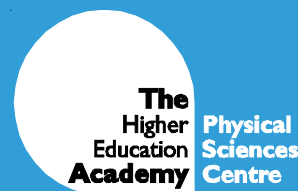


The Tomlinson Report

14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform



Introduction

This report was published 18th October 2004 and is concerned primarily with ensuring that 'all young people are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and progress in education, employment and adult life.' (Working Group on 14-19 Reform – press notice, 18/10/04). It is envisaged that the reforms will occur over a five to ten year period and a government White Paper on the proposals is expected to be published early in 2005 (see Postscript to this briefing paper). The working group consulted widely with schools, colleges, universities, employers and young people in the preparation of the report; this consultation process is set to continue as the diploma framework is developed. The Tomlinson Report can be found at <http://www.14-19reform.gov.uk/>

Why the need for reform?

The reforms are considered necessary because:

- There is too much assessment, which places too heavy a load on students and teachers
- There are too many qualifications and specifications – the intention is to improve clarity and transparency
- Current systems cause disaffection amongst some students leading to bad behaviour, truancy and difficulties in teaching
- Not enough young people continue education beyond the compulsory limit
- Too few young people have the basic skills of numeracy, literacy or C&IT to equip them for work
- Differentiation between high achievers is difficult
- Too many vocational qualifications do not meet the needs of learners, higher education or employers

A new diploma

The proposals would introduce a new diploma qualification, awarded at four levels:

- entry (equivalent to pre-GCSEs)
- foundation (equivalent to GCSEs at grade D-G)
- intermediate (equivalent to GCSEs at A*-C)
- advanced (equivalent to A-level)

Not all students would enter at the lowest level, many would start at the intermediate level and progress to the advanced level; others may start at entry or foundation level before progressing through to intermediate. Students would be able to progress through the system at their own rate which may lead to mixed-age classes. The new diploma would replace GCSEs, BTECs, AVCEs, AS-levels and A2-levels; the current apprenticeship schemes should also be included in the framework. The diploma would comprise two parts; core learning and main learning.

Core

Core learning would cover developing basic skills and would include mathematics, literacy and communication, C&IT, an extended project, wider activities entitlement (eg work experience, paid jobs, voluntary work, family responsibilities), personal review, planning and guidance. There will also be a focus on common knowledge, skills and attributes (eg personal awareness, problem solving, creativity, team-working and moral/ethical awareness). The extended project would replace much of the externally set coursework.

Main

Most of a young person's time would be spent on main learning which would focus on their subject specialisation. The content of GCSE and A-level curricula will be maintained as diploma components. Diplomas could be 'open' or 'specialised'. For the 'open' option, learners would choose a mixture of subjects and/or vocational options. All pre-16 diplomas will be 'open' to ensure breadth of study. For the 'specialised' option, studies would cover individual academic disciplines and vocational areas (eg an employment sector).

There will be a greater role for teacher assessment and less formal external examination. Achievements (except at entry level) will be recorded as a *pass*, *merit* or *distinction*.

A minimum threshold of 180 credits will be required for a learner to achieve a diploma, where one credit equates to a notional ten hours of learning time. (This is the same measure that the QCA uses for adult qualifications and credit framework.) Those who do not reach the minimum 180 credits at any level will have their achievements noted in the transcript that all learners receive. Learners who achieve rapidly in one area of the curriculum will be able to progress to components in the next level for that subject.

What does this mean for higher education?

- Vocational courses and pathways would become part of the single diploma framework. This would allow students to move between courses whilst accumulating transferable credits and could support progress to higher education courses.
- Improved differentiation for advanced level students as more difficult options will be added to examinations to add 'stretch'. These would be introduced firstly to the existing system as A-plus and A-double plus grades before the diploma was introduced.
- On 'graduating' students would receive a transcript of all their achievements, including a breakdown of individual module marks. These would be available to universities via an online system.
- The curriculum should develop personal skills including problem solving, teamwork and study skills. Also students would be encouraged to use their skills and knowledge creatively and to think for themselves.
- The extended project would allow the development of investigation, planning, research, analysis and presentation skills.
- AS and A2 would become separate components and AS would be renamed A1. For success an advanced diploma student would have to achieve at least four passes at A1 standard and at least two at A2. The current six assessment unit structure would change to a system with four formal external assessments and more internal sampling of student's work.
- It is not envisaged that students will normally be able to start higher education courses earlier than at present as even 'high fliers' would be stretched to achieve the demands of an advanced diploma before the age of 18-19.

What does this mean for the physical sciences?

There are very few references to **science** in the report and no mention at all of **chemistry**, **physics** or **astronomy**.

Science is however mentioned for Key Stage 4 where it is considered that coherent programmes for 14-16 year olds should be 'open' and must include the statutory KS4 requirements set out in the Government's White Paper, *Opportunity and Excellence*. Furthermore, these statutory requirements would not be included in the core, but achievement in them could contribute to the main learning requirements of diplomas at the appropriate level. In particular, the vast majority of 14-16 year olds would be expected to undertake accredited main learning components in **science** which meet the full National Curriculum **science** requirements. In addition, some subjects may be a supplementary requirement for some specialised programmes taken post-16 (eg **science** for engineering or a modern foreign language for business and tourism) and learners could achieve these at Key Stage 4 and carry forward the credit.

Recommendation 5 in the report concludes that:

'All 14-16 year olds should be required to follow the statutory National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 and other statutory curriculum requirements, such as RE, as they are now. Achievement in statutory KS4 subjects, such as **science**, which are not part of the core, should give credit towards main learning.'

Finally, **science** and technology is listed as one of the possible 'wider activities' which are usually undertaken outside formal learning time.

Postscript.

The Education Secretary decides (23rd Feb 2005):

- to keep GCSEs and A-levels, with a 3-level diploma for vocational studies.
- to retain tests of *functional* literacy and numeracy for all students.
- to make A-levels more stretching with a higher grade to differentiate between the top students.