



Department  
for Education

# **Post-16 institutions omnibus: June/July 2015 results**

**Research brief**

**December 2015**

**IFF Research**

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## Introduction

Post-16 education is critical to the government's aim of raising productivity and growth. The government has an aim to reform the post-16 landscape, including introducing high quality technical and professional routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes, to allow individuals to gain high level skills valued by employers, and being more responsive to the needs of local employers and economic priorities. The government is also seeking to ensure that post-16 education provides individuals with a full and valuable preparation for adult life.

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of what post-16 institutions are already offering to learners to help meet these goals and explore the key issues that they face.

IFF Research were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to conduct a survey of post-16 institutions. This summary provides an overview of the responses to the set of questions asked in the first wave of the survey conducted in June and July 2015. Alongside the research brief, a complete set of data tables for the survey has been published.

The questions submitted in the survey explored:

- Awareness of the different ways young people can participate in post-16 learning and the national database of post-16 courses.
- Readiness for changes to post-16 qualifications.
- Provision and signposting of traineeships.
- Vocational qualifications – including: vocational qualifications offered, involvement of employers in delivery and whether these are tailored to the local economy.
- Work experience and the introduction of 16-19 study programmes.
- Preparation for 16-19 accountability reforms.
- How institutions support students with English as an additional language (EAL).

The summary findings presented here are based on interviews with a sample of 472 post-16 institutions. Full details of the methodology can be found on page 10-11.

# Key Findings

## Post-16 education and training

Since September 2014, all young people in England have to be in some form of education or training up until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>1</sup> From September 2015, providers of post-16 education and training courses are expected to provide details of their courses to the Department for Education in order to help young people make informed decisions about their post-16 options.<sup>2</sup> Post-16 institutions were therefore asked to rate their level of understanding about the different kinds of education or training a young person can undertake to meet this duty, and if their institution was planning to provide information on their 2016/17 courses to the national database of post-16 courses by September 2015.

The survey found:

- The vast majority of institutions (95%) described their understanding of the different kinds of education and training that a young person can undertake to meet their duty to continue participating as good or very good, with just 1 per cent reporting that their understanding was poor.
- Just over half of institutions (55%) plan to provide information on their 2016/17 courses to DfE, compared with 19 per cent not planning to. However many institutions were unsure if they would be providing this information (27%).
- The institutions most likely to be planning to share the information were schools with sixth forms (67%) and general colleges (57%) – this compares to just under half of special schools (47%).

## Changes to post-16 qualifications

A new condition of funding for post-16 institutions stipulates that from September 2015, students who start a study programme and do not hold an A\*-C grade in GCSE Maths or English Language (or an equivalent qualification) are required to enrol on a GCSE or approved IGCSE English Language and/or Maths qualification.<sup>3</sup> Between September 2015 and September 2017, new A levels are being introduced to institutions across England. These aim to better equip students for degree-level study, with all qualifications

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<sup>1</sup> [Government guidance on school leaving age.](#)

<sup>2</sup> For further information about the announcement see: [A government news article on the announcement](#) and [Government guidance on the national database for providers](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Government guidance on the Maths and English condition of funding for post-16 institutions..](#)

becoming linear.<sup>4</sup> Institutions that offer or plan to offer GCSEs in the future were asked about their readiness for the new funding condition, while institutions that offer A Levels were asked about their preparedness for teaching the new A-Levels.

The survey found:

- 78 per cent of institutions offer or plan to offer GCSEs in the future. Of these nearly all were confident about their readiness for teaching all full time D grade students GCSE English language and GCSE Maths (92% for both), with over three-quarters very confident (76% for GCSE English Language and 78% for GCSE Maths).
- There were a number of statistically significant differences in the confidence levels by institution type. Schools with sixth forms that offered or planned to offer GCSEs were significantly more likely to be confident (English: 97%, Maths: 96%), whilst special schools were noticeably less likely to be (English: 52%, Maths: 59%).
- 77% of institutions taught A Levels. A high proportion of these institutions were confident about teaching these qualifications, with over nine in ten institutions that teach A levels confident about their preparedness for the new qualifications (94%), with two-fifths very confident (43%).

## Traineeships

Traineeships were introduced in August 2013 and are designed to help young people develop the skills needed for employment and become 'work ready'.<sup>5</sup> Respondents were asked whether their institution offered traineeships and whether they signposted traineeships to students.

