

Schools are bracing themselves for a new benchmark performance measure – Progress 8.

Catherine Mastaglio

looks at the changes, which are coming in for exams sat in 2016

The Department for Education (DfE) has recently made some significant changes to the way that secondary school performance is measured, changes which will have an impact on schools up and down the country.

The aim is to reform the way that schools and colleges are assessed so that all pupils, regardless of background, can make progress and find success across a broad choice of subjects and study programmes.

The government's vision was to reward schools that set high expectations for the attainment and progress of all their pupils, provide high value qualifications, and teach a wide variety of subjects across a balanced curriculum.

The focus was to ensure that accountability became "the servant, not the master, of excellent teaching". In other words, the accountability system should work with and not against teachers' main objective – to help their pupils gain the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in their future.

The DfE has expressed that schools will improve the most when teaching professionals have the autonomy to decide how best to teach their pupils – a fact that will come as no surprise to those in the teaching profession.

It is with this in mind that a consultation was launched last year with secondary schools to ensure the proposed accountability measures were fit-for-purpose, giving headteachers, teaching staff, parents and other key stakeholders the opportunity to contribute their valuable opinions.

Following the end of the consultation process, the government published *Reforming the Accountability System for Secondary Schools*, a document which outlines the proposed changes, taking into consideration the feedback from the consultation.

“This method will take the progress each pupil makes between key stage 2 and 4 and compare that with the progress that is expected to be made by pupils nationally who had the same level of attainment at key stage 2”

What do we need to know?

While these changes are not yet live, there are two new measures that could well have an impact on the delivery of your school curriculum from as early as 2015. These measures are:

- Progress 8: this “will show whether pupils have performed better than expected at the end of key stage 4 across eight key subjects”.
- Attainment 8: this “will show the school's average grade across the same suite of eight subjects”.

The focus on progress

Looking particularly at the progress side of things, eight key subject areas will count in this measure, rather than the five in the current headline measure of school performance. The eight are:

- One slot for double weighted English.
- One slot for double weighted maths.
- Three slots for other English Baccalaureate subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages).
- Three remaining slots which can be taken up by

Measuring progress



further qualifications, including EBacc subjects, other high value arts, academic and/or vocational qualifications.

How is progress to be measured?

It has been proposed that the progress measure should be created using a value added (VA) methodology. This method will take the progress each pupil makes between key stage 2 and 4 and compare that with the progress that is expected to be made by pupils nationally who had the same level of attainment at key stage 2.

The government is still considering the nuances of this methodology, to ensure that it works as well as it can do. For example, at present, the method compares pupils with the same prior attainment within the same cohort. This means that the grades needed for each pupil to achieve a positive progress score are worked out after exams have been taken. Instead, the expectations could be set using the results of pupils who completed key stage 4 three years previously. This would have the benefit of pupils and schools knowing in advance what grades they need in order to achieve a positive progress score, enabling them to set suitably challenging targets.

The DfE has also confirmed that it plans to move to a simple, linear 1 to 8 point scale (such as 1 point for a G grade up to 8 for an A*), allowing them to plot grades on the same scale for current and reformed GCSEs and vocational qualifications. This is a clearer way of doing things, helping with ease of comparison and giving more credit to schools when pupils achieve high results.

Following the feedback received during the consultation, the DfE has committed to looking at further aspects of the Progress 8 measure in more detail before finalising the methods of calculation. More details on this will be available soon.

What are the benefits?

Ultimately, the idea is that using a progress measure helps to make judgements about schools fair. Under the point score progress measure, each pupil's achievements will count equally, which rewards schools for their work with all pupils, whatever their starting point. This will be particularly useful for schools who have a high intake of disadvantaged students.

The new measures will help to celebrate those schools that help children with low prior attainment to achieve some worthwhile qualifications, and will encourage schools to stretch and challenge those pupils who are high achievers.

The progress measures also give schools the opportunity to be credited for their work in vocational areas of study – vocational options can make up three of the eight subject areas that will be assessed.

In learning, one size does not fit all. For every aspiring scientist, there is a talented artist. For every pupil who is academically gifted, there is another who shines and flourishes through practical, creative learning. The new measures allow schools to explore this and truly nurture and develop all of the pupils in their care.

