Progression Pathways

January 2016

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Progression Pathways project - 2015

Foreword

The qualification landscape for university admissions is currently undergoing significant change. Not only are qualifications themselves undergoing significant reforms, but there has been a shift in the types of qualifications with which many young people are applying to university. The UCAS Analysis Note (June 2015) shows that just 63 per cent of 18 year old applicants for higher education were applying with three A levels; 75 per cent hold at least one A level.

This leaves a very significant minority applying with newer and less traditional qualifications or through less straightforward routes, and it has become clear to UCAS that the opportunities and challenges of this change are not yet well understood by learners, parents, teachers or providers. Some universities have developed specific strategies to manage applicants who progress in a less traditional way and have identified key factors that support successful transition into HE. This report explores good practice and aims to shine a light on the sometimes complex and poorly understood 'secret garden' of non-traditional pathways into higher education.

We have identified four main qualification pathways which are now an integral part of the pre-HE curriculum offer and have defined these as academic, applied general, technical and occupational. Within these pathways, qualifications are changing and evolving to meet the needs of a wide variety of learners and to support the full implementation of the raising of the participation age to 18.

The routes by which young people progress to university have also become more diverse. The expansion of apprenticeships, including higher and degree apprenticeships, will mean more young people aspiring to higher education coming through this route. Foundation degrees are a valid way for many people to 'test the water', while the HNC/HND route is still available in many subject areas, and is a well-trodden route in Scotland. The foundation year or year zero is an effective way to ease students into higher education, and 256 are now listed on the UCAS website.

The aim of the UCAS Progression Pathways project was to look across the whole landscape and provide information and advice for both learners and universities on the issues they should respectively consider to secure appropriate, fair and transparent progression to higher education for those holding less traditional qualifications. While all pathways can lead to university, an apprenticeship or

employment, each has its own strengths and challenges in helping young people fulfil their aspirations.

The objective was to raise awareness of the differences between the routes and pathways, and the implications of choosing each. It has not been possible in this project to explore some of the more intriguing areas like Access to HE courses, apprenticeships or foundation years in depth; these may be the focus of future projects.

The key outputs of the project are a range of information and advice tools, now available at www.ucas.com. These include video case studies directed at both admissions and academic staff in universities. For learners, we have produced video case studies, an animation and an interactive online tool. We hope the materials include information that will also be helpful to IAG advisers and teachers in schools and colleges.

We are conscious that the next few years will be challenging ones for higher education admissions. Until 2017, universities and colleges will still be accepting students with the current qualifications. While a small number of students with revised or new qualifications will apply in 2017, the main cohort applying with reformed qualifications will enter higher education until 2018.

In this project, we have therefore focused on current qualifications, whilst indicating what the new versions will look like. We highlight the challenges and perspectives that the learners, teachers, universities and awarding bodies that participated in the project shared with us to help inform your thinking and planning, and ours, for a new generation of learners progressing to higher education and employment from 2018 onwards.

Mary Curnock Cook, Chief Executive, UCAS

Executive summary

This report is a product of the Progression Pathways project carried out by UCAS during the latter part of 2015. The aim was to develop a range of information and advice products, both for students and higher education providers (HEPs), to support the changes to the qualification landscape for 16-19 years olds and to help identify appropriate progression pathways. The report reflects our observations from the various stages of the project and identifies some challenges and issues which we hope will generate discussion across the sector. It also gives some illustrations and examples of how these challenges can be effectively met.

First of all we identified a number of key challenges for students when choosing Level 3 qualifications. This choice is strongly affected by their level of awareness and understanding of how their choice of pathway will be viewed by potential employers or higher education providers.

The key challenges include the following.

- The qualification landscape is complex and not well understood by HEPs, employers, learners, parents and teachers.
- The qualification landscape is dynamic and significant changes will be introduced from 2016. These changes include:
  - changes to A levels
  - the introduction of Tech Levels
  - ensuring all advanced qualifications are rigorous, with robust assessment
  - the expansion of apprenticeships
- More students are taking mixed qualification pathways.
- The vocational route is different in Scotland.
- More students are going to university with qualifications other than A levels.

Second, this increase in the number and proportion of learners taking Level 3 qualifications other than A level poses progression challenges for them, as well as for receiving higher education providers and potential employers. The challenges we have explored are:

- the disconnect between the demands of HEPs and the realistic ability of providers delivering Level 3 Applied General and technical qualifications to deliver them
- the effective selection of appropriate HE courses by applicants

- support strategies; some HEPs have initiated transition programmes for a range of students but more will be needed as the number of students with less traditional qualifications or from less traditional routes increases

The report and its associated products also propose some actions for consideration amongst individuals and organisations with responsibilities for young people progressing at age 18 to higher education, apprenticeship or employment. This includes HEPs, but also teachers and advisers in the school and college sectors.

These actions include:

- ensuring an understanding of the difference between the various qualification pathways and the implications for progression
- building an understanding of how the qualifications are changing
- setting clear entry requirements to secure the right match between student and course
- building partnerships with key feeder schools and colleges to develop a shared understanding of the qualification pathways
- considering the transitional support students with less traditional qualifications might need
- engaging both admissions and academic staff with these issues

We present this as a discussion paper which we hope will raise awareness of the issues and generate feedback and engagement across the school, college and HE sectors.

Understanding of the report will be enhanced by engagement with the other products which form the Progression Pathways project.

Description of project

The project set out to develop intelligence to form the basis of content for ucas.com, on progression pathways for learners and higher education providers who may be less familiar with new or less traditional routes into higher education.

The methodology for the project included desk research and literature reviews. However, we wanted particularly to ensure a sound understanding of the issues as they play out in practice for learners, parents, pre-HE providers, IAG advisers, HE

admissions staff and HE academic tutors. To that end the research phase was characterised by visits to and extensive discussions with:

- universities – admissions staff and academic tutors
- colleges - sixth form colleges, FE colleges, FE colleges with HE provision, colleges supporting apprenticeships
- awarding bodies
- professional associations
- Department for Education in England

We engaged with colleagues in Scotland and have referred to Scottish issues in the report. However, since the landscape is different there, it has not been possible to cover the Scottish issues in depth in this stage of the work.

We are very grateful to all the organisations, providers and individuals who helped us with this research. They are listed separately at Appendix 2.

