



Department for Education Protocol for changes to accountability, curriculum and qualifications

The following statements set out the Department for Education's commitments in response to the 2014 Workload Challenge: to introduce minimum lead in times for significant changes to accountability, the curriculum and qualifications; and to do more to consider the impact on schools when introducing such changes.

1. New Department for Education policies related to accountability, curriculum and qualifications which will have a significant workload impact on schools should be brought in, wherever possible, **at the beginning of the school year**. Examples of changes of this type include major changes to the curriculum or qualifications, or changes to the Ofsted framework or handbook which have an impact on teaching staff.
2. There should be a **lead in time of at least a year** for any accountability, curriculum or qualifications initiative coming from the department which requires schools to make significant changes which will have an impact on staff workload. So, for example, the Department would publish subject content and Ofqual would publish its assessment requirements for any new qualifications at least a year in advance of first teaching (with accredited specifications and additional materials to follow later).
3. Significant changes to qualifications, accountability or the curriculum **should avoid having an impact on pupils in the middle of a course resulting in a qualification** (i.e. pupils should start a course knowing that the content or assessment criteria will not change during the course). Taken in conjunction with 2., this will mean that children in different years might be affected by changes at different times so that their course or key stage is not interrupted. For example, a change to GCSE would be implemented for pupils entering Year 10, but would not affect those who had already started the course (and were entering Year 11).
4. The Department should generally seek to **avoid such changes while pupils are within a Key Stage**, whilst recognising that there may be occasions when this will not be desirable, for example due to the risk of excessive delay or the creation of additional workload.
5. Significant policy changes of this type should take into account the workload impact on different types of school (for example primary, secondary, special, middle schools, academies) and staff within the school (for example the headteacher, phase leaders, business manager, SENCO etc).

6. The Department will not ask Ofsted to make changes to the handbook or framework for inspectors during the school year, unless these are minor changes, such as points of clarification, requested by schools themselves. Changes to the Ofsted handbook or framework for inspectors will be accompanied by clear guidelines (where appropriate) about what will be expected of schools.
7. This protocol may be subject to an override in cases where a change is urgently required, such as where there is clear evidence of abuse in the system which needs addressing, for example on the advice of the exam regulator Ofqual. Reasons for any overrides will be communicated when the change is announced.
8. Policy proposals on significant accountability, curriculum and qualifications changes sent to ministers should set out the workload impact on schools and the lead-in time. If the department protocol is likely to be overridden, this should be clear in the initial proposals sent to ministers.
9. Instances where the override is exercised should be published annually, with reasons why this was the case.

First published March 2015. Reviewed and reissued February 2017.

© Crown copyright 2017

Reference: DFE-00114-2015