There are many high-quality vocational qualifications available which hold equality with GCSE subjects. For example, NCFE V Certs (available in creative studies, business and enterprise and computer technology) are one possible addition to a key stage 4 curriculum, offering the same performance points as GCSEs and an alternative way of engaging your pupils, helping them to progress and achieve.

What is the timescale?

Progress 8 will be introduced for all schools in 2016 (based on 2016 exam results, with the Progress 8 score showing in performance tables published in early 2017).

However, the DfE has said that schools may be able to opt into the new system as early as 2015 so that they are held to account based on new performance measures one year early (based on 2015 exam results).

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• Catherine Mastaglio is 14 to 16 project lead with awarding body NCFE.

Further information

- You can find out more information about the new Progress 8 measure and the wider accountability reforms at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/secondary-school-accountability-consultation
- If you would like to know more about NCFE V Certs and how these vocational options could help contribute to your curriculum and improve your students' progress, then call 0191 239 8000 or email service@ncfe.org.uk. You can also visit the NCFE blog to comment on the new measures. Visit www.ncfe.org.uk

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The use of Twitter by schools, teachers and within education continues to grow rapidly. For those thinking about getting involved, **Lindsay Plumpton** offers a start-up guide for making the most of Twitter

Tweeting, Blogging, Linking in, Facebooking (not to mention Tumblr, Pinterest, Google+) – it's all the rage and whether you like it or not, social media has become unescapable. Looking at Twitter in particular, it currently has around a billion registered users, with a phenomenal 100 million users who are active on a daily basis.

Essentially, Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that allows you to share short messages online and engage in conversation with other users. You have got 140 characters to succinctly express yourself. This basic idea has revolutionised the way millions of people discuss and market themselves.

Why should we be involved?

It can sometimes seem hard enough to keep on top of your emails, without giving yourself extra workload. But the great thing is that as well as being a free resource to use, it really won't take up much of your time and can yield great results for your school.

If it is used effectively, Twitter can help to move your school forward, become part of the larger community, and give it an official voice in the education sector. Twitter is a quick and easy communications tool to let the entire school community know what's going on with you and your students.

It can be used effectively to engage parents who are often working, on the move, and busy. For example, it's an easy way for them to keep up with school news or residential trips

How would a school use it?

Any reticence you have is understandable – Twitter is certainly something which divides opinion. Is Twitter not just the inane ramblings of celebrities? What's so fascinating about people documenting every aspect of their daily lives? Who really cares what Joe Bloggs had for breakfast? Well, you'll be glad to hear that it can be used for a lot more than that.

With Twitter, you can share information (including weblinks, images or video clips as appropriate) about your school or classes as you see fit. It can be used effectively to engage parents who are often working, on the move, and busy. For example, it is an easy way for them to keep up with school news or residential trips. It is also good for engaging with your students (some schools are even setting homework via Twitter) and with others in the education industry.

Through updating Twitter you can:

- Celebrate your activities and successes as well as highlight students' work.
- Share photographs of students doing collaborative work, showcasing best practice or answer questions that arise during lessons.
- Update parents about school trips or other school news and advertise school events.
- Provide your school's thoughts on matters of policy or education news, as well as receive feedback from and interact with followers.
- Create an online debate – are you considering whether or not to scrap a particular subject? Or do you want to know what other people think of Michael Gove's latest proposal? A quick tweet is the perfect way to take a quick reading of public opinion.

You can share your Twitter messages via computer, tablet device or mobile at any time that's convenient to you. What's more, you can embed Twitter into the school's website or blog. Therefore, the immediacy of being able to share information via Twitter (particularly



via a mobile device) can be combined with the main school online presence, the website.

Getting started

Before you jump into the Twittersphere, there's obviously a few things that you need to consider.

- What do you want to do with this account? What do you hope to accomplish? What do you want to communicate?
- The account will need to be looked after as social networking is an immediate thing which can demand an immediate response. Will there be just one person who will post or will you have multiple people who post? Remember to keep it simple to start with.
- Who do you want to follow? Parents? Students? Community members? Political figures? It's important to follow people in order to facilitate interaction, so set some ground rules based around what you want to achieve.
- How will you respond to questions directed at you? Twitter should be a two-way conversation and to be a good conversationalist, you need to listen as well as talk! Participate, lead the way and make your voice heard.

Practicalities

When setting up your account, you need to think of a name. You'll also need an email address that is not already associated with a Twitter account (maybe just your generic school email address).