The first developed outcome of the project was the design of a high level 'learning and progression architecture' to explain:

- the different progression opportunities available throughout a learner's journey
- the interactions and connections between the different routes so that learners understand they can navigate across different routes at different stages

This learning and progression architecture has informed four key products now available on ucas.com**.**

- Five case studies aimed at university staff involved in admissions – both admissions and academic staff involved in the recruitment and selection of students. They include testimonials from learners, teachers, IAG advisers and HE staff explaining the curriculum and assessment approaches and exemplifying high level delivery and learning outcomes. The purpose of these case studies is to further understanding of newer and less traditional qualifications and routes into HE, to support the recruitment and retention of students who take them.
- Three case studies aimed at learners which cover the different progression routes and exemplify the issues for them to consider, both

when choosing a Level 3 route and when planning for progression to HE, apprenticeship or employment. These also include testimonials from learners, teachers, IAG advisers and HE staff, illustrating the issues and what they can do to address them. The purpose of these case studies is to show learners there are a range of options and how to identify the one best suited to them.

- An animation to help learners choosing qualifications at age 16 to navigate their way through the Level 3 options available to them.
- An interactive online tool to help learners choosing qualifications at age 16 to understand the Level 3 option that might be most appropriate for them.

Section 1: Key challenges in respect of the Level 3 qualification landscape

Challenge 1:1 – Understanding the learning

The aim of the learning architecture was to rationalise and improve understanding of the Level 3 qualification offer. It is based on the following premises.

The essential element in any qualification choice is the learning it provides. It is our view that all qualifications are made up of four different elements, all of which young people need to acquire to succeed in work and adult life. What appears to distinguish qualifications is the amount of emphasis placed on the different elements and the amount of time each is given. We have identified the elements as:

- transferable skills
- transferable knowledge
- specific skills
- specific knowledge

When making choices about what to study, the focus should be on the learning. Learners should be encouraged to construct programmes that give them the best blend of the four elements to meet their specific needs at that particular point in their learning journey. This can be done within qualifications or by choosing mixed programmes of different qualifications.

Skills and knowledge

Transferable skills: These help learners to be adaptable and flexible and are essential to all parts of life, learning and work. They have a significant impact on their ability to make a confident contribution both in social and working life and to cope with change.

There are many transferable skills, but they can be summed up as those which help learners to:

- do things independently
- know how to find things out
- think creatively
- sort out problems
- organise and manage their own work
- get on with other people and make a good contribution in a team
- show leadership

Transferable knowledge: Knowledge describes facts, information and understanding. Transferable knowledge helps learners to be flexible and adaptable and can be used in many aspects of life, learning and work. Transferable knowledge and understanding are gained in all kinds of learning but most where the learning is practical, work-related and applied to a real-life context.

Transferable knowledge takes many forms but it is best summed up as knowledge and understanding of:

- good communication by speaking, listening and writing
- information technology
- report and essay writing
- preparation and delivery of presentations
- research and referencing
- data recording
- analysis and interpretation

Specific knowledge: Knowledge describes facts, information and understanding. It is essential to the understanding and enjoyment of language and literature, mathematics and science, history and geography, art and music, technology and engineering – the things which shape the world in which we live. Knowledge underpins all learning and is constantly changing as inventions occur, the

environment evolves and nations develop. Specific knowledge is most strongly developed in academic subjects.

Specific skills: These are needed to do a particular job or work in a particular industry. These skills are essential in many jobs and careers where employers set out the actual skills needed to do a job and cannot employ those who don't have them. These skills often build on each other, so a learner needs to acquire one set of skills before moving on to the next level. They are recognised by trade and professional bodies. They may provide a licence to practise or exempt learners from having to take a professional exam after they've started a job.

Figure 1: the relationship between learning and qualifications

Challenge 1.2 – Understanding the complexities and changes in the qualification landscape

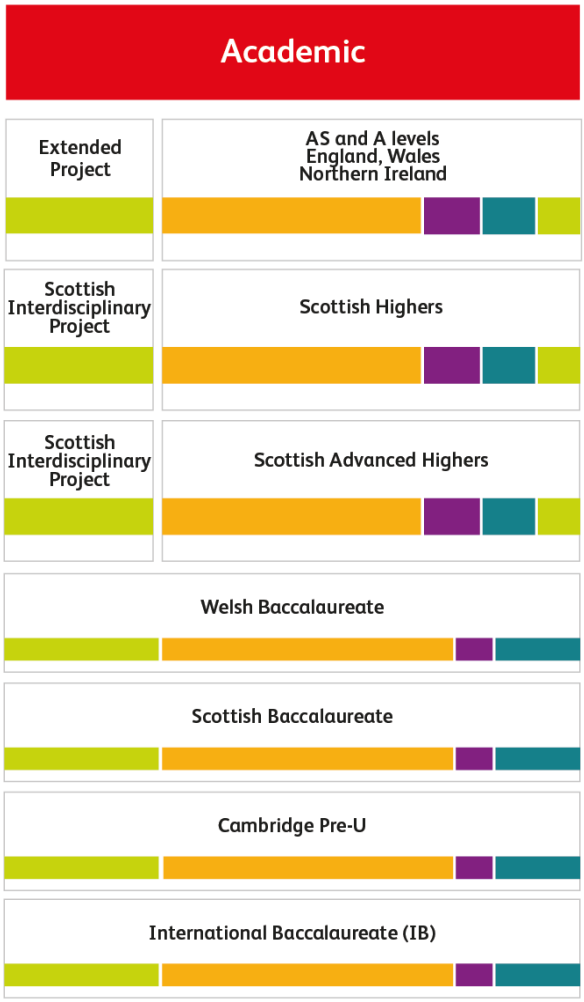
Academic pathway

The traditional route for university entrance is the academic route, generally comprising three A levels. This is not expected to change. However, the A level qualification is changing, with the decoupling of the AS and the introduction of a linear structure. In addition, A levels are not the only offer available within the academic route which has become more complex in recent years.

The academic route is most easily defined as knowledge-based. This is only partly true. There has been a growing thrust to increase the element of skills development for students taking academic qualifications. This has been done in three ways.

- The introduction of the Extended Project Qualification and the Scottish Interdisciplinary Project, taken as skills-based qualifications alongside A levels or Scottish Highers.
- The growing prominence of composite qualifications, e.g. the International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Pre-U, Scottish and Welsh Baccalaureates, which include separate skills-based components. However, the overall entries remain very small in comparison with A levels.
- Individual schools and colleges or consortia creating their own wrap-around awards that add dimensions like community service, leadership skills, or work experience to traditional A level programmes.

