DfE Curriculum & Assessment Review call for evidence

Response from the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) November 2024

Everything we do at ETF is about supporting the Further Education (FE) and Skills workforce on their professional journey, so that in partnership with the sector we can provide transformational learning opportunities to learners aged 14 and above.

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways

10. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

In compiling our response to this call for evidence, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) consulted 15 Further Education (FE) and Skills leaders as part of ETF CEO's sector leaders steering group representing Colleges, SEND, Independent Training Providers and Adult education organisations. We engaged a further 5 FE and Skills leaders through an online survey, whilst we also asked our Society for Education and Training (SET) members for their views via our Practitioner Advisory Group. In addition, we drew on our colleagues' frontline experience through our extensive engagement with the sector including their expertise in some of the key themes of this call for evidence such as English and maths, SEND provision, and T levels.

Qualification pathways through secondary education from key stage 3 into GCSEs and A levels are generally working well for learners without socioeconomic disadvantage or SEND, and who are motivated by this type of academic learning. The focus on core subjects such as English, maths and science helps equip the majority of students with key foundational skills needed for life and work.

Meanwhile, the breadth of FE and Skills options in terms of subjects and qualifications caters to diverse interests and career aspirations, and offers an alternative pathway for young people to progress into work or further study. One member that ETF consulted about this topic noted, "This flexibility encourages students who may not thrive in purely academic environments to pursue their strengths in practical fields, contributing to their engagement and future employability." For example, T levels offer a strong link between learning and work, and the robust nature of their assessment is raising standards. The

inclusion of work experience and placements in BTECs and T levels offer essential hands-on experience and opportunities to develop practical knowledge and skills.

Our key recommendations to improve the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are as follows:

- Policy commitment and investment in the quality of teaching and learning including clarity on the requirements of initial teacher education, a clear career progression framework supported by Continuous Professional Development and ongoing national recognition of ETF professional standards: curriculum change needs to ensure that the necessary pedagogic skills are developed in tandem to ensure that the desired positive learning outcomes are secured
- Promotion and support of an outcomes driven system focusing on impact and trust rather than a process driven system focusing on heavy regulation and continuous review. Simplification of regulation is key
- A system that recognises the importance of social value and the impact of FE and Skills on changing people's lives through outcomes such as increased confidence, communication, and social skills. This will enable us to drive professionalism and sector improvement
- Commitment to a broad curriculum that:
  - celebrates inclusion and diversity, is representative of society, and engages with the contributions of diverse groups including LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, and people from the global majority
  - contains more relevant and practical topics such as financial literacy, preparing for employment, emotional intelligence and critical thinking (particularly in the context of AI and misinformation)
- Increased flexibility in modes of assessment, moving away from an exam-centric model with high-stakes end-point assessments, and allowing for more practical assessments and/or multiple assessment points to benefit learner outcomes and wellbeing including recognition of prior experiential learning
- Support and incentivisation to strengthen relationships between employers/ industry and the FE and Skills sector, helping to prepare learners for work whilst also supporting the currency of subject matter expertise of educators
- Investment in skills and high quality teaching in industries that are central to the Government's five missions to rebuild Britain, and use this to address any related employment gaps (for example, via T levels or appropriate other qualification in construction to provide new homes for the country)
- Recognition that T levels will not be able to deliver all of the industrial strategy asks, resolve all local employment gaps, or automatically align with jobs that learners are motivated by
- Commitment and investment in increasing the research capacity around the FE and Skills sector, including facilitating better collaboration between FE and Higher Education (HE) to ensure we continue to have the evidence base to inform current and future curriculum reform

11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

Currently, the design of the secondary education system is based on an assumption that young people will achieve and progress through GCSE and A level pathways at the same rate according to age-related norms. However, this system does not work well for a significant minority of young people who do not progress according to such norms, whether this is related to socioeconomic disadvantage, SEND, their learning environment or an inflexible curriculum. Inequalities in education and skills for these groups (and more broadly) have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of disruptions to education, essential services and support (Ofsted 2021; House of Lords 2021).

