

GCSEs in vocational subjects

**A general guide and overview
of the qualifications**

(Second revised version November 2003)

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Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to give teachers and other education professionals a general overview of the General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) in vocational subjects, which were introduced in September 2002.

This is the second revision to the first leaflet on the GCSEs in vocational subjects. Other leaflets address questions raised by pupils, parents, guardians careers advisers and employers, in relation to the GCSEs.

During Key Stage 4 (school years 10 and 11) or sooner, many young people form a clear interest in the world of work and in turn, gain an interest in vocational learning.

The GCSEs in vocational subjects have been designed to provide young people with the opportunity to explore these areas in a distinctive and innovative way - by developing knowledge and understanding of a particular vocational area and by investigating and researching the world of work. Students can use creative and entrepreneurial skills within a vocational context. The GCSEs in vocational subjects provide the same standards and rigour as other GCSEs. As such they represent a positive choice for all students.

Purpose

The GCSEs in vocational subjects aim to:

- *introduce* learners to a broad sector of industry and business;
- *encourage* understanding of the sector, key concepts and theories prevalent in it; and
- *develop* capability in some skills used within it.

There are currently eight titles covering a range of subject areas, based upon the seven former Part One GNVQ subjects (plus Applied Science).

The awarding bodies are developing two additional GCSEs in Construction and the Built Environment, and Performing Arts. Details of these new subjects will be publicised in due course.

What subjects are available?

Applied Art and Design

Provides opportunities to understand the professional world of art, craft and design through investigating the business and commercial aspects of the industry.

Applied Business

Enables pupils to acquire the knowledge, understanding and relevant business skills which will equip students with what they need to start in work or go on to further education or training.

Engineering

Introduces the pupil to the process of engineering in the market place, with particular reference to design and the construction of design briefs in a range of business and industrial contexts.

Health and Social Care

Introduces pupils to a wide variety of work in evaluating a range of health and social care services and organisations, increasing their knowledge and developing awareness of influences on an individual's health and well-being and examining the influences on individual development.

Applied Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Enables pupils to understand the professional world of ICT. Pupils will be introduced to a wide variety of work in ICT and its applications, increasing their knowledge and developing an awareness of how ICT is used as a tool in vocational contexts in society more widely.

Leisure and Tourism

Provides opportunities to understand the leisure and tourism industries. Pupils will be introduced to a variety of different branches of the industries, increasing their knowledge and developing awareness of how leisure and tourism organisations operate.

Manufacturing

Provides for insights into the process of manufacturing in a range of business operations - with particular reference to design and the construction and implementation of design briefs.

Applied Science

Enables pupils to gain an understanding of the professional world of scientific activity and research. There will be ample opportunity for practical laboratory work, experimenting with a range of scientific equipment and investigating science based industries and how they work.

Key Skills

Guidance is given as to how key skills support and complement the awards. Examples of key skills that could be covered are Improving Own Learning Performance, Problem Solving and Working with Others. In addition there will be detailed signposting or mapping of key skill learning and assessment opportunities across the content.

Qualification Design

The grading system for GCSEs in vocational subjects is the same as that in place for other GCSEs. In most cases, the GCSEs in vocational subjects consist of three equally weighted units in each subject. National criteria determine the qualification's content for each subject and apply across all awarding bodies. Internal and external assessment arrangements differ between awarding bodies and they are responsible for their own guidance on delivery and assessment (see the last page).

Key features of the GCSEs in vocational subjects are as follows:

- equivalent to two other GCSEs;
- same grading as GCSEs A*A* to GG with a U = Unclassified;
- cover both level 1 (foundation) and level 2 (intermediate) of the National Qualifications Framework as do all GCSEs;
- assessment usually consists of one third external assessment (one unit) and two thirds internal assessment (two units);

- overall qualification grade results from the aggregation of unit results.

Teaching/contact hours are not prescribed but as the qualifications are equivalent to two GCSEs, schools and colleges should want to double the amount of time they allow for existing GCSEs.

Schools and colleges might also want to plan the curriculum to enable longer periods of time to be set aside for work placements or other practical activities such as visits.

How are the GCSEs in vocational subjects taught?

Classroom teaching is similar to other subjects - to increase knowledge and understanding and develop skills. However GCSEs in vocational subjects encourage learning within a vocational context throughout the course. Such learning might include:

- visits to placements in industry and/or business to gain some practical experience of the skills used;
- project work undertaken jointly with groups of pupils to develop self confidence and to increase awareness of the values and attitudes relevant to work;
- using the internet to find out about an industry or a particular organisation;
- use of case studies and business-based materials;

- role play and workplace simulations;
- finding out about what people do at work, and the qualifications and training they have;
- engaging in mini enterprise, perhaps with expert help from industry.

Assessment

Assessment will combine internal portfolio assessment and a variety of external assessment.

Portfolio assessment will operate with two units. The specifications set out the role of the school in designing, running, assessing and moderating the portfolio. The specification will also explain how the portfolios will be externally moderated. It also sets out the dates for submission of marks and notification of entry.

External assessment varies between subjects. The specification will set out whether it consists, for example, of a one-and-a-half hour paper with structured questions or whether it consists of a 10 hour externally set assignment which is school assessed and awarding body moderated.

Where might the GCSEs in vocational subjects lead?

As with all GCSEs, the GCSEs in vocational subjects can be used to progress to study another qualification in school or college, such as: a VCE (vocational A Level), an 'AS' level or an 'A' level in a closely related

subject; a vocational diploma or an NVQ in a vocationally specific area. From there, students might go on to university.

Students might start work and take an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship leading to a skilled career or management training, and later to a foundation degree or other higher education course. Or they might take further training that links education to employment - such as a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship.

Local Support Networks

Support networks for teachers and other professionals are available to ensure that schools and teachers have access to help and guidance. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), with the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), is helping to establish over 150 local networks to ensure that schools, colleges, LEAs, Educational Business Links Consortia (EBLCs) and training providers have access to effective implementation strategies and can share examples of good practice. Local networks will provide much more than a forum for discussion. They are intended to facilitate staff development and bring about innovation in curriculum development and delivery.

Contact the LSDA helpline for more information: **020 7297 9000** or visit the LSDA website:

www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Further information

To find out more about the GCSEs in vocational subjects, check out the following websites.

The qualifications and subject criteria, including the common content for the GCSEs in vocational subjects, are on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) website: www.qca.org.uk

Further information is available on the examination awarding bodies' website which can be found at:

AQA:	www.aqa.org.uk
Edexcel:	www.edexcel.org.uk
OCR:	www.ocr.org.uk
WJEC:	www.wjec.co.uk
CCEA:	www.ccea.org.uk

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) website can be found at www.lsda.org.uk, with further information at www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Information about GCSEs in vocational subjects can be found at www.connexions.gov.uk

You may also wish to view the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/qualifications, where we would welcome your comments on this leaflet under "Feedback" on the "Home" page.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

DfES publications

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