Figure 2: the academic pathway



Schools and colleges are currently considering their curriculum and qualifications offer in light of the changes to A level. UCAS conducted surveys of schools in January and October of 2015 to try to find out how they are responding to the de-coupling of the AS. Of the 305 responses in October 2015, 26 per cent indicated that the range of qualifications they offer has changed as a result of qualification reform and that fewer students will take A level qualifications in favour of other qualifications. 65 per cent said that they would be revisiting the issue for the next academic year. The following quotations give an indication of the direction of travel.

- We offer more Level 3 vocational courses now instead of A levels.
- We have introduced sport BTEC but will also need to change some of our A levels to BTECs if they are not being reformed, for example, Health and Social Care.
- Fewer A levels will be offered.
- We have dropped PE A level.
- No longer able to offer applied A levels; therefore will be offering BTEC from September 2016.

Applied General pathway

Applied General qualifications, the most popular and high profile of which has been the Pearson BTEC, have been around for a long time. They provide learning in a vocational area rather than for a single occupation, for example applied science, business or sport, and enable learners to develop transferable knowledge and skills. Initially these qualifications were not considered a definitive route into university. In recent years, however, that has changed, due in part to the policy of raising the participation age for education and training to 18.

Applied General qualifications as a route into HE are recognised in the DfE requirement that from 2016 all Applied General qualifications must have the written support of at least three higher education providers as fulfilling requirements for a range of HE courses, either in their own right or alongside other Level 3 qualifications.

BTECs are not the only qualifications operating in this space, though they are the most popular and well-established option. Cambridge Technicals were introduced in 2012 by OCR to replace OCR Nationals. Since they are offered in fewer subjects and student numbers are much smaller than for BTECs, they are much less well known. As a result students are finding that they are not accepted or even recognised by some universities. This has a demoralising effect on students who have taken the qualification in good faith because it was offered by their school or college.

An important aspect of all these qualifications is that they differ in curriculum size. This is not well understood by learners themselves, their parents and indeed by universities.

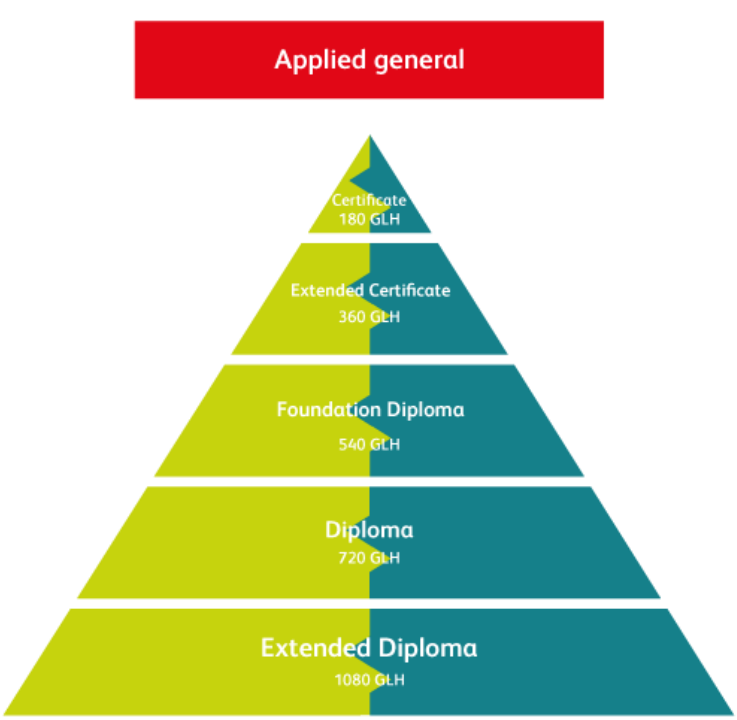
There are five sizes of Applied General qualifications. They are described below both in terms of guided learning hours and in comparison to the curriculum size of academic qualifications.

- Certificate – 180 GLH – AS size
- Extended certificate – 360 GLH – A level size
- Foundation Diploma – 540 GLH – 1.5 A level size
- Diploma – 720 GLH – 2 A level size
- Extended Diploma – 1080 GLH – 3 A level size

Qualifications of different curriculum sizes create a flexibility for students so they can choose to study full or part-time, or take a BTEC alongside A levels or other qualifications. However, it can also lead to a lack of clarity on the part of universities, and confusion for students as to exact entry requirements. If a university says it accepts a BTEC, does it mean it will accept the Extended Diploma as the applicant's only qualification, or only if one or two A levels are offered alongside (a smaller) BTEC qualification?

An added complexity is that they comprise mandatory and optional units. This raises a lot of issues which are detailed later in the report.

Figure 3: the Applied General pathway



The number of students applying for university with these qualifications is more likely to increase than decrease. Indication from the [1]UCAS surveys of schools is that with the change to linear A levels, the withdrawal of applied A levels and the constraints of funding, more schools and colleges may offer qualifications other than A levels to a wider cohort of students.

A student took two A levels alongside a BTEC Extended Diploma to meet the published entry requirements of a high-tariff university. This meant her programme was the size of five A levels. She still didn't get an offer from them.

[1] UCAS A level survey Nov 2105 update

Technical pathway

Tech Levels are designed for students who have a clear idea about the occupation they wish to pursue. They are vocational and can equip students with the specialist knowledge they need for a specific occupation, such as engineering, computing or hospitality. They can also support progression to HE. The [2]DfE describes them as *rigorous advanced technical qualifications on a par with A levels.*

More awarding bodies operate in this space than in the Applied General route. The Pearson BTEC brand – and possibly others – will appear in both the Applied General and the Tech Level route. This is not signaled in the qualification titles, so it will be important for universities to understand the difference. In addition to Pearson BTECs, Tech Level qualifications have also been developed by OCR, AQA, City and Guilds, WJEC and a range of specialist awarding bodies. [3]*They cover vocational areas where employers employ people with specific Level 3 qualifications or where a Level 3 qualification is needed before students can progress to a related higher education course. Tech Levels require the written support of trade or professional bodies, or at least five employers. Many higher education providers have also pledged their support.*

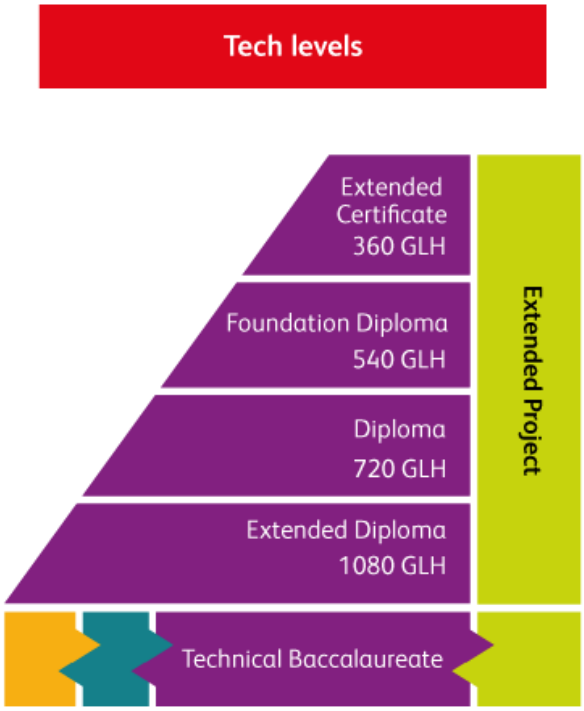
Like Applied General qualifications, Tech Levels are of different curriculum sizes. However, there are only four sizes of Tech Levels as indicated below.