In the 2022/23 academic year, 65% of students in England got a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths (DfE, 2024). Young people who do not achieve a grade 4 or above on the first sitting may interpret this as evidence that they themselves have failed, and this negative self-perception may become an additional barrier to success. Improvements need to focus on whole system design, offering broad and flexible pathways to support the pace and needs of diverse learners, including pathways to and through FE and Skills. By showing these pathways, FE and Skills has the potential to be seen as a viable and legitimate option for learners, whereas today is all too often talked of as the option available if you have not achieved certain grades at school.

In terms of the assessment system, following the GCSE reforms of 2015, there is now a reliance across multiple curricula on using a purely exam-based model of assessment. This can prioritise rote learning and memorisation over creativity and critical thinking; the latter being skills we contend are essential in a world where learning is increasingly technology-enabled. In addition, for some learners, this exam-centric model has contributed to a 'cycle of failure' whereby learners get stuck in a loop of resits and are left feeling demotivated after failing GCSE exams multiple times. An alternative assessment model may better support these learners, allowing for more practical assessments and/or multiple assessment points to benefit learner outcomes and wellbeing, which may include the recognition of prior experiential learning. Functional Skills (FS) provides an example of a more flexible model of assessment. Whilst being exam-based, there are multiple opportunities throughout the year to sit the FS exams, which can assist learners to take exams when they are ready and reduce anxieties around end-point assessments.

More generally, the concept of high quality teaching and learning is becoming ever more critical. High quality education is the foundation upon which success rests: high quality teaching and learning prepares learners not just for the jobs of today but for future opportunities in an increasingly complex world. This requires educators who inspire, engage, and challenge learners to reach their full potential. Within FE and Skills high quality teaching encompasses expert subject knowledge as well as the use of effective pedagogical techniques that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability.

Maintaining high standards of teaching and learning across the FE and Skills sector requires policy commitment and investment in initial teacher education, access to lifelong training opportunities, and a clear ongoing CPD commitment.

Sources: Department for Education (2024) GCSE English and maths results.
Ofsted (2021) Children and young people with SEND disproportionately affected by pandemic. Webpage [accessed 19/11/2024].
House of Lords (2021) Covid-19: impact on child poverty and on young people's education, health and wellbeing. Webpage [accessed 19/11/2024].

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

A major barrier for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage is that they may have caring responsibilities or need to work part time due to financial pressures, limiting the time they have available for study. The digital divide and digital poverty can further disadvantage these learners, who may not have access to the internet or IT resources they need outside of their provider. Furthermore, these learners may not have a safe and appropriate space to study where they live and may be restricted as to when they can use their college or provider facilities, due to limitations with public transport provision, especially in rural areas. In terms of accessing the FE sector, an additional barrier is that they may not be familiar with or understanding the FE system and how to enrol (see earlier comment regarding pathway to and through FE and Skills).

From a provider's perspective, funding, standards and performance measures should not act as a barrier to supporting learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, as otherwise the system itself reinforces existing class ceilings and contribute to learners leaving education without achieving certain grades or qualifications.

13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

In a report published in 2023, UCAS and Stonewall shared research from a survey of 3,000 school and college students who identified as LGBT+. The survey found that 12% of LGBT+ students said they did not have a good experience at school or college, and of those, 70% said this was because their identity was not reflected in the things they learnt. As discussed in our answer to Q23, the experiences of LGBTQ+ students could thus be

improved by ensuring the curriculum is representative of society and engages with the contributions of diverse groups including LGBTQ+ people.

