



Department
for Education

Consultation

Launch Date 17 September 2012
Respond by 10 December 2012

Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications

Issued

Enquiries To

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Department on 0370 000 2288.

e-mail: KS4QualReform.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

Contact Details

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Consultation Unit by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's 'Contact Us' page.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This consultation sets out the Government's plans to restore rigour and confidence to our examination system at age 16, which has been undermined by years of continued grade inflation. We need to raise the level of challenge in our Key Stage 4 qualifications to match the best in the world. Raising our expectations of attainment for all students will drive up standards as teaching and learning improve to meet that challenge. High expectations are essential to creating a step change in standards and allowing us to keep pace with our international competitors.
- 1.2. Our proposals will restore confidence by ending the perverse incentives created by the interaction of our qualifications and accountability system. At present, schools are incentivised to boost their performance by seeking examinations in which they believe their students may achieve higher grades, and Awarding Organisations have a corresponding incentive to compete for market share by providing less demanding examinations.

- 1.3. To remove that perverse incentive, we will move away from the competition between Awarding Organisations in the core academic subjects of English, mathematics, sciences, history, geography and languages. Instead of schools being able to choose between competing GCSEs in these subjects, a competition will be held to identify the best, single suite of qualifications in each subject offered by a single Awarding Organisation.
- 1.4. We intend to use the school and post-16 accountability frameworks to incentivise schools and colleges to teach these new qualifications both at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Schools will start teaching new qualifications in English, mathematics and sciences from 2015, with students first entering the new exams in the summer of 2017. We will refocus the Department's floor standard measures which identify underperforming schools to take account of performance in our new English, mathematics and sciences qualifications from 2017. The timetable for the introduction of qualifications in history, geography and languages, and the timetable for the introduction of English and mathematics post-16, will be determined following responses to this consultation.
- 1.5. This consultation seeks views on the characteristics of the new qualifications, and how best we can prepare schools, colleges and students for the transition. There will be a separate consultation on reforms to the school accountability system later this year.

2. Coverage of the consultation

- 2.1. We want to seek the views of schools, further and higher education, employers, curriculum and assessment experts, Awarding Organisations and the general public on what makes a qualification world class, and how we can use these qualifications to support all young people to have high aspirations and the best possible opportunities to progress to further and higher education and into employment.
- 2.2. This consultation covers the following issues for new qualifications in England:
 - The characteristics we should look for in selecting new qualifications;
 - How best we can support schools and colleges as they prepare to deliver the qualifications;
 - How best we can prepare all our young people to achieve the reformed qualifications; this includes, in particular, the arrangements for lower attaining students who are not ready to take the new examinations at the end of KS4;

- The impact of the reforms on specific pupil groups, including those students with SEN and/or disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, set out a commitment to ensure that our qualifications match the best in the world, providing a good basis for further study and employment.
- 3.2. GCSEs were introduced with good intentions. In particular, they introduced the concept of an almost universal qualification that would allow students of all abilities to sit examinations in core subjects, and would provide them with a grade which recognised the progress they had made. They replaced a system in which only a minority of students took a qualification which properly prepared them for the full range of further study, including progression to A Level and beyond that, to higher education. That principle of universality is one that we are determined to maintain.
- 3.3. However, there is clear evidence that the standards of our examinations have fallen over time, and that the expectations they set for our students are now below those of our international competitors. Between 2006 and 2009, the proportion of students achieving a C grade or higher in English and mathematics GCSE increased by 8%. But comparison of international tests – where there is no incentive for achievement to be inflated – taken in those years show that this significantly overstates the actual improvement in attainment which has taken place. The small reduction in the proportion of A*-C grades awarded in summer 2012 was the first time such a fall has been recorded since the introduction of GCSEs, and does not detract from this overall picture, while the concerns that have been raised about grading have demonstrated how the current modular exam system can be unfair to students, and has further damaged public confidence. Employers, universities and colleges are dissatisfied with school leavers' literacy and numeracy, with 42% of employers needing to organise additional training for at least some young people joining them from school or college (CBI survey, 2012).
- 3.4. A wide range of research also points to a lessening over time in how demanding GCSE qualifications are. The Royal Society of Chemistry and the University of Durham have both found that students of similar ability are being awarded higher grades than their equivalents in the past. Ofqual, the exams regulator, has recently reported in their review of standards in the years 2004 and 2008 that the level of demand in mathematics and science GCSEs has declined and has taken action to reverse this. Ofsted, the regulator of standards in education, has reported that whilst attainment in GCSE mathematics has risen, successive changes in specifications and structure have reduced the demand of the examinations for many students. The public recognise