- Extended Certificate – 360 GLH – 1 A level size
- Foundation Diploma – 540 GHL – 1.5 A level size
- Diploma – 720 GLH – 2 A level size
- Extended Diploma – 1080 GLH – 3 A level size

Tech levels also comprise mandatory and optional units. Curriculum planners have suggested that Tech Levels may become a more clearly defined route than Applied Generals which often form a part of an academic / applied general mix.

[2] 2017 16 to 19 performance tables; qualifications in the Tech Level category (Feb 2015)
[3] 2017 16-19 performance tables: qualifications in the Tech Level category (Feb 2015)

Figure 4: the Tech Level pathway



Ensuring that Level 3 Applied General and Tech Level qualifications are rigorous

The regulations governing all Applied General and Tech Level qualifications have been gradually changing over the last few years and these changes will become mandatory for inclusion in performance measures from 2016. The intention is to make them as rigorous as other advanced qualifications, like A levels. The key changes include the following.

- The old qualifications were accredited to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The new qualifications are accredited by Ofqual to the

new Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and by Qualifications Wales to the Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFC), as A levels are.

- The introduction of external assessment – a minimum of 40 % for an Applied General and a minimum of 30% for a Tech Level. This will be set and marked by the awarding body but may be task-based.
- The introduction of synoptic assessment (there was no synoptic assessment allowed in the old qualifications, although students did apply knowledge, skills and understanding developed to later units).
- New rules for internal assessment (these are already in place for BTECs). There is now only one opportunity to submit each assignment. They cannot be resubmitted.
- A larger core (a minimum of 60% for Applied General and 40% for Tech Level) and fewer optional units.
- A greater emphasis on mathematics and English: this involves units moving to the core. This is not a requirement but has been adopted for BTECs.

Teachers are positive about the new assessment arrangements. They say that it is allowing them to concentrate on the learning. They don't force the teachers to teach to the assessment. 'I can teach again'. However, teachers are reassured that they still allow for a range of different and innovative types of assessment to reflect the applied nature of the learning.

The first students to have taken the fully reformed Applied General and Tech Level qualifications will be applying to university in 2018. In light of the changes there is an expectation that the grade profile may shift. Universities may want to consider this when setting their entry requirements for the 2018 admissions cycle. Pearson is undertaking modelling to estimate the impact.

Occupational pathway

The occupational pathway, known as the professional pathway in parts of the UK, particularly Northern Ireland, represents the most direct route into employment. The best known qualifications in this route are NVQs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and SVQs in Scotland, though there are many other occupational qualifications, e.g. Technical Certificates. They are designed to assess a person's competence to do a particular job and can lead to a licence to practise.

NVQs are generally only available to people in employment, on an apprenticeship or undertaking voluntary work, though the studying is usually done in college. The

pattern of qualifications for those in work or apprenticeships may change with the introduction of Tech Levels.

Apprenticeship route

Apprenticeships are likely to become an increasingly significant 16-19 route, due to the drive to create 3 million apprenticeships in England during the life of this Parliament. This expansion is not just numerical but also into different sectors and companies. Some of these, like the financial or government sectors are not traditionally associated with apprenticeships. Many apprenticeships, e.g. those in engineering, are available at the UK's most prestigious companies.

There is complexity in the apprenticeship framework which operates at three levels and can meet the needs of students of different abilities and at different stages of their learning journey.

The National Apprenticeship Service describes the three levels of apprenticeship and their relationship to traditional qualifications as follows:

- Intermediate – comparable to five good GCSEs
- Advanced – comparable to two A levels
- Higher/degree – Level 4 and beyond

Apprenticeships differ throughout the UK and assessment can be through occupational standards alone. Where qualifications are taken, many will be occupational qualifications, such as NVQs. However, many apprentices do follow qualifications such as BTEC, often alongside full-time students in colleges. This is likely to increase with the introduction of Tech Levels, since they are designed to equip students with the specialist skills and knowledge needed for a specific occupation.

Thus an apprenticeship is a valid HE route in its own right through a higher/degree apprenticeship or a progression route through an apprenticeship to study at a university. 34 per cent of apprentices now progress to Levels 4 and 5 and it is a challenge to create a coherent system across colleges and universities. Where the apprenticeship leads directly to a degree there is built-in bridging; an apprentice who progresses to a university can find the transition challenging. For some this can be eased by progressing to a foundation degree.

