

<b>Response to Rajmund Brent by:</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> September 2012</b>
<b>To:</b>	<b>Kent Economic Board</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Government consultation on Qualifications for 14 – 16 year olds and Performance Tables</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	Unrestricted
<b>Due DfE by:</b>	<b>30<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>

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## **SUMMARY:**

In the paper *Qualifications for 14 – 16 year olds and performance tables* recommendations have been made for the content of performance tables with a request for responses to a consultation document.

These responses were put to Cabinet 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

It was recommended that the Kent Economic Board have an opportunity to add to the consultation paper. It was considered particularly appropriate to gauge employers' views.

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## **Background**

Professor Wolf's Review of Vocational Education published in March 2011 sets out the case for change. The number of vocational qualifications taken in schools up to age 16 has grown dramatically in recent years - from 15,000 in 2004 to 575,000 in 2010. In her report, Professor Wolf describes how this rapid growth was less about the inherent worth of these qualifications and more about the value they have been given in performance tables. Some of these qualifications are valued by employers and further education. However, too many do not offer the broad progression opportunities and skills that properly prepare young people for further learning and the modern world of work.

The Government response to the Wolf Review, published in May 2011, accepted all of Professor Wolf's recommendations. In relation to the recommendation quoted in Professor Wolf's foreword, the Government committed to reform school performance tables by breaking free from the existing equivalency-based system.

At present, any qualification taught in a school to *14 to 16 year olds* is counted in Key Stage 4 performance tables. All of these qualifications have been given a value based on their size compared with GCSEs. The Government is proposing to replace the current system with the one set out below.

## Key Details

- Schools will be encouraged to focus on GCSEs and **a narrower range of high quality vocational qualifications** by limiting the number of so-called equivalent qualifications that count in the key stage 4 performance tables.
- Only **a maximum of two non-GCSE qualifications per pupil** will be counted in the headline indicators in the performance tables in future.
- The Government will reform the system by treating one qualification as “one” in the tables.
- The Government will replace existing headline performance indicators with new measures in the future that recognise achievement in a new, shorter list of preferred qualifications.
- **Only qualifications that are at least the size of a GCSE** will be counted in the tables in the future.
- The Department will reform the system by treating one qualification as “one” in the tables.

## The tension between academic education and technical education

Vocational education is a vital underpinning for our economy. The development of young people’s skills in areas of immediate relevance to employers and business is a central part of the Government’s plans to boost economic growth, and to support higher levels of youth employment. It is a commonplace that technical education in England has long been weaker than most other developed nations, though Kent is mentioned as offering good practice in this area in the Wolf review.

Yet it is also widely agreed that our country’s future relies upon building an advanced economy founded on high-level technical skills, and the ability to remain at the forefront of ever-faster technological change. Reforms must be put in place to address the long term weaknesses in practical learning.

It is intended that vocational qualifications that attract performance points will be the very best for young people – in terms of their content, assessment and progression. Young people must be offered learning programmes that are valuable, respected and support progression to further learning and skilled jobs.

Preferred qualifications will:

- have rigorous assessment, including a percentage of external assessment;
- provide good progression opportunities to Level 3;
- be in subjects which are recognised by employers and higher education;
- offer rigour, breadth and depth;
- be of an appropriate size to complement the academic core for the majority of students.

## Implications to Kent County Council

A reduction in the number of includable qualifications might well risk the status of schools deemed currently to be performing well.

Much worthwhile learning may be diminished or abandoned altogether because of the pressure of performance tables.

Current HE funding arrangements have already shown an increased uptake of technical and vocational pathways, especially in Kent's high schools.

## Equality Implications

These recommendations would devalue achievement, for example, of students with SEN and other vulnerable groups.

The outstanding practice in Kent, as mentioned in the Wolf would be clearly undermined.

The perceived divide between academic and technical education would be consolidated.

### Recommendation:

An emerging priority for Kent is to develop cross county learning programmes which focus on the skills – sometimes the soft skills – and knowledge young people need for employment and adult life to ensure they are well prepared for social responsibility in a modern global society and to play a positive role in growing the economy locally and nationally.

Do employers have any comments to make on whether these Government proposals will facilitate or hinder this priority, in particular preparations for working life?

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### Links and Linked Documents

<http://www.keb.org.uk/taskgroups/employment-and-skills/> - ref the Wolf review item  
14 – 16 Qualifications and Performance Tables paper  
Response form