this to be true. 60% of those surveyed in a recent YouGov poll believe that GCSEs have got easier, while only 6% think that they have got harder.

- 3.5. The current structure of GCSEs fails lower attaining students. First, lower grades at GCSE provide a weak foundation for progression. Future prospects for students attaining lower grades in English and mathematics GCSE are very poor. A student who fails to get a D or better in English or mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4 has only a one in ten chance of continuing to study these GCSEs after the age of 16, and only a one in fifty chance of securing a C grade by 19. Yet, as Professor Alison Wolf pointed out in her Review of Vocational Education, securing the C grade is of critical importance to students' future opportunities.
- 3.6. Second, many GCSEs, including all of the English Baccalaureate subjects except history, are tiered – a practice which limits the ambition of students entered for the foundation tier papers to a C grade (the highest grade available to them at that tier in ordinary circumstances). This means that the overwhelming majority of students directed to those papers are, in effect, cut off from any chance of progressing in the subject: only 5% of those with a C grade in English, 3% in biology, 1% in chemistry or physics and less than 1% in mathematics go on to study the subject at A Level.
- 3.7. The root cause of these failures in the system – a lessening of demand in GCSEs and the failure of lower grades to provide a foundation for progression – is the interaction of the current school accountability system with England's competitive examinations market. This market drives Awarding Organisations to compete by offering qualifications that are easier to pass, and the current school accountability framework rewards schools if they offer less demanding qualifications, and encourage students to take less demanding subjects. Ofqual has acted to tighten controls over GCSEs, tackling resits, modularisation and spelling, punctuation and grammar, and demanding evidence that improvements in grades are matched by real improvements in performance. But these reforms have addressed the symptoms of the problem, not the root cause. We believe that we need to address the "race to the bottom" at its source, so that schools and Awarding Organisations have no incentive to compete by choosing or providing easy exams, and every student has the opportunity to take a world class qualification that commands the respect of employers, parents, universities and the general public.

4. Proposal

- 4.1. The first of our aims is to reverse the long term decline in standards by providing schools with new, high quality qualifications that match the

world's best. Our students are being left behind. As the syllabus and levels of expectation embodied in qualifications effectively provide schools with part of their curriculum for Key Stage 4, we need to make sure that our qualifications are fit for purpose, provide a greater and more honest level of challenge and differentiation between students' attainment, and that they are providing students with the level of knowledge and skills expected in our highest performing international competitors. The characteristics which we think the new qualifications need to demonstrate in order to do this are set out at **Section 5**.

- 4.2. Our second aim is to ensure that, once set, the standard of these new qualifications remains high. We must replace the current perverse incentives for Awarding Organisations and schools to develop and seek out less demanding qualifications, with a system where Awarding Organisations compete to show that their qualifications are the most ambitious. To achieve this aim, the Department for Education will hold a competition to identify the single, best qualification, offered by a single Awarding Organisation¹, which could be adopted in each of the core academic subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate – English, mathematics, sciences, history, geography and languages, for a period of five years.
- 4.3. We do not believe that qualifications are best designed by Government. Awarding Organisations, drawing on the expertise of universities and learned societies, and schools and colleges, need to have the freedom to apply their professional expertise and experience, based on evidence of what is working well in the highest performing jurisdictions around the world. This Government does not intend to repeat previous attempts to underpin the quality of our qualifications by setting ever more restrictive central requirements. There will be some areas where there will be absolute requirements that we expect our qualifications to meet, but in general we do not expect to direct the design of new qualifications. Further detail on the process by which we intend to select the new qualifications is set out at **Section 8**.
- 4.4. We will refocus the Department's floor standard measures which identify underperforming secondary schools, and the minimum standards for post-16 institutions, to take account of performance in our new English, mathematics and science qualifications from 2017. We will shortly launch a full consultation on how to improve the accountability system for secondary schools in England, building on these changes. The consultation will invite views on how best we can measure performance in these subjects to support all students to achieve the highest standards. It will explore how we can ensure that schools are rewarded for teaching high value qualifications and are able to make decisions about qualifications on the basis of their worth without perverse incentives to boost their apparent standing in school performance tables.