The email address is used to confirm the account and is sent any notifications of direct messages, new followers etc. As far as your name's concerned, you should pick something that's short, easy to remember and in keeping with your school's brand as this defines your identity on Twitter.

It is also good to add your full school name, location, description, link to your website and picture (maybe your school logo or symbol).

If you are going to be using Twitter on your mobile, you might want to look into an app that makes this easier. Furthermore, using something like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck on your computer allows you to use the more advanced features of Twitter and follow multiple feeds at any one time. You can also use this to manage multiple accounts within the school.

Hashtagging? Trending?

For many, some of the terms used when discussing social media can be intimidating. However, it is much more simple than it sounds.

Using a hash symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase (known as a hashtag) categorises those tweets and helps them show more easily in Twitter searches. Clicking on a "hashtagged" word in any message shows

you all other tweets featuring that keyword. Don't over-tag a single tweet though (two is probably the maximum).

Trends on Twitter refer to a hashtag-driven topic that is immediately popular at a particular time.

Meanwhile, mentioning an organisation or person using their Twitter name (@joebloggs) will help to bring your tweet to that organisation or individual's attention.

Some final tips

- Remember to keep it informative, varied and visual (everyone loves a photo). If you are including links, you can shorten the links to fit into your tweet using link shortening websites, such as Bit.ly.
- Promote your account – put it on your website, in your newsletters and elsewhere.
- Try to keep it up-to-date so that everyone knows it is a fresh account and worth following.
- Have a sense of humour with it – it is a social net-

work and does not have to be formal in style. Bring out your school's personality and make it fun as well as functional.

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- Lindsay Plumpton is PR and social media officer at NCFE.

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- Hootsuite: <https://hootsuite.com>
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The five steps to success

Caroline Gallagher discusses the five key elements to delivering a successful programme of vocational education

As youth unemployment continues to rise, vocational training forms a key part of government strategy to tackle this issue. Vocational qualifications when delivered within schools can offer a way for learners to develop work-ready, practical skills, renew self-confidence as their achievements grow, enhance their CV, and engage in a form of learning that interests them. But when it comes to delivering vocational qualifications effectively, what do schools need to bear in mind?

The right qualification

Choose the qualification which is the right fit for the students – a simple but crucial first step.

It is important to provide potential candidates with an initial assessment to confirm the appropriate level of activity and to help you choose the qualification which best fits their needs.

By fitting the learning programme to the cohort of students rather than the other way around, you are really able to nurture their strengths and help them to leave school armed with the skills they need to progress.

For every potential doctor, there is a budding artist, or care worker, music technician, travel operator or retailer who would benefit from an element of vocational training to prepare them for the career ahead of them.

Vocational education is also useful to those who are naturally academically inclined, giving them the employability skills to help them progress. In education, one size definitely does not fit all.

As you will no doubt be aware, from this term many vocational qualifications cease to hold GCSE equivalency as a result of changes brought in by the Department for Education (DfE). However, this does not mean that you are compelled to stop delivering vocational qualifications. There is a number of engaging alternative qualifications available which fit the new requirements, such as the NCFE V Certs.

What's more, the DfE recommends that "in all cases schools should act as they judge to be in the best interests of their students, regardless of whether a particular qualification or course will be recognised for the purposes of performance tables".

In fact, by delivering additional short vocational qualifications to your students and motivating them with extra achievement, you could be adding an extra layer of quality to a student's all-round education and helping towards the achievement of a positive Ofsted report.

The core curriculum

It is important to weave vocational delivery into the core curriculum. Vocational education and academia need not work in conflict with each other – in fact they can be mutually compatible.

Vocational qualifications can give real-world context to core curriculum subjects – for example personal money management can work alongside maths to demonstrate the importance of numeracy skills in action.

Qualifications such as effective thinking skills, enterprise, learning to learn and employability skills develop a range of transferable skills such as team-working, problem-solving and confidence-building which students can then apply to their wider learning programmes at school.

Abbey School in Kent has been delivering NCFE's Equality and Diversity qualification as part of its citizenship and RE statutory curriculum for all year 11 students.

Religion and citizenship subject leader, Steven Cooper, said: "I have had students campaigning for kicking out racism in sport, which has led to our PE department formalising a code of conduct for all students involved in representing the school in sports.