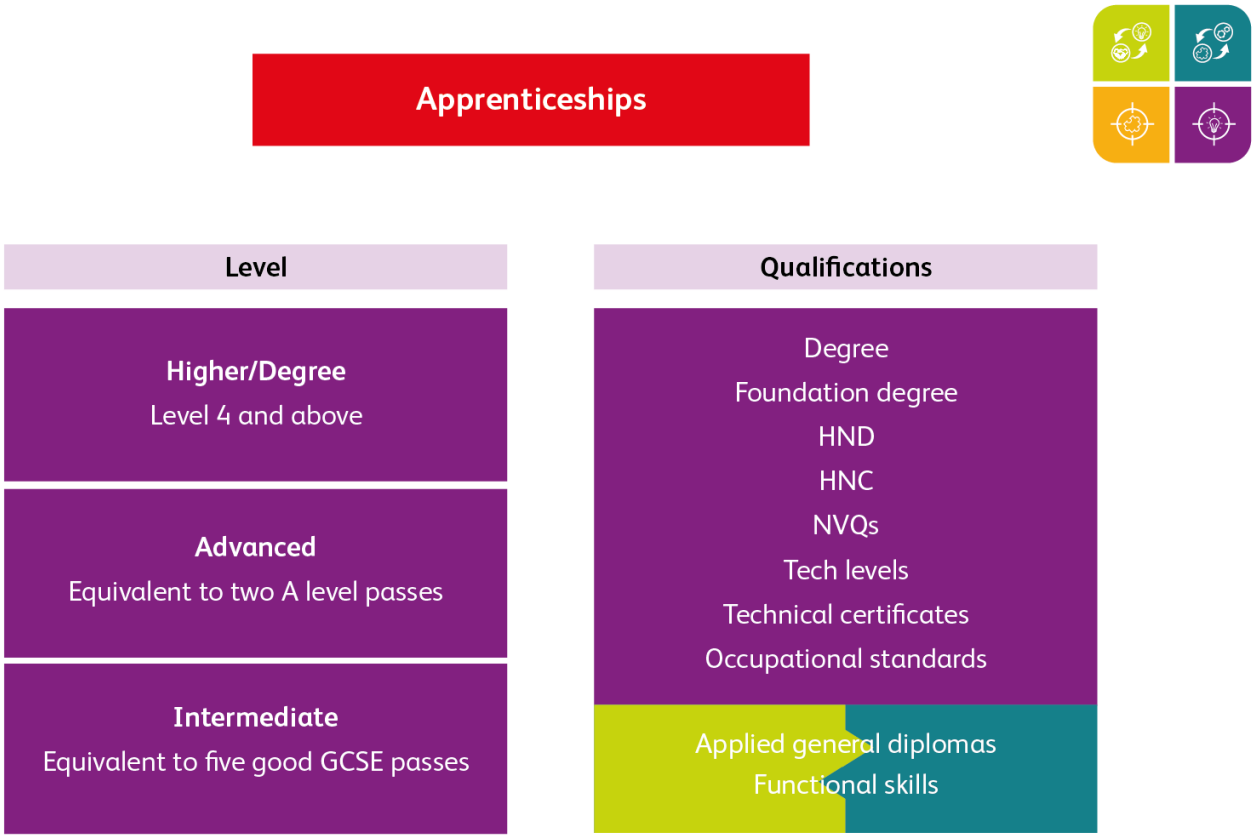
Case study

Charlotte Brough is currently studying for a BEng in Mechanical Engineering at Furness College. She won an IMechE Whitworth Scholarship in 2014 and was one of just 14 top engineering students in the UK to receive the scholarship. She previously studied at the college for an apprenticeship with BAE Systems, during which she completed an HNC in Mechanical Engineering. Furness College has one of the largest apprenticeship programmes in the country.

Charlotte chose this degree course because the content covered the mechanical engineering modules she knew she needed to progress at BAE Systems. She has already been promoted from a designer to a mechanical engineer and is looking to achieve chartered engineer status in the near future. For this she will need a masters' degree.

Furness College: University Education Course Guide

Figure 5: the apprenticeship route



Challenge 1.3 – More students are taking mixed pathways

The four pathways – academic, applied general, technical, and occupational – do not operate independently of each other. Many students follow a learning programme which includes qualifications from more than one pathway and it is not impossible, though somewhat unlikely, that a student could choose qualifications from three pathways.

The Government's new performance measure for England, the Technical Baccalaureate, encourages such an approach by including:

- A Tech Level qualification (technical)
- the Extended Project Qualification (transferable knowledge and skills)
- a Level 3 mathematics qualification, e.g. an AS or the new Core Mathematics qualification in England (academic)

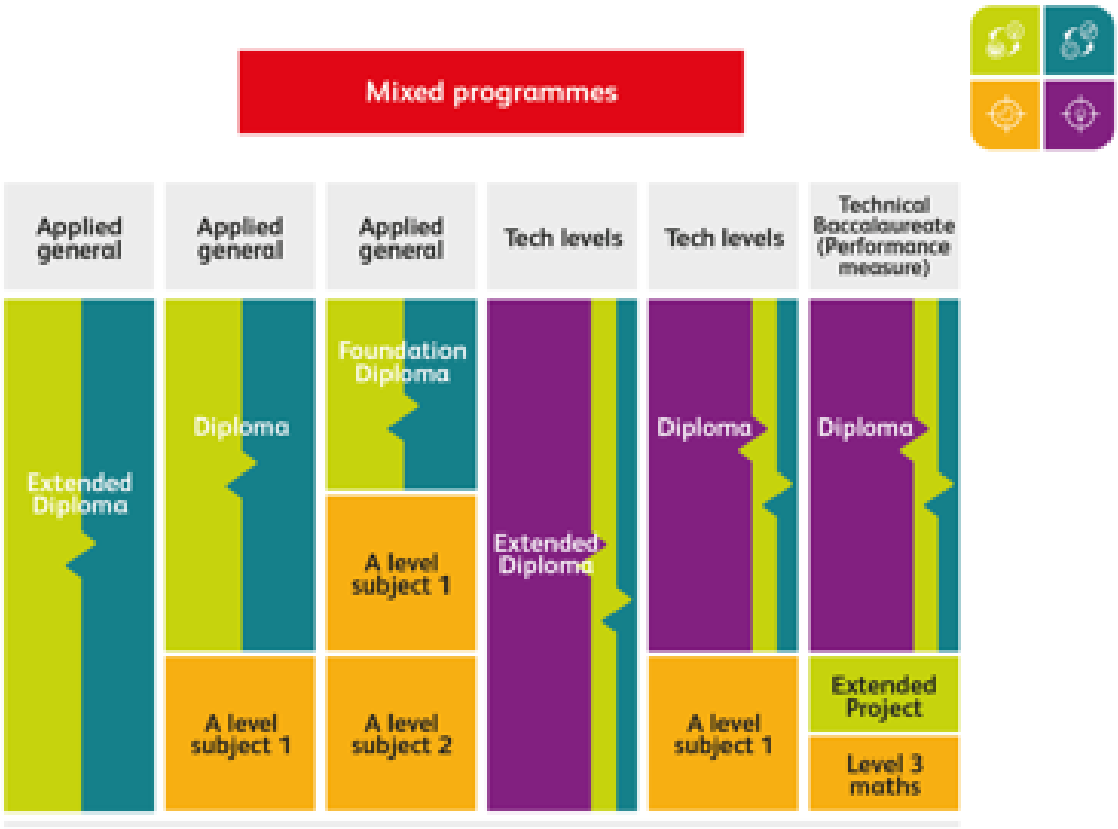
Since this is a new performance measure for England, we cannot yet tell how much it will drive behaviour or the extent to which it will influence student programmes.