¹ The same Awarding Organisation may win the competition in more than one subject.

- 4.5. We expect that everyone who now sits a GCSE should sit this new qualification. While most students will take the examinations at age 16, there will be a small group of students who could not reasonably be expected to achieve a grade in the new qualifications at that age, in the same way that some students do not currently attempt GCSE at age 16. Appropriate arrangements for these students are discussed in **Section 6**. Most important will be ensuring that there are clear routes, support and incentives for students who are not yet secure in English or mathematics at 16 to continue to study for these qualifications. This will make additional demands of school sixth forms and colleges to support these students to succeed in mathematics and English by the time they leave education or training.
- 4.6. It will be essential to the success of the new arrangements that Ofqual, as the independent regulator, continues to secure standards, confidence and efficiency. Ofqual will be considering the arrangements that it will need to put in place to regulate the new qualifications effectively, and will be consulting as necessary.

Other subjects

- 4.7. To ensure that the benefits of this more rigorous approach to the English Baccalaureate subjects are felt across the whole curriculum, we will ask Ofqual to consider how these new higher standards can be used as a template for judging and accrediting a new suite of qualifications, beyond these subjects, at age 16, to replace current GCSEs.

Title

- 4.8. Qualifications studied must be well understood and have currency with schools, further and higher education and employers. A qualification must have a title that enables it to be easily recognised, and which clearly indicates if significant changes have been made. Given the extent of differences we will see between current GCSEs, and our new qualifications, we do not believe it would be fair on students if we continued to use the title “GCSE” to describe the new qualifications. In particular, with different expectations and different grading, it would be unfair not to distinguish clearly between the results achieved by students in 2016, the last year of the current GCSE, and in 2017, the first year of the new qualifications
- 4.9. “GCSE” will, therefore, not be used as the title for our new qualifications, so there is clear signal to students, employers and universities that the system has changed. We propose that the new qualifications should be called “English Baccalaureate Certificates” or EBCs (so, for example, an English Baccalaureate Certificate in physics). This would represent a clear break from the past; and recognise that these subjects represent an academic foundation which provides a secure base on which to build further study, vocational learning or an apprenticeship. Success in EBCs in English,

mathematics, the sciences, history or geography and a language would mean a student had achieved the full English Baccalaureate.

Do you agree that the new qualifications should not be called “GCSEs”?

Do you agree that the new qualifications should be called English Baccalaureate Certificates?

If not, what alternative title should be adopted?

5. Characteristics

- 5.1. This section sets out the requirements against which the Government proposes to assess the EBCs. We will expect Awarding Organisations submitting qualifications to have a strong reputation for excellence and evidence that they have existing qualifications with a good track record of supporting progression to further study at A Level, vocational subjects or to Apprenticeships. We will also look for high expectations of the performance students need to demonstrate, rigorous demands for assessment, and challenging requirements for content to ensure that students will be studying a world class syllabus. Further detail on these characteristics is set out below.