"This is a major achievement for the students. They could see that the Equality and Diversity course is not stale, old or irrelevant, but actually a real part of their own lives."

"Because of the student-centred nature of the course, they have felt valued as individuals; happy that they are able to achieve something for themselves, rather than just for school statistics. The qualification also inspired some to go on to study sociology at A level."

It's all in the delivery

Differentiation is key – make sure you are able to recognise vulnerable learners by working with your



school data manager. You can then tailor your teaching, learning and guidance accordingly.

Build tutorial-style sessions around the assessment tasks, spend time with individual learners ensuring that they understand the targets and requirements, including those for higher grade achievement.

It is positive to develop a "coaching" style of support – ask open-ended questions about the work, get the learners to explore possibilities, identify actions and analyse outcomes. An integral part of delivering vocational education is encouraging your learners towards reaching independence. With this in mind, project-based work can be a very successful method for engaging learners.

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The great thing about vocational qualifications is that you have the freedom and flexibility to deliver the qualification as you see fit using your teaching expertise. Through this, you can really capture the students' imaginations.

Back at Abbey School, for example, delivery of the Equality and Diversity course is broken down into 24 digestible PowerPoint-based lessons, each of which encourages students to think about a small bite-sized chunk of the qualification.

Wherever possible, tutors looked to adopt interactive and innovative methods of delivery in efforts to stimulate debate and further thinking among students. Discussions often focused on current topics within national and local media, allowing students to see the real application of the ideas through their local community.

Engaging with the local community has been a successful method of delivery for many schools running vocational qualifications. St George's School in Newport has been innovatively delivering a Level 2 Award in creative craft to students with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

The students completed two stand-out projects throughout the year and also produced artwork for exhibition and sale at the local hospital. By the end of

the course, the learners had not only developed their creative talents but also their business acumen and enterprise skills.

Plan to perfection

As professional planners, it might seem that this piece of advice would go without saying! However, it is so important to get approved with an awarding organisation. Submitting your approval forms in advance ensures that you can register candidates in plenty of time and it means the appointed external moderator for the

vocational qualification has the opportunity to provide support to your school as required. Also, you will need to make sure that an internal moderator is allocated to the vocational programme as soon as possible.

Write an assessment plan (scheme of work/project/assignment) in advance of the programme which clearly identifies activity, evidence to be produced, associated learning outcome(s), and assessment points (dates).

Your awarding organisation should be able to offer resources to help with this (for example, NCFE has internal assessment briefs on its website for helping to plan lessons for the V Certs).

You will also need to write an internal moderation plan ahead of delivery which clearly identifies the assessor(s), unit(s) and candidates in the proposed sample. This will be linked to the assessment plan so that the internal moderator can sample assessment decisions after they have taken place.

Feedback, feedback, feedback!

Make sure that assessment decisions are clearly recorded and feedback is provided to candidates. It is very important to reference work correctly to the assessment criteria to make it clear which piece of work is attributable to which criteria. This helps assessment decisions and with external moderation. It also promotes organisational skills in a tidy and well-structured portfolio.

Assessors also need to receive feedback on their practice and the quality of their assessment decisions. Make sure you take the advice from your external moderation report on board – it is there to help you and will inform and confirm good practice in your school. The external moderator should discuss the visit and any recommendations and action points before leaving.

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• Caroline Gallagher is 14 to 16 qualifications officer at NCFE.

Further information

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A vocational revolution

From September, tough new rules will limit the number of vocational qualifications which will qualify for inclusion in school league tables. **Lindsay Plumpton** looks at the fall-out of this move and new qualifications that are being developed as a result

According to Ofqual's recent survey of attitudes towards qualifications, at least half of the general public consider that vocational options are of equal value to traditional academic routes.

It is an interesting statistic at a time when there is much concern and criticism about a narrowing of the curriculum, with a National Union of Teachers' survey of more than 2,000 of its members earlier this year finding that two-thirds of teachers think there is "too much emphasis on 'facts' rather than skills" in the new curriculum.

Changes coming into effect in September will see most vocational qualifications ceasing to hold GCSE equivalency. This has been brought in by the Department of Education (DfE) based on the recommendations in Professor Alison Wolf's review of vocational education. It means that many vocational qualifications will no longer count towards school performance tables.