A lack of representation in the current curriculum may also disproportionately impact disabled and learners from global majority, both being often minoritised. A 2020 report by YMCA into young Black people's experiences of institutional racism in the UK found that 49% of young Black people felt that racism was the biggest barrier to attaining success in school, while 50% said the biggest barrier was teacher perceptions of them, for example being seen as 'too aggressive'. Tackling negative racial stereotypes and institutional racism within education are therefore imperative to breaking down barriers for young Black people accessing and progressing within education. Ensuring the curriculum is more representative is one means of tackling such stereotypes and racism. Please also see earlier comments in Q12 regarding socioeconomic barriers. Each of these factors are exacerbated by an eco-system that has little understanding of and about the opportunities that FE and Skills provide.

Sources: UCAS and Stonewall (2023) *Next Steps: What is the experience of LGBT+ students in education?*
YMCA (2020) *Young and Black: The young Black experience of institutional racism in the UK*

14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Qualifications that are inflexible with high-stakes end-point assessments in the form of written exams may meet the needs of the few but are especially likely to fail learners with SEND, who may experience anxiety, challenges with concentration, or require additional processing time. A move away from purely exam-based models towards more practical assessments and multiple assessment points is likely to benefit the outcomes and wellbeing of many learners with SEND, and beyond.

In addition, a high proportion of learners taking resit GCSE exams are those with SEND, and there is a persistent grade gap between learners with SEND and non-SEND learners (DfE 2024). As such, if there are certain English and maths requirements for level 3 vocational qualifications (for example) then this may act as a barrier for learners with SEND progressing in education.

Many teachers in general education are not confident that they have the skills and knowledge to support SEND and/or neurodivergent learners. For example, Ambitious about Autism's We Need An Education campaign highlights that many teachers do not feel confident to teach autistic learners, and fewer than one in four autistic young people access education or training beyond school, as the right support is not in place for them. Therefore, we need more investment to ensure teachers and trainers are equipped to

support SEND and neurodivergent learners at school, in general Further Education, and beyond.

Sources: Department for Education (2024) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources*.
Ambitious about Autism (2024) We Need an Education. Webpage [accessed 15/11/2024].

15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above?

Wraparound care and wider services to support with a range of issues, from poverty to discrimination, act as enablers to support learners progress and achieve. So too do mentoring and coaching by qualified professionals. Sufficient funding and resourcing are required so that these supports can be put in place for learners.

CPD around SEND and neurodiversity can equip teachers with a solid understanding of diverse learner needs, along with how to effectively support them, leading to learning environments which are more inclusive, accessible and engaging. This is particularly pressing as changing demographics mean educators are supporting increasingly neurodiverse cohorts (DfE 2024). Such CPD should be informed by research and evidence from experts in SEND and neurodivergence, and have a practical focus on creating supportive learning environments.

Additionally, technology can assist in enabling access and progress for all learners, and SEND learners in particular. When consulting our members on this topic, one said, "Enhancing digital literacy is equally critical, as technology can provide valuable tools for differentiation and personalisation. Professional development sessions on assistive technologies—such as text-to-speech software, interactive learning platforms, and digital tools that enable multimodal instruction—can empower teachers to better meet individual learning needs." FE sector leaders also highlighted the importance of ongoing training and practice in using assistive technology, so that the tools can be successfully integrated into their teaching.

Within FE and Skills, access to industry and employers are vital to equipping learners with the skills they need for future study, life and work (as discussed in our answer to Q27), and this hands-on experience may benefit those groups listed above. For SEND learners aged 16+, programmes such as Supported Internships can provide a flexible and tailored means of supporting their progression into employment. However, industry commitment and access pose huge challenges, especially in terms of access to industry placements as T levels expand (as discussed in our answer to Q48). As such, there needs to be a focus on strengthening relationships with employers, investing in industry engagement, and offering flexible means of employers and industry working with providers as part of the curriculum.

Source: Department for Education (2024) Special educational needs in England: Academic year 2023/24.