High expectation of performance and accurate grading

- 5.2. If qualifications are insufficiently challenging, or do not provide an accurate picture of performance, they lower expectations and attainment, and foster complacency in schools and nationally. Grading must be a reliable indicator of a candidate’s attainment that can be trusted and valued. It must clearly differentiate between students. At the top end, it must allow colleges and universities to identify and select the best candidates with confidence. Lower grades should give students an accurate assessment of their performance, and should have real value for their future progression to further education and/or employment. The public and employers must also be able to understand and have confidence in the process by which grades are arrived at to ensure that students are appropriately recognised for their achievements.
- 5.3. The new qualifications will also need to restore the credibility of our examinations system by halting the fall in standards. Increasing numbers of students achieving higher grades must reflect genuine improvements in students’ underlying knowledge and understanding, and not be a result of downward pressure on standards.
- 5.4. To raise standards in all schools and ensure that every child has the

knowledge and skills they need to succeed in further and higher education and employment, we will expect EBCs to identify clearly whether students are literate and numerate, have a sound understanding of the subject studied, and are ready to move on to further study. That would demand that a candidate was performing beyond the minimum levels which are currently required to achieve a C grade at GCSE – but it would still be something we believe all children with a good education should be able to achieve. The qualifications should differentiate the stronger performance of those who are ready to progress in the subject to A Level and likely to achieve top grades, to encourage excellence and to assist colleges and universities in making decisions about entry to competitive courses. To this end we would also look to Awarding Organisations to offer more detail in the information that is made available about students' achievements, in addition to the overarching grading structure. The qualifications will grade lower levels of performance, in particular to assist students who will retake these subjects, post-16, and where such grades would provide a clear benefit to the students receiving them.

- 5.5. We will expect Awarding Organisations to pay particular attention to the expectations of what students know, understand and can do at comparable levels of performance in high performing jurisdictions in determining the most appropriate grading for these new qualifications. It will also be important that – alongside changes to the levels of performance demanded of students – there is a clear break from the past in how grades are described, so that there is no danger of confusion between a grade awarded in respect of GCSEs, and one awarded on the basis of EBCs.

Do you agree with our expectations for grading structures, set out in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.5?

- 5.6. All GCSEs are currently required to offer the same grading, from A*-G, with A*-C representing a Level 2 pass. This makes it simple to compare students' performance in different subjects. Awarding Organisations, however, might wish to propose new and different grading structures that they believe will best deliver the requirements set out above, in the context of each subject being examined. Schools already offer a range of non-GCSE qualifications, assessed using different grading scales.

Do you believe that we should insist on a common grading structure for all EBCs; or should we allow AOs the freedom to innovate?

No tiering

- 5.7. There is currently a GCSE system with two tiers of exams, which caps students' aspiration. Students are able to take either foundation or higher tier examinations in a number of GCSEs, including all of the English Baccalaureate subjects except history. The higher tier allows

students to achieve grades A* - D and the lower tier allows students to achieve grades C - G. In ordinary circumstances, it is rare for a student who is entered for the foundation tier to achieve higher than a C grade. The prospects for those students taking a foundation tier paper are poor; progression rates for students achieving C grade are much lower than for those achieving A* - B. Further education institutions frequently require a B grade or higher at GCSE for access to some A Level courses. Having a grade-cap in foundation tier examinations is also likely to be de-motivating and limit the aspirations of students.

- 5.8. We believe that wherever possible EBCs should not be tiered, removing the grade-cap that currently exists at C grade in GCSE foundation tier papers, to benefit all students and increase motivation and attainment possibilities.

Do you agree that it will be possible to end tiering for the full range of subjects that we will be creating new qualifications for?

Are there particular approaches to examinations which might be needed to make this possible for some subjects?

Assessed 100% by examination, or minimising reliance on internal assessment

- 5.9. We know from Ofqual's report (*Evaluation of the Introduction of Controlled Assessment*) that schools and teachers have concerns about the manageability of internal assessment in GCSEs (which replaced coursework in 2009) and its impact on teaching time and methods. EBCs will need to restrict the use of controlled assessment, coursework or other forms of internal assessment as far as possible, to free up teaching time and reduce opportunities for the malpractice associated with internal assessment such as plagiarism and the rote learning of isolated tasks. By doing so, we will ensure that assessment judgements are of the highest quality.
- 5.10. Our preferred approach is to remove internal assessment from all six English Baccalaureate subjects. Existing qualifications in all six subjects, offered in England and overseas, already offer opportunities for 100% external assessment – for example, in modern foreign languages, through externally assessed speaking exams, which are conducted and recorded by the teacher and marked by an external examiner.

