

14-19 curriculum and its assessment

14-19 education has undergone significant change in recent years. We now need overall stability in the 14-19 landscape to permit staff in schools and colleges to develop the best education possible for students.

Education must be equitable; a two-tier system is not acceptable. The 14-19 system must, for all students, offer flexibility and meaningful choice of subjects, qualifications and ways of learning. This is best achieved through cooperation and collaboration between institutions.

ATL believes the current 14-19 system, with its four pathways, lays the foundations for an equitable offer. Staff and students working on diplomas are confident that they offer an engaging and useful curriculum, but the implementation of all the 17 available lines within the diploma pathway is proving difficult, and many students continue to pursue BTEC qualifications. ATL supports the principles underpinning diplomas, as well as Apprenticeships, Foundation Learning, and GCSEs/A Levels. However, the whole curriculum framework must be better integrated. Each pathway will require some significant changes before the system can be truly equitable. But this must not involve radical overhaul of either qualifications or the overall offer to pupils.

What is 14-19 education for?

- 14-19 education should develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to enable young people to be responsible citizens and independent thinkers. Students should be prepared for employment, competent to make choices and learn throughout their lives.
- 19-year-olds should be ready to progress to employment or continue in education, with useful social and learning skills and qualifications that are valuable and understood by both employers and education institutions.
- 14-19 education should be sufficiently engaging to retain young people at risk of leaving education, employment and training.

Requirements of the curriculum

- The 14-19 curriculum must be underpinned by coherent aims and build on key stage 3. Schools, colleges and

policymakers should work towards an integrated and flexible framework of entitlement that is not solely qualifications-led.

- Within the national framework, the taught curriculum should be designed in local partnerships, rooted in local circumstances, have flexibility to respond to local and changing needs, but not be limited by them.
- The 14-19 curriculum must represent the equal value, and application, of knowledge and skills. The flexibility of the 14-19 pathways offers opportunities to link areas of study.

Requirements of assessment

- Assessment should be appropriate to course content, pedagogy and learning. ATL cautions against over-examination as a method of assessing learning.
- The diploma does not lend itself to the 'traditional' assessment of external or controlled, summative, written exams, that dominate. Other assessment methods should be developed.
- ATL urges a redressing of the balance to allow pedagogy to lead assessment, capitalising on the professionalism and judgment of teaching staff.

A multi-dimensional education for all

- Policy and political rhetoric must move away from the false dichotomy of vocational and academic study; young people should be engaged in both. Functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills, which cut across both academic and vocational learning, are also vital. Young people must not be forced into an unchangeable pathway at, or before, they are age-14. The credit-based nature of Foundation Learning simplifies transferral between pathways.
- Inductions and introductions to the pathways should be more structured, extending time limits for changing and demonstrating the types of learning involved, while teaching skills and knowledge that students will be able to use elsewhere in their education.

14-19 curriculum and its assessment (continued)

- Courses and qualifications that do not only start in September benefit those not in education, employment or training, and those wishing to change pathways.
- Providing additional specialised classes could allow pupils in very academic, or very vocational, routes to experience learning on a different route.

Parity of pathways, qualifications and accessibility

- Frequent referral to established brands such as GCSEs and A-levels often undermines qualifications like the diploma. There must be no inferable value differences between the pathways. New or changed qualifications must be properly 'sold' to employers and universities. The 14-19 system will only succeed and be equitable if institutions offer access to all pathways and universities and employers accept all qualifications, rather than imposing their own values to crudely compare different qualifications.
- A points-based system for learning and qualifications could counter the variable esteem of qualifications and difficulties in changing pathways. The Qualifications and Credit Framework can achieve this. Its rollout should be accelerated, extended beyond vocational education, and publicised extensively to professionals, young people, employers, and universities.
- Young people in rural areas cannot always access the full range of the 14-19 curriculum. More limited opportunities, transport infrastructure, personal cost and inflexibility associated with local authority boundaries all pose problems. Government should conduct a rural impact assessment with a view to remedying the urban-rural differential.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

- High quality IAG is vital. Although government has attempted to address provision, IAG has not kept pace with the size and complexity of the 14-19 curriculum.

- Responsibility for IAG should be shared within partnerships of professionals. Education staff should advise only on what they know is up-to-date. A thorough programme of continuing training in IAG skills and in curriculum knowledge should be provided at the earliest opportunity.
- Staff must be able to offer the most appropriate advice to meet the needs of the student rather than the needs of the institution. The highly-charged culture of accountability and institutional competition undermines this principle.

The 14-19 workforce

- Training and development has lagged behind change. The government must ensure education professionals have the confidence and skills to deliver its reform.
- Education staff must develop skills for collaboration. These should be developed in partnership, and local authorities should support joint continuing professional development (CPD) between schools and colleges.
- ATL calls for CPD in: the learning requirements of teaching under 16s (for FE staff); vocational pedagogies; devising appropriate assessment; and using learner voice.

ATL will continue to support a broad and equitable 14-19 framework.

- **For learners, this means genuine choice and the chance to progress.**
- **For education staff, this framework can only be provided through partnerships, and will take time to implement fully.**
- **For government, system stability is paramount.**



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