

Pearson Response to the Welsh Government Consultation on Key Stage 4 IVET

13 March 2015

Summary

Pearson welcomes the opportunity to contribute views on the impact of changes in England on the fitness for purpose of vocational qualifications in Wales and future provision at Key Stage 4. We are happy to discuss the issues further if this would be of use. In general, our view is that:

- Provision of vocational education is critical at Key Stage 4. At this level, in common with changes in England, the correct focus is on maintaining breadth of learning so as not to limit learners before they have come to an informed decision about future career paths.
- Assessment arrangements should be justified on a sector by sector basis. There are various methods of assessment that suit vocational education, depending on the knowledge, understanding and skills required for that sector. Therefore, awarding organisations should be expected to show why the assessment approaches chosen are appropriate to the qualification type and sector, and will prepare students for assessment approaches at level 3 in that sector, rather than working to a fixed rule.
- Changes must ensure that breadth of provision is maintained:
 - This should be considered in any decisions around the timescale for changes.
 - This means that rules should allow for qualifications conforming to rules in England to be used in Wales unless there is strong evidence why this should not be the case.

About Pearson

Pearson is the UK's largest awarding organisation, offering academic and vocational qualifications and training to schools, employers and other places of learning in the UK and internationally. We offer a range of vocational qualifications including Edexcel NVQ and BTEC from entry level to Higher Nationals.

Consultation questions

Question 1

What feedback do you have on how the current KS4 vocational provision/delivery is working in schools and what the issues are?

Schools in Wales are currently transitioning from QCF BTECs at level 2 to BTEC NGs developed on the NQF. These BTECs are already in use in England and contain a degree of external assessment, as is planned for qualifications at level 3. Some concerns have been raised by teachers over the appropriateness of external assessment for these subjects. This is for a mix of reasons. Some consider the external assessment and related content to have altered the nature of the subject. Others are concerned that student will not cope with the form of assessment.

Our experience in England is that introduction of external assessment into vocational qualifications where it was not previously used requires a period of adjustment and a review of the learners who are appropriate for the courses used. As will be noted in later questions, care is needed to pick the correct forms of external assessment for the sector and that the forms of assessment at level 2 are chosen in light of the types of assessment used at level 3.

Question 2

Does the current KS4 VQ provision support learner engagement and motivation and what might be the impact of a more broad skills based qualification?

Feedback from centres is generally clear that there is a strong link between engagement and motivation and the use of vocational qualifications. This is formed of three main elements:

- Students are engaged where they see the relevance of the learning and the sector they are studying is one of interest to them.
- Students remain motivated by continual achievement on vocational qualifications. This indicates that a strong element of continual assessment should be maintained.
- The main factor in student motivation and engagement is the quality of the teaching and support they receive. This indicates that any substantial changes must be supported by availability of training for teachers.

It is hard to estimate the impact of a more skills based qualification, but the factors above should be borne in mind.

Question 3

What are your views on how the current offer at KS4 supports learner progression post-16?

Progression data is not yet available for NQF BTEC NG qualifications. Data for level 2 QCF BTEC qualifications shows a strong correlation between pre-16 vocational study and progression to post-16 vocational learning. We would be happy to provide more detailed data about students taking a pre-16 vocational qualification and progressing to a level 3 BTEC qualification.

Question 4

What are your views on the appropriateness of the current assessment arrangements for VQs at KS4 and their structure in Wales and how that might have to change in the light of changes in England? (Level 1/2? External assessment?)

Vocational assessment often requires the assessment of cognitive (thinking), affective (attitude/behaviour) and psychomotor (can do – including higher order) skills. Traditional forms of examinations, taken under high control, are an effective way of assessing the cognitive area. However, they cannot assess affective or psychomotor skills. If the definition of external assessment allows for assessment approaches other than exam (e.g. tasks set and marked by the awarding organisation but undertaken over a period of time by the learner) then external assessment may be possible for a number of sectors. However, to ensure assessment is valid for the subject, we recommend that awarding organisations should be expected to show why the assessment approaches chosen are appropriate to the qualification type and sector, and will prepare students for assessment approaches at level 3 in that sector, rather than working to a fixed rule.

Question 5

What might the VQ and in particular IVET qualifications offer in Wales look like in the future at KS4 e.g. more or less choice, more or less specialism, a Wales only offer?

Learner engagement is linked to the relevance of learning and their interest in the subject area. This requires a range of sectors to be offered to align content with learner interest. At the same time, some requirement to prove the qualification is relevant to progression post-16 should be an expectation to ensure learning is genuinely relevant and provides opportunity to progress.

There is a need when considering learners of this age group to be mindful of the changing nature of their interests. Few will have a set view of their future progression path in education or to employment. As such, a broad programme of learning, rather than specialisation, should be favoured.

One of the key attractions of vocational learning is the idea that the qualification received is widely recognised. So as not to limit learners, this means the qualifications should be recognisable to employers outside Wales. As such, the offering should not be limited to a Wales only offer.

Question 6

Any other comments on the impact on KS4 learners and what is best for them and Wales as a whole?

As noted in the summary, our general view is that to ensure breadth of provision is maintained, careful consideration should be given to the timescale for changes and rules should allow for qualifications conforming to rules in England to be used in Wales unless there is strong evidence why this should not be the case.