We intend that EBCs should be assessed 100% by externally marked examinations. Do you agree?

If not, which aspects of English, mathematics, the sciences, history, geography or language do you believe absolutely require internal assessment to fully demonstrate the skills required, and why?

Does not support 'teaching to the test'

- 5.11. Together with Ofqual, we have already taken steps to discourage 'teaching to the test' and to tackle the culture of re-sits by ensuring that students are tested at the end of the course. This will give students the opportunity to gain a deep and broad understanding across the whole subject.
- 5.12. Qualifications should provide opportunities for a broad breadth of study; assessment should limit predictability so that there is no incentive for teachers to tailor teaching specifically to match patterns in the syllabus areas tested or the types of questions asked. Candidates should be encouraged to express the full breadth and depth of their knowledge through examinations which require the whole syllabus to be covered, in a range of ways. This will support teaching that provides all students with a proper understanding of the breadth of the subject, and help prepare more able students for further study, where they will be expected to demonstrate more independent thinking.

Size requirement for syllabus

- 5.13. The English Baccalaureate subjects – English, mathematics, sciences, history, geography and languages – are a core set of academic subjects that are valuable for the majority of students. These require an appropriate amount of curriculum time; but we do not want the new qualifications to prevent greater breadth of study and a balanced curriculum that includes the time to study other subjects.

Should our expectation be that EBCs take the same amount of curriculum time as the current GCSEs? Or should schools be expected to place greater curriculum emphasis on teaching the core subjects?

Examination aids

- 5.14. Currently, students are permitted to take examination aids into some examinations, including calculators for mathematics and science papers, periodic tables in chemistry and source materials in history and geography.
- 5.15. We believe that the use of such examination aids should be restricted wherever possible, to allow students the best opportunities to demonstrate their true abilities and competence. They might only be permitted if removal would make it impossible for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding – for example, in solving higher-order mathematics problems.
- 5.16. We do not class reasonable adjustments for disabled students (such as modified papers or a scribe) as examination aids and Awarding Organisations will continue to make these available under the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010.

Which examinations aids do you consider necessary to allow students to fully demonstrate the knowledge and skills required?

Syllabus

- 5.17. In each of the subjects that they will cover, the new EBCs must ensure coverage of the key knowledge that should be expected of those who may cease to follow these subjects after the age of 16; and also areas that would be needed for progression to higher levels of study in qualifications that draw upon the subject.
- 5.18. We do not believe that Government should seek to determine this subject knowledge in detail: we will look to those who wish to provide our new qualifications to consult with subject experts, domestically and internationally, to prepare and propose truly world class syllabuses, and to provide evidence that they match the curriculum content taught in the highest performing jurisdictions around the world. The Awarding Organisations are currently working with universities and learned societies to reform A Levels. We will expect the development of the syllabuses for these new qualifications, and the syllabuses for new A Levels and vocational qualifications, to be taken forward in parallel, so that teachers and students are presented with a coherent progression in their studies from age 14 to 19.
- 5.19. To aid Awarding Organisations in their considerations, we will set out our broad expectations for the subject content we would consider absolutely essential for these purposes, drawing on analysis of the best qualifications offered in other countries and using the consultation period to work with subject and education communities to develop appropriate content. We will be looking for Awarding Organisations to build upon these expectations by working directly with higher education institutions and learned societies to create a syllabus for each subject that is truly world class and provides an excellent preparation for further study at A Level, in Apprenticeships or in vocational qualifications. For example, in mathematics we will be looking to raise the challenge in algebra so that our expectations match those of the highest performing jurisdictions; and in the sciences we would expect students to be taught to understand the central laws, knowledge and theories, such as evolution and Newton's laws of motion, in greater depth. We will be looking for Awarding Organisations to continue to offer appropriate choices to schools and students, for example in terms of the set texts that are offered to English students and the periods offered for study in history. Our expectations of subject content will be published when we set out our final policy requirements to Ofqual at the end of the consultation period. Requirements for history, geography and languages will follow at a later date as these subjects are following a longer timeline (see paragraph 7.1).