The survey found:

- Around one in ten institutions (11%) offer traineeships as part of the curriculum, accounting for 36% of the student population. Traineeships were considerably more likely to be offered by general colleges (67%) whilst a notably smaller proportion of special schools and schools with sixth forms offer them (12% and 5% respectively).

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<sup>4</sup> Linear qualifications typically involve assessment only at the end of a course and content which is not divided into self-contained units. Further information on the difference between linear and modular qualifications can be found here: <http://www.cie.org.uk/images/149738-moving-from-modular-to-linear-qualifications.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [The latest Traineeship Framework for Delivery \(for the 2015/2016 academic year\)](#)

- Over two-thirds of institutions signpost traineeships to their students (67%) and these institutions teach almost four-fifths of the student population (78%). The institutions more likely to signpost traineeships to their students were general colleges or schools with sixth forms (84% and 72% respectively).

## Vocational qualifications

Three new qualification categories have been introduced which are designed to better prepare young people for employment or progression to Higher Education: Applied General, Tech Levels and Technical Certificates. In addition, ensuring that vocational qualifications meet the needs of the local economy and involving employers are considered important factors in ensuring students leave education with the skills that employers need.

The survey asked institutions whether they offered vocational qualifications in general and the new qualification categories in particular. Institutions were also asked about their motivations for offering these qualifications and whether, and how, they tailored their vocational offer to the local economy. Finally, they were asked whether, and how, they involved employers in the delivery of these qualifications.

The survey found:

- Around four-fifths of institutions (79%) offer vocational qualifications as part of their post-16 provision, and these institutions account for 89% of the student population. Around a fifth of institutions did not teach vocational qualifications, rising to a quarter among schools with sixth forms (25%).
- Just under one-third of institutions that teach vocational qualifications have included at least one of the new vocational qualifications (Applied General, Tech Levels and Technical Certificates) in their curriculum (30%) and just under half of the student population attend these institutions (48%).
- Applied General qualifications were slightly more likely to be offered (17%) than Tech Levels (15%) and Technical Certificates (13%). However, this order is inverted if the proportion of students these vocational qualifications were offered to is examined; Technical Certificates (34%), Tech Levels (27%) and Applied General (26%). This is largely because of the prevalence of Technical Certificates

(55%) and Tech Levels (39%) at general colleges<sup>6</sup> which are attended by 44 per cent of the student population.

- Most institutions that offer vocational qualifications to post-16 students were motivated by the belief that vocational qualifications would help improve the employability of students or because they thought it was in the best interest of their students (98%). Demand from students was also a common factor (90%) as was demand identified through strategic planning (62%).
- The majority of institutions stated that they tailor their vocational qualification offer to the local economy (60%) and over four-fifths of these have done so by using student destinations data (82%). Over three-quarters that tailor their offer use input from the business community (76%) and a sizeable proportion have utilised information on job vacancies (70%).
- In addition, most institutions that offer vocational qualifications involve employers in the delivery of such courses (70%). This was most commonly done by employers inviting students to undertake work experience or placements with them and mentoring students (94% and 60% of institutions that involve employers, respectively).

## **Work experience and the introduction of 16-19 study programmes**

Providing students with meaningful work experience opportunities is a key element of preparing young people for the transition from education to work. The introduction of study programmes from September 2013 presented a significant change to post-16 education and was intended to better link students to higher education, training or employment.<sup>7</sup> Institutions were asked about how easy or difficult it was to find work experience placements for students and what were the most in demand sectors. Respondents were also asked whether the introduction of 16-19 study programmes had led to any improvements in relation to work experience for students.

The survey found:

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<sup>6</sup> General further education colleges are distinct from sixth form colleges and tend to offer a wider range of courses such as vocational qualifications.

<sup>7</sup> [Guidance on 16-19 study programmes](#)

- The vast majority of institutions find work experience placements on behalf of their students (92%). Of these, almost three-fifths considered it difficult to find placements (57%), with 18 per cent reporting it was *very* difficult.
- General colleges (75%) were more likely than schools with sixth forms (52%) to find it difficult to find work experience placements for students.
- The education, health and public administration sector was by far the most frequently reported sector in demand for work experience placements (58%), followed by business administration and support (38%) and professional, scientific and technical (35%). However, the pattern was slightly different for special schools, where wholesale and retail (64%) and accommodation and food services (51%) were particularly in demand.
- The majority of institutions have observed an improvement in the amount of work-related activity to develop employability skills and prepare for working life (76%) following the introduction of 16-19 study programmes. Furthermore, just under half reported some improvements in the amount of internal work experience offered (47%) and the tailoring of placements to suit the career aspirations of learners (45%)<sup>8</sup> (institutions were asked about each of these in turn). It was less common for institutions to report an improvement to the supply of work experience placements with external employers (41%).
- General colleges were more likely than schools with sixth forms and special schools to report that there had been an improvement in all four of these measures.