However, the importance of vocational qualifications is still recognised and supported by many within the sector, with research from the Edge Foundation and IPPR finding that 85 per cent of senior teachers believe vocational qualifications are valuable for their students, boosting motivation, confidence and transferable skills.

David Grailey, chief executive at awarding organisation NCFE, said: "I believe that in education, one size does not fit all – every individual is different and for every budding doctor there is an aspiring artist or musician. Their skills should be nurtured, developed and ultimately granted the same prestige as academic prowess. There are many routes to career success and the vocational pathway is a valid option for many young people.

"Vocational qualifications ensure learners meet the needs of their prospective employers and also offer them a way to expand their qualification range by accrediting the skills they develop. Teaching staff don't need to be convinced of the benefits of vocational qualifications; the challenge is how to successfully

'Engagement', 'motivation' and 'relevance'. These terms describe the true benefit of vocational qualifications to students. They are clearly where the real value of vocational education lies

weave them into the curriculum alongside the more 'traditional' subjects."

Mr Grailey is passionate that vocational qualifications can be used to give context and a real-life relevance to academic study. For example, qualifications in money management can be delivered alongside a related core subject such as mathematics, or qualifications in health and social care can work well alongside the sciences or citizenship and PSHE.

He added: "These short courses do a vital job in raising awareness of key issues in society and responding



to critical issues and agendas such as nutrition, sexual health, alcohol awareness, environmental issues and equality and diversity."

Nevertheless, a key decision for schools when planning for next year will be which qualifications now hold the all-important performance table points. With this in mind, NCFE has developed a suite of new 14 to 16 qualifications which fall in line with the DfE's characteristics for qualifications that can hold value in the 2015 performance tables.

The new qualifications, called V Certs, are graded, and contain both internal and external assessment elements – two key criteria. Each qualification is equivalent to one GCSE. All five of the new qualifications are from within the creative studies sector and cover performance skills, graphic design, interactive media, music technology, and photography.

NCFE has been working with a number of educational advisors and schools to develop and test the qualifications before they launch in September.

A key concern for those schools involved was the major differences in grading between the old and new generation of vocational qualifications.

Previously many of the old style vocational qualifications did not require a formal grading structure. However, under the new system, in order to be deemed sufficiently rigorous and therefore achieve parity of performance points with GCSEs, all new vocational qualifications must have an element of external assessment and grading.

Schools working with NCFE have been actively engaged in assessing the new structure to grading and assessment. As a result of input from these schools, NCFE is now developing a number of resources to assist schools with approaching grading for the qualifications in an objective way. These include resources such as Sample Assessments and a Teacher Guide.

Liz Forrester, from educational consultancy Schools Improvement Agency, has worked on the project. She explained: "The feedback from schools has been invaluable and will really help to give schools confidence in delivering these qualifications."

"The content of qualifications such as the Art and Design V Cert has been acknowledged as being relevant and appropriate with real opportunity for project development. From the sample units reviewed, teachers have found that the style of project-based learning is a style that learners find genuinely engaging."

Sarah Tinson, innovation, understanding and skills manager at Pent Valley Technology College in Kent, has had a positive experience with the qualifications so far.

She explained: "It will enable us to continue to offer a mixed curriculum that meets the needs of all our

learners. The language used and the processes embedded in the V Certs mean that learners can learn in a style that reflects genuine industry practice and context."

With such rapidly shifting sands, it is difficult to ensure that the school curriculum not only meets government requirements but also attends to the needs of learners. For schools planning their delivery of vocational qualifications for next year, what's the best advice?

Mr Grailey added: "Over the years, many schools have described to us the benefits of vocational qualifications not using words like 'performance points' or 'tables', but talking about 'engagement', 'motivation' and 'relevance'."

"These terms describe the true benefit of vocational qualifications to students. They are clearly where the

Ready to go: Sarah Tinson and students at Pent Valley Technology College have been helping to trial and develop the new V Cert qualifications

real value of vocational education lies. All vocational qualifications, regardless of their point value, will continue to enrich pupil learning and education." **SecEd**

• Lindsay Plumpton is a reporter at NCFE.

Further information

NCFE is holding an event for schools at The Lowry Arts Centre in Salford Quays on July 2 to explain more about the new V Certs. For details, call 0191 239 8000 or visit www.ncfe.org.uk/events

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