Subject suites

5.20. We propose inviting bids from Awarding Organisations for the following complete subject suites in English, mathematics and sciences:

English

- English Language
- English Literature

Mathematics

- Mathematics (pure and applied)
- Optional Additional Mathematics (Awarding Organisations will be asked to consider submitting an additional mathematics qualification to provide the depth and breadth to fully test the most able)

Sciences

- Physics
- Biology
- Chemistry

We are at present unconvinced by the ability of a single science option to provide students with the scope and rigour to demonstrate real achievement across the three science subjects. However, we recognise that the current combined science GCSEs are currently a popular option.

Do you agree that these are appropriate subject suites? If not, what would you change?

Is there also a need for a combined science option covering elements of all three sciences?

Track Record

5.21. A vital aspect of our new qualifications is that they will enable students to compete on an international level. We will be looking for Awarding Organisations to provide evidence that the qualification they are submitting is world class. We will therefore expect Awarding Organisations to provide evidence that they have experience in designing and running high quality qualifications for high performing jurisdictions and/or high performing schools, and that students successfully completing these qualifications go on to succeed in further study.

What qualities should we look for in EBCs that will provide evidence that they will support students to be able to compete internationally?

Assurance of literacy and numeracy

- 5.22. Evidence from employers shows they are not satisfied with the literacy and numeracy of school leavers, with 35% of employers reporting dissatisfaction with literacy skills of school and college leavers, and 30% reporting dissatisfaction with numeracy skills and ability to apply these to day-to-day situations (CBI Education and Skills Survey, 2012).
- 5.23. The new qualification should therefore provide greater assurance of literacy and numeracy, in English language and mathematics, than a C grade in the current GCSE. Employers should be confident that it will reliably identify those who have, and can consistently demonstrate, a reasonable level of literacy and numeracy.

Do you agree that we should place a particular emphasis on the successful English language and mathematics qualifications providing the best assurance of literacy and numeracy?

School and Post-16 institution Support

- 5.24. Awarding Organisations support schools and colleges both to administer examinations effectively and to teach the syllabus effectively. They must comply with any directions that are placed on them by Ofqual, in particular in relation to the delivery of seminars and the provision of other support (for example, text books). We need to ensure that any support provided does not encourage 'teaching to the test', which may mean limiting materials such as past papers, mark schemes and examiner reports, which are currently widely available.
- 5.25. We will ask Awarding Organisations submitting qualifications to our competition to demonstrate how they will seek to minimise the administrative burden that they impose on schools and post-16 institutions and how they will monitor that burden and reduce it where possible over the five-year period.

In order to allow effective teaching and administration of examinations, what support do you think Awarding Organisations should be:

- a) ***Required to offer?***
- b) ***Prevented from offering?***

How can Awarding Organisations eliminate any unnecessary burdens on schools and post-16 institutions relating to the administration of EBCs?

6. Lower attainers and equalities

Qualification supports progression of lower achievers

- 6.1. We expect the vast majority of students to be entered for EBCs. There will be, however, a very small group of students for whom, for a variety of reasons, entry at 16 may not be in their best interests. At the moment those students who do not sit GCSEs often receive little valuable feedback to recognise their progress in these subjects. We are proposing that all students who are not entered for the qualification should be provided with a “Statement of Achievement” by their school, which sets out their strengths and weaknesses in each subject, and which will help their future school or college understand what additional teaching and support they will need to be able to enter and achieve an EBC post-16.
- 6.2. For all students who take EBCs, we will expect Awarding Organisations to improve the information that is available in addition to grading information, offering greater detail, again to help support their progression in that subject post-16. We will also consider whether a “Statement of Achievement” could be of benefit to more students to support transition at 16, for example to those who are expected to achieve a low grade at 16, or indeed to all students. This might include introducing a requirement on schools to pass on certain information where students move to a different institution post-16.

Which groups of students do you think would benefit from a “Statement of Achievement” provided by their school?

How should we ensure that all students who would benefit from a “Statement of Achievement” are provided with one?