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

16. To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?
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17. To what extent do the English and maths primary assessments support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?
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18. To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

Whilst the current English and maths GCSE curriculum content prepares learners for future study in these subjects, it does not adequately support learners to gain the key knowledge and skills they need for life and work. It can be very difficult to get young people, especially those taking re-sits, to understand the relevance of the concepts covered in the current GCSE maths curriculum. One leader ETF consulted said, "GCSEs require a complete overhaul to promote relevance, accessibility and engagement... Ensuring the programmes are relevant and meet the needs of the contemporary workforce will create a more topical and engaging programme." To better support this aim, the GCSE content could be updated to contain relevant and real-life topics related to life, study and work, such as finances and data management in maths, and writing job applications and critically analysing and appraising online discourse in English. The latter is essential in a world where we are accessing higher volumes of online information at a faster rate than ever before. In addition, any texts used within English GCSE exams need to be current or topical. For example, the 2023 'Punch and Judy' text felt somewhat distant from the 16-year-olds of today.

The FE and Skills sector has a pivotal role to play in supporting learners who are perceived to have failed after years of secondary study, and sometimes only have two months until the November resit window to try and impact this. Learners can feel demotivated and resentful towards the requirement to repeatedly re-sit GCSE exams, which is not conducive to improvement, and the current reinforcement post-school, including a focus

on exam questions in every lesson in some cases, does not serve learners nor their future employers well.

19. To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

See answer to Q40.

20. How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?
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21. Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

The annual cycle of GCSE exams may not effectively support the needs of learners in need of additional support, such as learners with SEND, as discussed in our answer to Q14. The Functional Skills (FS) model is more flexible and supports learners with SEND and socioeconomic disadvantage by allowing them to build up their skills in stages and be rewarded with qualifications at each stage. In addition, the FS curriculum and assessment is shorter and for English it is split into 2 sections which can be passed independently. However, the FS curriculum for maths would benefit from being adapted as the current content is not engaging and does not help learners to understand why they would need maths in their everyday life and work, as discussed in our answer to Q18. Learners with SEND may benefit from English and maths curricula that focuses on more realistic and practical scenarios that they are more likely to encounter in life and work.

We acknowledge the argument that controlled assessments may be less suitable for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners and those whose home circumstances prevent them from completing work at home (such as caring responsibilities or instability), hence the move towards exam-based models of assessment. However, the pressure of annual exams gives learners few chances to resit and so having some classroom-based assessment could provide a suitable alternative – such as for the creative writing element of the English curriculum.

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects where:
a. there is too much content; not enough content, or content is missing;
b. the content is out-of-date;
c. the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy);
d. there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)?
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23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

The main change that is needed is to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and contributions are included in the teaching of all subjects. In subjects such as English and History, this would involve highlighting texts and contributions from women, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people and people from the global majority. Meanwhile, in subjects such as Geography it would involve encouraging learners to think critically about how contemporary issues such as climate change may disproportionately affect certain groups of people, including those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. FE leaders we consulted in this call for evidence underlined the importance of regular engagement with diverse industry professionals, educators and learners during curriculum reviews, to help ensure that content and teaching remain up-to-date, responsive to societal shifts, and representative of the society learners are interacting with.

24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about and respect others? Are there elements that could be improved?
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25. In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study and what could we change to better support this?
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26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?
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27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

FE leaders and the members ETF consulted highlighted the need for a holistic approach to supporting learners to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work. They suggested this holistic approach should encompass and support wellbeing, careers advice, and targeted academic support. This was viewed as particularly important for those resitting GCSEs, as well as learners at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) at the end of school transition point.