## Preparation for accountability reforms

From 2016, a new accountability system will come into effect, expanding on the information that is reported in performance tables and introducing more rigorous minimum standards.<sup>9</sup> Institutions were presented with a list of eight possible changes they may have made to the support they offer students, their curriculum and entry requirements and asked if they had made any of these changes in the last 12 months and, if so, whether this was in preparation for the 16-19 accountability reforms.

The survey found:

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<sup>8</sup> Please note, this question was only asked to the 436 institutions that find work experience placements for their students.

<sup>9</sup> [Guidance on 16-19 accountability measures..](#)



- The vast majority had made at least one of the changes (97%), and almost two-thirds had made at least one of the changes in preparation for the reforms (64%). The most common changes to be made in preparation for the reforms were: increased initial advice and guidance (42%) and increased general support arrangements (31%).

## **Supporting students with English as an additional language (EAL)**

Institutions were asked about the proportion of students which had EAL and what support they provided to these students.

The survey found:

- Almost three-quarters of post-16 institutions had EAL students (73%), rising to 94 per cent among those located in London. EAL students account for 1-10 per cent of the post-16 population at over half of institutions (53%), though almost one in ten institutions (9%) reported their proportion of EAL students was 21-50 per cent.
- Over four-fifths of institutions with EAL students provided some form of learning provision (82%) such as: scaffolding in curriculum subjects (62%), ongoing one-to-one tuition (56%) and intensive catch-up support on an individual basis (51%).

## Methodology

Between June and July 2015, IFF Research conducted interviews with 472 post-16 institutions, most of these (468 or 99%) were undertaken by telephone, although there was also an opportunity for respondents to take part via an online survey if they preferred.

The majority of these interviews were with Heads/Principals or Assistant Heads/Principals (40%) or Directors/Heads or Assistant Directors/Heads of sixth forms (44%).

The questionnaire design stage involved two development phases to ensure the 20 minute questionnaire was relevant, engaging and consistently understood by the different types of institutions:

- In the first phase, six cognitive interviews were conducted by telephone. After running through the survey, post-16 institutions were asked follow-up questions to examine their understanding of the questions and the reasons for their responses.
- Following this, the questionnaire was piloted with 12 institutions. These telephone interviews were structured in the same way as the mainstage interviews and were monitored to further check respondents understood the questions and the flow of the interview.

### Sample and weighting

A sample of 922 institutions was drawn from Edubase which covered all the different types of settings attended by post-16 learners in England.<sup>10</sup>

The sample was stratified to account for small sub-groups (e.g. studio schools and specialist colleges where there are a very small number of institutions) to prevent schools with sixth forms dominating the sample.

Weighting was applied to the results to correct for this over-sampling of small-subgroups, thus ensuring the results are representative of the entire population of post-16 institutions. A secondary weight was also applied to the data to make it representative of the proportion of students by institution type (for instance, general colleges account for a small proportion of institutions but 44% of the student body – see Table 1 below). Data with this secondary weight is reported on throughout this summary where it changes the interpretation of the results.

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<sup>10</sup> Edubase is a register of educational establishments in England and Wales, maintained by the DfE.

**Table 1: Sample drawn and interviews achieved at Wave 1**

<b>Institution type</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>% of student body</b>	<b>Sample drawn</b>	<b>Interviews achieved</b>
General FE colleges <sup>11</sup>	218	44%	98	49
Specialist colleges	21	2%	14	8
Sixth Form colleges	93	12%	47	24
Schools with sixth forms	2,045	35%	639	319
Special schools	552	1%	94	59
Studio Schools	30	<0.5%	15	5
University Technical Colleges	30	<0.5%	15	8
<b>Total</b>			<b>922</b>	<b>472</b>

The sample was not stratified by academy status, although a total of 219 schools with academy status were interviewed, and among schools with sixth forms, two-thirds (66%) were academies.

Throughout this summary relevant statistically significant differences among different subgroups are discussed where the base size is at least 49.

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<sup>11</sup> General further education colleges are distinct from sixth form colleges and tend to offer a wider range of courses such as vocational qualifications.



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