- 6.3. Decisions about when young people should re-sit the qualification (or take it for the first time) will be down to individual schools and colleges, although we will consider as part of our accountability consultation how to ensure that schools are properly incentivised to enter all those who have the potential to achieve a grade in the new qualifications.
- 6.4. We will expect those students who are not secure in English or mathematics at the age of 16 (whether or not they were entered for an EBC) to continue to study towards an EBC post-16. We will consider the role of our qualifications in relation to Apprenticeships following the conclusion of the Richard Review. Implications of this for post-16 provision are discussed in paragraphs 7.3-7.5 below.

Equalities

- 6.5. We believe these reforms will benefit all pupil groups. EBCs will provide students with a more accurate assessment of ability, rather than rewarding students with a pass based on expectations which are

too low. All students will have better information about what they know and can do; students, further and higher education, and employers will be able to have confidence that the new qualifications properly identify those with the knowledge required to do well in further study and employment. As discussed in paragraphs 6.1-6.2, we will improve arrangements for those who do not take an EBC at age 16, or achieve low grades, in order to help their subsequent progression.

- 6.6. Awarding Organisations delivering GCSEs are required by the Equalities Act 2010 and by Ofqual to design their qualifications so that they do not discriminate against students who share a protected characteristic². They are also required to make reasonable adjustments to how a disabled candidate's knowledge and skills are assessed so that they are not put at a substantial disadvantage (for example through extra time, supervised rest breaks, and modified papers), provided that these do not affect the integrity of the assessment. These requirements would apply automatically to EBCs. In addition, the Department for Education usually considers the impact of policy changes upon disadvantaged groups such as those eligible for free school meals despite this not being a protected characteristic.
- 6.7. Following this consultation, we will publish an equalities analysis.

Do you believe any of the proposals in this document have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, adverse or positive, on specific pupil groups; if they have potential for an adverse impact, how can we reduce this?

7. Implementation

- 7.1. We expect that the best qualifications in English, mathematics and sciences will be identified in 2013 so that schools will have more than 18 months to prepare for the first teaching of the new qualifications in September 2015. History, geography and languages qualifications will be developed to a later timetable and their implementation will be determined by the response to this consultation. We will work with Ofqual and Awarding Organisations to ensure that schools are provided with appropriate guidance and support as they prepare to deliver these reformed, more rigorous qualifications.

Should we introduce reformed qualifications in all six English Baccalaureate subjects for first teaching in secondary schools in 2015, or should we have a phased approach, with English, mathematics and sciences introduced first?

² Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership.

How best can we prepare schools for the transition to these reformed, more rigorous qualifications?

How long will schools need to prepare to teach these reformed qualifications?

Languages

7.2. We intend to include ancient and modern languages as EBCs. The number of different languages currently offered at GCSE – 24 different languages, in total – mean that we need to take particular account of the practical implications of running the competition. Some of these GCSEs have much higher take-up than others; the overwhelming majority of examination entries are in French, German and Spanish. Only six languages GCSEs are offered by more than one Awarding Organisation: French, German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu. The top six languages recently identified as important for businesses were French, German, Spanish, Mandarin, Polish and Arabic³. Ancient languages provide an important foundation for the study of modern languages and civilisation. Our forthcoming consultation on accountability will consider how languages should be reflected in accountability measures.

Should all languages in which there is currently a GCSE be included in our competition?

Should the number of languages for which EBCs are identified be limited? If so, which languages should be included?

Given the potential number of new languages qualifications to be developed, should they be introduced to a later timescale than history and geography EBCs?

Post-16

7.3. In accepting the recommendations of the Wolf Review in 2011 the Government has already signalled that all students who fail to achieve a good GCSE pass in mathematics and English by the age of 16 will need to continue to be taught these subjects afterwards. As part of our implementation of the Wolf review, from 2015 funding will be deducted from post-16 institutions for each student that does not hold a good GCSE pass and is not enrolled on a course to retake these qualifications. The same principles and mechanism will be applied to EBCs. Arrangements in relation to young people who are undertaking an Apprenticeship will be determined separately following the conclusion of the Richard Review.