Learning programmes comprising a mixture of Applied General qualifications (e.g. BTECs) and academic qualifications (e.g. A levels, IB components) are well established. They meet the needs of many students and are required by many universities and courses. UCAS analysis shows that while the number of 16-18 year old students taking mixed courses remains smaller than those on a specific route, the numbers show larger proportional increases. These applicants have almost doubled in number since 2011, with nearly half the increase in 2015 (23 per cent 2,150 applicants).

These are considered to be the reasons for the increase in numbers taking mixed programmes.

- Some university courses require students to demonstrate a high level of achievement and understanding of a particular subject when they start their degree. If they are not convinced the BTEC can provide this, the university may ask for a relevant A level – often mathematics or a science subject for degree courses such as engineering.
- Alternatively, universities or courses which use mainly traditional exam assessment might have concerns about students who have been used to mainly coursework assessment. An additional A level would demonstrate a student's ability to cope with exam-based assessment.

Figure 6: Examples of mixed programmes at Level 3



Challenge 1.4 – The vocational route is different in Scotland

In Scotland the main route to university is through Scottish Highers. Some students will leave school and go to college where they will study for National Certificates or National Progression Awards. These qualifications are ungraded and are not intended to lead directly to university. However, a large number of students with these qualifications will progress to study for an HNC or HND. 25-30 per cent of students in some Scottish universities have progressed with these qualifications and the Scottish Government is currently funding additional places.

This percentage is not evenly reflected across all universities. Where it is a popular route, there are agreements in place between colleges and universities – an arrangement which has been described as a footbridge. There is a clear distinction between schools and colleges and their respective curriculum and qualifications offer which facilitates such agreements, which have been in place now for five to six years.

An HNC takes one year to complete and is the equivalent of first year study at university. The HND takes two years and is the equivalent of the first two years of university. These qualifications are also available in other parts of the UK, where there is also the alternative of the foundation degree.

However, students who take an HNC or HND in Scotland are known as Associate Students and can be guaranteed a place at university to study for a full degree. Many students do this. However, universities may insist that students with HNCs start in the first year, the second year for those with an HND.

'This is a valid and well-trodden route. Students are not defined by their qualifications but where they're starting from.'

Anne Marie Docherty was a 37 year old single parent with no qualifications. Unable to find a job, she decided that going to college would improve her chances of gaining future employment. She chose technology and began her college course with a National Diploma (ND). Once she started she was bitten by the learning bug and enjoyed it so much she continued to an HNC, then an HND in software development. While doing her HND, it was suggested that she progress to a degree course. Her first thought was 'What, me at university?' and admitted to being both excited and terrified at the same time. She was able to use her HND to gain entry into the third year at Glasgow Caledonian University studying information systems development. She admits to taking some time to adjust to the different learning and teaching styles and the idea of independent learning but did adjust and achieved her degree and 'much more' from attending university.

While this route can work effectively for Scottish students wanting to progress to Scottish universities, the issue of cross-border progression is worth pursuing. In our study, a number of students studying BTEC or similar qualifications expressed interest in applying to a Scottish university and were disappointed that their qualifications were not generally recognised there.

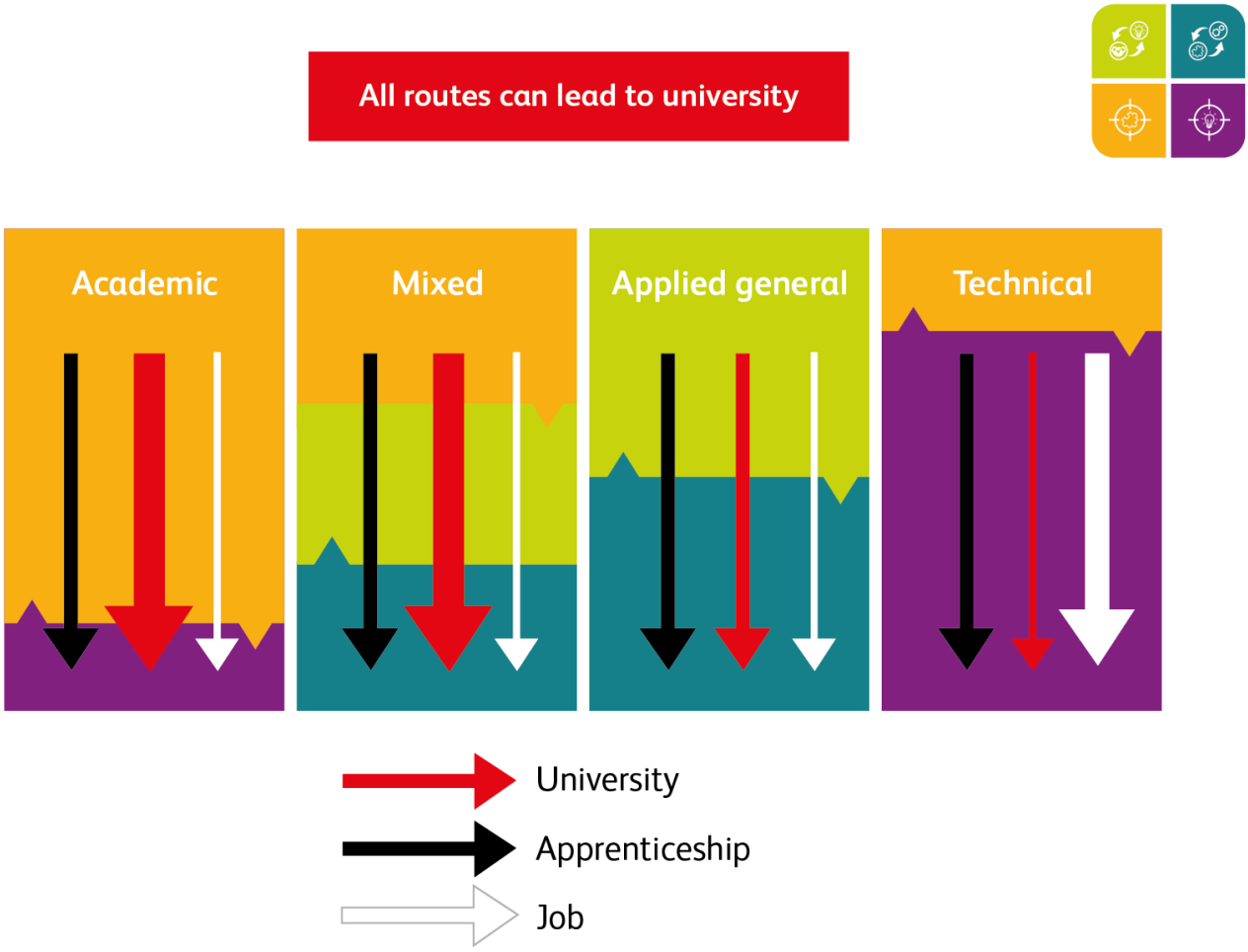
Challenge 1.5 – More students are going to university with qualifications other than A levels

Students who are successful at Level 3 have the opportunity to progress to university, an apprenticeship or a job, at this stage of their learning journey, whatever route they have followed. However, the likelihood of them progressing to each destination is affected by the Level 3 pathway they have chosen.