A number of strategies could be used to better support this, including:
- Funding and expanding access to dedicated wellbeing support teams, who can provide support from counselling to mental health resources
- Providing access to high quality and up-to-date careers advice, including interaction with employers or industry talks to give learners practical insights into options available to them
- Equipping educators across FE and Skills with essential teaching and learning training and development
- Creating personalised learning pathways for GCSE resitters, including a focus on mentoring and building confidence for learners who are demotivated
- Targeted support and careers advice for learners at risk of becoming NEET, as the percentage of all young people who were NEET in April to June 2024 was estimated at 12.2% (872,000 young people), up 0.9 percentage points on the year (ONS 2024)

In addition, to equip learners with the knowledge and skills they need for study, life and work, curriculum content should be updated to include:
- practical topics such as financial literacy, writing job applications, and critical analysis of online discourse (see our answer to Q18)
- critical thinking, to enable the development of learning itself as a skill (see our answer to Q31)
- other key life skills such as emotional resilience

When thinking about preparing learners for work, it may be beneficial to consider the Government's five missions to rebuild Britain, and any related employment gaps. For instance, if the country needs more homes, then there is a need to equip more people with construction expertise, and therefore a need for more people to teach construction (for example, via T levels). This will require investment in these skills and high quality teaching, as well as strengthening industry engagement in the FE and Skills sector. What is also important to note is that T levels will not be able to deliver all of the industrial strategy asks, nor meet the needs of all learners. The curriculum design of T levels will not suit all economic and industry needs in any given location/geography; not will the focus of particular curricula automatically align to the subjects (and subsequent) jobs that learners are motivated by. This mismatch between learner interest, local jobs and policy direction

can have dire consequences and render those already disadvantaged even further so: if qualifications at L2 for example are removed, this could remove all immediate options for some learners.

Source: ONS (2024) Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: August 2024.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

28. To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?
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29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?
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30. To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

See answer to Q27.

31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

At secondary and 16-19, there are some opportunities for learners to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects. Within vocational pathways such as T levels, there is great opportunity to access creative fields and gain practical experience. However, the emphasis on core academic subjects such as English and maths often results in creative subjects including Art, Music and Drama being given less funding and fewer resources. FE leaders and the members we consulted feel it would be beneficial to invest in resource and support for creative subjects, suggesting this could help create a more balanced curriculum that values creativity alongside core academic subjects and skills. As part of this more balanced curriculum, it would be beneficial to place more emphasis on developing essential skills such as critical thinking, which will enable the development of learning itself as a skill and facilitate future learning. Such critical thinking skills could be

embedded within the existing curriculum and qualifications pathways and may be best assessed through discourse or observation as well as via exams.

32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?
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Key stage 4 Technical Awards

33. To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?
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34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?
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Section 7: Assessment and accountability

Primary and national curriculum assessments

35. Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?
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36. Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?
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37. Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?
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38. What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?
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Secondary assessment

39. Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

The volume of assessment required for GCSE English and maths is not necessarily an issue, however there are some key improvements that could be made to these assessments, as discussed in our answer to Q40.

40. What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

With regards to English and maths GCSE assessments, there are a number of challenges to ensuring they capture and support the development of knowledge and skills, and promote young people's wellbeing, namely:

(i) English learners are required to produce a large amount of content in a short time, meaning that speed is being assessed at the cost of testing learners' ability to write creatively or critically analyse texts and produce reasoned responses. This also poses a particular disadvantage to learners who are neurodivergent or for whom English is not their first language
(ii) Three maths papers can be overwhelming, especially for those with anxiety or SEND learners
(iii) The infrequency of assessment points contributes to exam anxieties

These issues could be addressed by having a greater variety of assessment and teaching of English and maths GCSEs, moving away from a purely exam-based GCSE assessment model, and using pedagogical approaches effectively to support learner wellbeing and help reduce their anxiety around exams. For example, assessment of GCSEs could incorporate project-based assessments or shorter topic-based exams at multiple points through the course.

41. Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

Changes could be made to the content and assessment of GCSE English and maths to ensure their relevance, as per our answer to Q18.

42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?
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43. Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?
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Accountability

44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?
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45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

Currently, progress for FE learners is often understood in terms of qualification attainment and transition into further education, training or paid employment. However, FE and Skills providers also add a great deal of social value, for example in terms of increasing learners' confidence, autonomy, communication, social skills, and understanding how to live healthy lives. These outcomes may be particularly important for learners with SEND and/or those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and therefore need to be better recognised and valued.