7.4. The first group of students to have taken EBCs will enter post-16 institutions in 2017 and all these institutions will need to be ready to

³ CBI Business and Skills Survey, 2012

teach these qualifications by this date. We could, however, expect post-16 institutions to offer EBCs at the same time as schools so that all students, no matter what age, have the opportunity to gain these new qualifications from 2015.

- 7.5. We estimate the current shortage of specialist English and mathematics teachers in the further education sector able to teach to GCSE level is 10% in English and 25% in mathematics. Post-16 institutions will need to build capacity in their workforce to support students studying these subjects in these, more rigorous qualifications by 19.

Should we expect post-16 institutions to be ready to provide EBCs at the same time as secondary schools?

How best can we support post-16 institutions to prepare to provide EBCs?

8. Choosing the best qualification in each subject

- 8.1. We intend to identify EBCs in the core academic subjects through a two stage process: recognition and accreditation by Ofqual and evaluation by the Department for Education. In the first stage, Ofqual, the independent examinations regulator, will determine that Awarding Organisations have sufficient capacity and resource to deliver these qualifications. They will then assess qualifications submitted by those Awarding Organisations against new regulations. The second stage, carried out by DfE, will involve independent assessment of those qualifications that meet Ofqual's regulations to identify the very best qualification in each subject.
- 8.2. Our selected qualifications will be recognised in the headline measures in performance tables for a period of five years. After that time we plan to repeat the process to ensure that the qualifications offered remain current and reflect the very best in the world. We will be discussing with Awarding Organisations and with Ofqual how we can best safeguard delivery of qualifications and ensure an orderly transition, if required, in five years' time.

Do you agree that five years is an appropriate period for the new qualifications to feature in the performance tables before the competition is rerun?

Regulation

- 8.3. Following this consultation, the Secretary of State will set out his policy steers for the new qualifications to Ofqual, and will ask Ofqual to develop and consult on new, demanding regulations that will allow them to assess and regulate Awarding Organisations and their

qualifications against these requirements. We expect that a range of Awarding Organisations will then submit newly developed qualifications that meet the new conditions.

8.4. These regulations would cover the assessment characteristics that we would expect any qualification to meet in order to be considered for selection by the Department. Additionally, Awarding Organisations will need to provide assurance to Ofqual that they meet certain delivery criteria. We expect these to include:

- The ability to deliver examinations on a national scale to all state funded and independent secondary schools, and post-16 institutions, including the recruitment of markers, delivering exams and collecting scripts, and setting up an effective appeals process;
- Appropriate security arrangements for development and delivery of examination papers and collection and marking of scripts including effective contingency arrangements for exam errors and leaked tests;
- Provision of appropriate, compliant access arrangements.

8.5. We are aware that there is currently cross-subsidy between the different qualifications offered by Awarding Organisations. We are also aware that the outcome of this competition will have a very significant impact on the Awarding Organisations which currently offer GCSEs, potentially affecting whether they continue to offer other qualifications at 14-19, or intended for other groups, for example adult English and maths provision. We will work with Ofqual and Awarding Organisations to secure value for money from the qualifications, and to explore fully the wider impacts on the qualifications market.

Evaluation by the Department for Education

8.6. Once qualifications have been regulated by Ofqual, Awarding Organisations will submit them to the Department. The Secretary of State, on the basis of public selection criteria and independent advice, will make a decision about which qualification should be selected in each subject to be the new EBC, and to count towards the performance tables.

Northern Ireland and Wales

8.7. Education policy is devolved and the Governments and regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland will therefore make their own decisions about whether and how they want to reform the qualifications available in those countries. We will discuss these proposals with the Devolved Administrations so that, where different qualifications are offered, they are well understood and no students are disadvantaged. Where similar qualifications continue to be used across the three countries the regulators will decide how best to achieve common standards.

9. How To Respond

- 9.1. Consultation responses can be completed online at www.education.gov.uk/consultations, by emailing KS4QualReform.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk, or by downloading a response form which should be completed and sent to:

Consultation Unit, Area 1c, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ.

10. Additional Copies

- 10.1. Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the Departments e-consultation website at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

11. Plans for making results public

- 11.1. The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on the DfE e-consultation website.