

DEFINITION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

There is no universally agreed definition of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and questions arise as to whether it refers only to post-compulsory education and whether it encompasses work based training. In recent years, though, vocational education has increasingly come to encompass both vocational qualifications (for example, AVCEs, GNVQs and NVQs), and work-based training.¹ In very broad terms, vocational education and training might be defined as:

The wide range of courses/skills that help students to prepare for entering employment.

In order to elaborate on this definition, it is useful to consider information from the Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme and DENI.

The Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (VQRP)

The VQRP is a UK-wide programme introducing significant changes to the vocational qualifications system,² particularly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The VQRP states that a vocational qualification is within its scope when its primary purpose is:

- to provide learners with knowledge, skills and/or competence directly relevant to work or employment, either within one or more sectors or for specific occupations; and/or
- to provide enhanced labour market opportunities for those currently in work or employment.

For example (this list is not exhaustive), the range of different sub-purposes for vocational qualifications which could be in scope for this programme might include those which are designed to:

- assure a learner's competence in the full range of knowledge and skills in order to give entry to/advancement in a specific set of occupations (e.g. current S/NVQs, technical certificates and some Vocationally Related Qualifications - VRQs);
- provide the learner with some of the underpinning knowledge or understanding associated with a specific set of occupations, but not offer full workplace competence (e.g. some VRQs, where the

¹ http://cep.lse.ac.uk/research/skills/Skills_Publications/McCrone_Morris_2004.pdf

² With the aim of creating a system: based on learner and employer needs; with greater clarity and more flexibility and choice; encouraging a more skilled and productive workforce; allowing individuals to fulfil their potential; and supporting greater social justice and opportunity
<http://dius.gov.uk/vqreform/about/index.html>

relationship with National Occupational Standards is looser, or there is a relationship with a number of sets of NOS);

- offer learning in a subset of skills and knowledge relevant to a particular specialisation within an occupation or set of occupations (e.g. for top-up or to refresh skills, for CPD or extension purposes); and/or
- offer a range of sector-related knowledge, skills and capabilities as a pre-entry qualification for preparation for employability in that sector.³

Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI)

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 (the 2006 Order) makes provision for the introduction of the revised curriculum and the Entitlement Framework.⁴ A key feature of the Entitlement Framework is that, under Article 19 of the 2006 Order, not fewer than one third of the courses to be made available must be 'applied courses' (professional/technical or vocational) and not fewer than one third shall be 'general courses'.⁵ To assist schools in the planning process DENI is required under Article 20 of the 2006 Order to issue:

a) a list of courses appearing to the Department to be wholly or mainly general (academic) courses; and

b) a list of courses appearing to the Department to be wholly or mainly applied (professional/technical or vocational) courses.

As regards the categorisation of courses, DENI has stated that it:

... does not intend to be narrowly prescriptive in categorising courses, and it is acknowledged that some courses could legitimately be placed in either the general or the applied category. Nevertheless it is important that as clear as possible a distinction is made in order to create a better blend of provision than is available currently.

The categorisation of courses will not be determined solely by the method of assessment, but also by focusing on content and the teaching and learning context. The following definitions will be used:

A general course is one in which knowledge, understanding and skills are developed within a subject specific context. [Source: CCEA]

An applied course is one in which subject knowledge, understanding and skill are developed in relation to a work context. [Source: CCEA]

This approach will allow for the categorisation of most courses. However, it is recognised that as qualifications change over time, it may become

³ <http://dius.gov.uk/vqreform/jargon.html#d38>

⁴ DENI Circular Number: 2005/18 Date of Issue: 15 June 2005
http://www.deni.gov.uk/2005_18-entitlement_framework-initial_guidance.pdf

⁵ The composition of the final third will be at schools' discretion, and will reflect the particular educational emphasis of each school.

appropriate to change the classification of a course or to classify a course under both categories.⁶

DENI has made its list of courses available electronically on the www.efaudit.org website and has provided an illustrative list of the details available online at Key Stage 4 and Post-16 in Circular Number: 2007/23 issued 18th December 2007.⁷ A sample from this illustrative list is provided in Annex 1 to this briefing note.

June 2008

⁶ DENI "Entitlement Framework – Initial Guidance"
Circular Number: 2005/18 Date of Issue: 15 June 2005
http://www.deni.gov.uk/2005_18-entitlement_framework-initial_guidance.pdf

⁷ http://www.deni.gov.uk/22-microsoft_word_-_14_-_19_team_approval_of_qualifications_circular_2007_23.pdf

Annex 1

Selection of Courses by Area of Learning – Key Stage 4

Area of Learning	Qualification Type	Subject	General or Applied
Language and Literacy	GCSE	English	G
		English Language	G
		English Literature	G
		Greek	G
		Irish (in Irish speaking schools only)	G
		Journalism	A
		Latin	G
		Media Studies	G
		BTEC First Diploma in Media (Level 2)	A
		BTEC First Certificate in Media (Level 2)	A
		Certificate in Business Language Competence (Level 1 and 2)	A
	Key Skills	Key Skills in Communication Level 1 and 2	A
Mathematics and Numeracy	GCSE	Accounting/Finance	A
		Additional Mathematics	G
		Financial Services	A
		Mathematics	G
		Statistics	G
	Key Skills	Key Skills in Application of Number Level 1 and 2	A
Modern Languages	GCSE	Arabic	G
		Chinese	G
		French	G
		German	G
		Irish	G
		Italian	G
The Arts	GCSE	Applied Art and Design	A
		Art and Design	G
		Drama	G

DEFINITION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

RESEARCH AND LIBRARY
SERVICES

		Expressive Arts Fine Art Music Performing Arts Applied Media (Double Award)	G G G A A
	VRQ	BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Art and Design (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Graphic Design (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Photography (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Media (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Music (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Music Technology (Level 2) BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Performing Arts (Level 2)	A A A A A A A
Environment and Society	GCSE	Applied Business Archaeology Business Studies Business and Communication Systems Catering Classical Civilization Economics Environmental Science General Studies Geography	A A A A A G G G G G