Additionally, a lack of trust in the FE and Skills system means there is too much focus on outputs (how we deliver qualifications) rather than outcomes (which is how we drive professionalism and sector improvement). An output incentivised system cannot serve outcomes well. The accountability system and standards must therefore focus on driving professionalism, sector improvement and social value, in addition to outputs and qualifications.

46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

Building on our answer to Q45, the move towards the accountability system focussing more on outcomes and social value could better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, the new Ofsted report card could specifically look at how well learners from these groups are included and progressing. Importantly, this should not only consider numbers of SEND learners, but take a more holistic look of their experiences of inclusion and learning.

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

47. To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners? a. Level 3 b. Level 2 c. Level 1 and entry level
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48. Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners: a. AS/A level qualifications b. T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes c. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3 d. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

b. If T level numbers increase, then one major change that will be needed is additional flexibility around the industry placement requirements. Whilst this is an integral part of the course, and highly beneficial to learners in terms of developing hands-on experience and skills, the volume of placements required as T levels expand (especially in rural areas) is unfortunately not feasible. In some industries such as in digital, media and computing, an additional challenge to placements is that the workforce now tends to work from home or on a hybrid basis. If employees are not in the office for large portions of the week, it may not be possible to support work placements. An alternative would be to balance the placement requirements with a bigger focus on employers working with providers as part of the curriculum. In addition, there needs to be a focus on equipping young people with the digital skills required to work in a remote or hybrid manner, where relevant.

49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

The FE sector leaders and the members ETF consulted highlighted that we need to create clearer progression routes from T levels into university and/or further technical study, as this will support learners who aspire to undertake further academic or professional qualifications. Currently, not all universities understand T levels, and so we need to create readiness across the system before we can truly improve learners' understanding of possible progression pathways. Additionally, increasing the research capacity in FE and Skills through dedicated research funding may facilitate better collaboration between Further and Higher Education. This would help to ensure that universities see FE as an evidence-based, innovative sector, capable of advancing knowledge, transferring best practice, improving itself through research, and supporting learners to prepare for university. Other leaders felt that learners must be offered a choice of qualifications and pathways (including BTECs and Apprenticeships) to fulfil diverse learning needs.

To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?
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50. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

See answer to Q27.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

Transitions

51. How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?
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Technology

52. How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

One of our members consulted on this topic remarked, "Technology has the potential to transform curriculum delivery, assessment, and qualifications in England, making education more personalised, accessible, and effective."

In curriculum delivery, digital tools can be used to give access to a variety of resources, interactive online content, and blended learning models. Furthermore, they allow teachers to be flexible in content delivery and tailor it to individual learning needs, supporting learners to progress at their own pace. As the member continued, "Interactive learning tools, such as virtual reality and simulations, could also enrich subjects like Science, Geography, and History, bringing abstract concepts to life in ways that enhance engagement and understanding." Furthermore, EdTech resources can help teachers to gamify and reimagine traditional resources to make them more engaging for learners.

In terms of assessment, technology may be used to support continuous evaluation methods such as online quizzes or e-portfolios, as well as allowing teachers to provide real-time feedback and support. Meanwhile, in terms of qualifications, technology may allow for more flexible qualification pathways including online modules and assessments.

In the FE and Skills sector, the first step to using technology to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications would be to improve the digital literacy and basic IT skills of teachers themselves. This may be achieved through CPD, mentoring, and/or networking opportunities with other teachers. Any CPD delivered should be based on evidence and research around how best to use technology to improve delivery of the curriculum, assessment and qualifications. It should also be current, exploring the latest technological developments such as AI, and how they might assist teachers to plan lessons, generate content, and summarise articles.

The use of technology to improve any delivery is predicated on the funding and availability of online platforms, interactive learning tools, and up-to-date industry standard technology (such as interactive anatomy tables for science and health lessons) being available to learners.

Further views

53. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?
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