- The likelihood of them going to university is greatest if they have taken an academic route. There is less likelihood of them moving to an apprenticeship or to employment.
- If they have taken an Applied General route, the likelihood of going to university or an apprenticeship is about equal. They may be able to progress direct to employment, but their Applied General qualification will not have qualified them for a particular job role. Some universities or particular courses might not accept them.
- If they have taken a Tech Level qualification they will be prepared for a particular job role. [4]*In some cases a Tech Level qualification is a licence to practise and can exempt someone holding the qualification from a professional exam.* However, some employers may not think their skills are sufficiently specialised and will want them to serve an apprenticeship. [5]They will be able to progress to university *where a Level 3 qualification is needed for progression to a related degree course.*

[4] 2017 16-19 performance tables: qualifications in the Tech Level category (Feb 2015)
[5] 2017 16-19 performance tables: qualifications in the Tech Level category (Feb 2015)

Figure 7: a high-level progression architecture



UCAS regularly publishes analysis notes, which take an in-depth look at specific HE admissions topics. In June 2015, UCAS published an analysis note exploring the changes in the main groups of qualifications that UK 18 year old HE applicants are studying.[6] This revealed that a growing number of UK 18 year olds who apply to undergraduate higher education courses through UCAS, apply while pursuing BTEC qualifications.

In 2015, there were 42,130 18 year old students applying with BTECs, with three-quarter of those applying with BTECs only. The number of 18 year old applicants with

[6] https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/analysis_note_2015_04_0.pdf

BTECs has been increasing in recent cycles, by 6,300 (18 per cent proportionately) from 2014 and by 13,970 (50 per cent proportionately) since 2011.

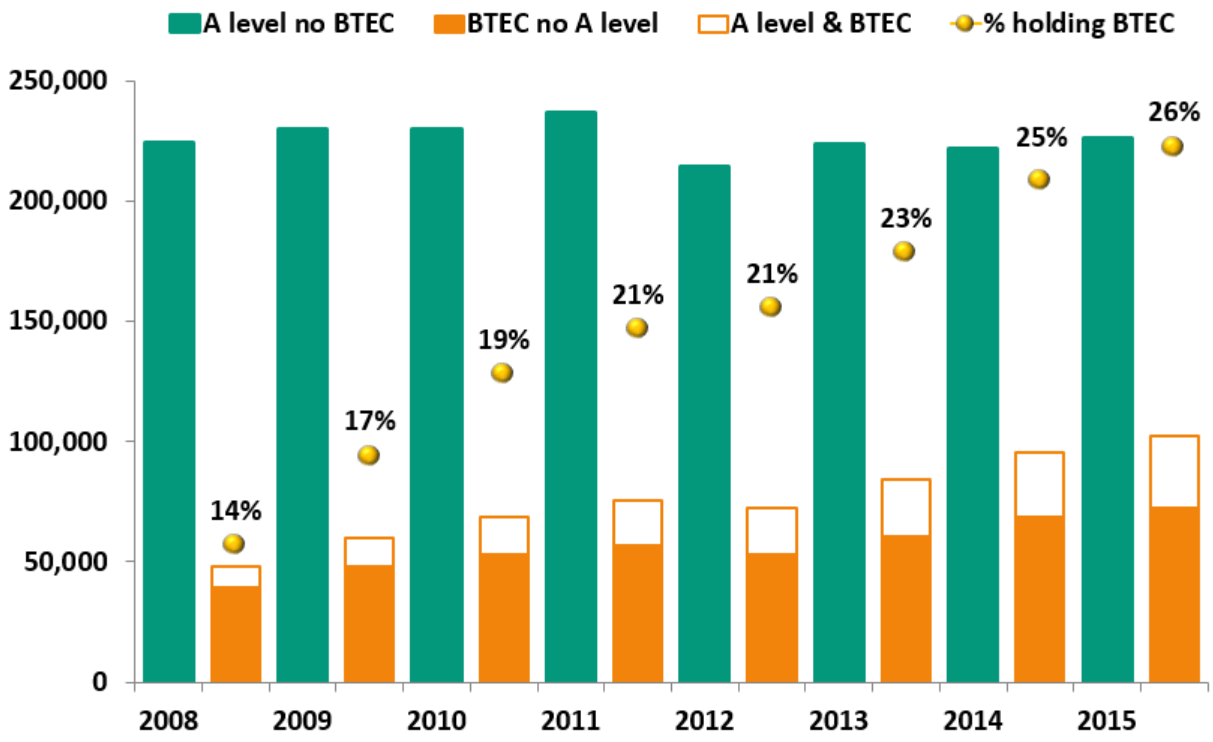
In 2015, applicants studying for BTECs, either on their own or in combination with A levels, accounted for 15 per cent of all 18 years old applicants, up from 11 per cent in 2011. Most of these applicants are studying only for BTEC qualification. This group has increased in number by 37 per cent (8,300 applicants) since 2011, with nearly half of the increase in 2015 (16 per cent, 4,150 applicants).

The chart below shows the statistics for all applicants.

Figure 8: statistics for progression to HE with A levels, BTECs and mixed courses

Accepts holding A levels & BTECs: All HEPs

English accepted applicants of all ages: 2008 - 2015



It is not difficult to find teachers or students to speak confidently about the strengths students with applied or technical qualifications have, and the value they bring to university courses. They are good for a whole range of students who want to shift from a more academic style of learning after GCSEs to more practical learning and develop skills in a vocational area. They may prove attractive to early cohorts of young people required to remain in education or training until the age of 18.

The strengths can be summed up as follows.

Development of useful and transferable skills

- The practical hands-on nature of the learning.
- Student confidence and resilience.
- Thinking and learning skills.
- Team work.
- Development of social skills.

Development of valuable study skills

- Experience of research and coursework.
- Ability to meet deadlines and general time management.
- Preparation and delivery of presentations.
- Report writing.
- Continuous feedback on work and understanding how to improve it.
- Independent learning.

Specific subject knowledge

- Extensive learning in the subject at Level 3 for two years.

