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4 July 2013

Pocket Watch – Developing vocational quals for 16-19 year olds

Introduction

Today the Government confirmed its intentions on **reforming** Level 3 vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds. In future, to be recognised for 'league' table purposes, they will have to meet a set of prescribed criteria. While the total number of vocational qualifications currently approved will be significantly reduced as Alison Wolf had proposed, the Government hopes their purpose, quality and value will be equally significantly increased as a result

So what will 16-19 vocational qualifications look like now?

Although the approach adopted for these qualifications is similar to that used for 14-16 qualifications, there is one notable difference and that is that L3 vocational qualifications in future will be divided into three types: traditional academic qualifications, which are not covered here; applied general qualifications, which provide progression into employment, an Apprenticeship or higher education; and what are now being called Tech-Level qualifications, more specialised skills and knowledge for a particular employment sector

What new criteria will they have to meet?

Much of the criteria is in place already but it has now been formally laid out to help learners, parents, employers and others determine which qualification is the most suitable. Tech qualifications only require employer involvement in '*delivery and/or assessment*' which may prove difficult for some, all the other criteria apply to both types of qualification. They include requirements on purpose, size (minimum 150 guided learning hours for applied and 300 hours for Tech qualifications,) recognition (letters of support from at least 3 HEIs for applied and 5 recognised employers for Tech qualifications,) assessment (including grading, synoptic and external and/or moderated assessment,) progression potential and track record

When will all this happen?

Gradually. Requirements on purpose, size and recognition will need to be submitted this September, ready for first teaching from Sept 2014 and 'league' table use in 2016. The rest of the criteria will apply for first teaching from Sept 2016 and league table recognition in 2018

Are there any problems?

These changes have been under development for some time but one problem is that other changes are still in the pipeline. Similar changes are under consideration for voc quals at L2, the Tech Bacc is under development and accountability arrangements for 16-19 are also due for consultation. A further issue for many is whether learning, especially for 16-19 yr olds, can be fitted into three distinct routes, which explains perhaps the emphasis on 'declared purpose' throughout for any qualification. The system of external recognition with its required set number of endorsements could be seen as formulaic at a time when labour needs are changing rapidly while the issue of assessment, clearly an essential feature in ensuring parity of acceptability, leaves some room for interpretation. The acid test of course remains improving the prospects for young people



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Tech and Applied Levels July 2013