Assessment:

- The learning is tightly assessed in all critical areas but uses a range of innovative and interesting assessment methods that reflect the nature of the learning.

Employability skills

- The value of work experience – professional practice placements.
- Development of sector specific skills (this can be particularly important for sport and health and social care progression).
- Employability skills and access to employment.

Below are a sample of comments made by teachers.

'Research projects, if done well, are an indication that a student will be successful.'

'Students have been immersed in the subject for two years; they are very focused about what they want to do.'

'Professional practice placements have real impact.'

'Are Cambridge Technicals easier? No, it's easy to see the benefits.'

'The best BTEC students are as good or better than A level students.'

Section 2: Key challenges in managing progression to HE with newer and less traditional qualifications

Challenge 2.1 – Progression challenges for students and receiving HEPs

Many students with BTEC or similar qualifications are very successful at university. It is an excellent and proven route. However, success at university does depend on which subject a student has studied at Level 3 and which type of subject they're going into.

There is a high success rate where the course is a good fit. This doesn't mean an exact course fit – many successful applied or technical students don't wish to follow the same path. For example: public services to criminology, sport science to physiotherapy, health and social care to early years.

Successful progression is not just about getting into university. It is about enabling students to progress to a course they will enjoy, do well and achieve in. Successful progression into HE depends on:

- the synergy between the student's learning style and that of the university

- the university's understanding about the knowledge and experience of the student

However, if universities assume these students have experienced an A level style of teaching and assessment, the students may struggle.

- They will have less experience in examined assessments and preparing for them than students with A levels, and be less confident at recalling information.
- They may have less experience of essay writing, particularly in conceptual subjects and in exam conditions.
- They may have some gaps in content knowledge:
  - In general this may be the case in mathematics and English – although this is not necessarily so, and with changes to GCSEs, is becoming less of an issue.
  - Specific examples often quoted are insufficient science for sport science or medical degrees (e.g. nursing or physiotherapy), or mathematics for engineering degrees. This can be the case, but depends on the exact units studied, an issue which is explored later in this report.

On the other hand, students with applied and technical qualifications have the big advantage of having had extended learning in the subject for two years. In health and social care, for instance, their knowledge is much greater than a student who only has the subject knowledge as part of an A level – and it is active knowledge, tightly assessed.

These are valid qualifications – particularly if they're in the same subject as the degree chosen.
There is a tendency to have a deficit model of these qualifications. They are different, not deficient.
These students know what they are going into, so are less likely to drop out because they don't enjoy the course.

Jackie Powell: Higher Education Progression Partnership, Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam Universities

Challenge 2.2 – The matching of Level 3 units to HE requirements

One key issue is that there can be a disconnect between the demands of HEPs and the realistic ability of providers delivering applied and technical qualifications to meet them.

Students applying for university with a BTEC or similar qualification will be offering a whole range of prior learning experiences. This is a result of three different aspects of the qualifications and the learning programmes students may have followed. These are:

- Applied General and Tech Level qualifications differ significantly in size – Applied General from 180 GLH (AS size) to 1,080 GLH (three A levels size); Tech Level from 360 GLH (A level size) to 1,080 GLH (three A levels size). Therefore, the amount of knowledge and understanding can vary greatly.
- The qualifications themselves are made up of a series of units. Some of these are mandatory and some optional. The choice of units is generally made by the school or college and not by the individual student.
- Student programmes can vary significantly. Some may take just an applied or technical qualification as a full-time programme. If they do this it would probably be the largest size of 1,080 GLH. Others may take a smaller qualification together with one or more A levels. Some students may take two applied or technical qualifications. Any student on an Applied General or Tech Level course may take the Extended Project Qualification as an enhancement of their programme.

The trickiest of the issues for HE progression is that of the mandatory and optional units; the precise units studied can affect the ease with which a student progresses to HE. The difference in the units studied means that students with the same qualifications and grades may have had very different learning experiences. It may also explain the apparent differences in ability between students with the same grades.

Sometimes, the choice of units may mean that a student will not have the required content to progress on to certain courses. However, others will have taken units which mean they have more than adequately covered required content.

This will be less of an issue when the qualifications change for first teaching in 2016. From that point there will be a larger core, a minimum of 60 per cent for Applied

General qualifications and a minimum of 40 per cent for Tech Level qualifications. However, students with these reformed qualifications will not be applying for university until the 2017-18 admissions cycle. And even then, while it will be less of an issue, it will still exist.

The unitised structure can also lead to complexities in grading. For instance, the final results for an Extended Diploma are reported in three components of pass, merit, distinction, distinction*, e.g. D*D*D*, D*DD, DDM. However, these grades are aggregated across 18 units which have been marked using both points and pass, merit, distinction. Thus, it is not immediately apparent which units a student may have done well or badly in, or how the overall grade has been achieved.

So what steps can schools and colleges delivering the qualifications do to square these particular circles? Colleges have a responsibility to try to offer the units universities want and students need for progression. Many make a real commitment to doing so. However, the ability to do so is subject to factors like staff expertise and availability. Funding is also an issue. It can be more difficult in schools and smaller colleges that can only support one teaching group.

'Students look to progress. The combination of units is important. There has to be balanced decision making in the units, for instance putting in more technical units. It's all about progression.'

Eleanor Taylor, Head of HE and International, West Nottinghamshire College

There are many examples of schools and colleges devising thoughtful and innovative practices to structure their applied and technical courses to meet the learning and progression needs of their students. However, student needs and progression aspirations will differ, as will the requirements of receiving HEPs.

Below are two very different examples:

Huddersfield New College: two pathways in health and social care

There are around 300 students taking BTEC health and social care courses at Huddersfield New College. It has multiple teaching groups for all sizes of qualifications, with four groups taking the Extended Diploma. In the first year, all students take a common foundation course, comprising units covering the basics of health and social care, such as, communication, health and safety, equality and diversity, anatomy and physiology.

In the second year the college offers two pathways, depending on the career and university aspirations of the students.

- The health pathway is for students wanting to progress to nursing, midwifery or other health professions. The chosen units are more science-based. The college works closely with partner universities to choose the units with the necessary content to most effectively ease progression to HE courses.
- The social care pathway is designed for those students planning to progress to careers like social work or youth work. In the first year they will have taken the core anatomy and physiology module. In the second year they will take more specialist science options, like physiology and fluid balance and physiological disorders, and taught how to transfer skills within practice.

North Lindsey College: introducing a TechBac for engineering students.

North Lindsey College in Scunthorpe is one of the early adopters of the City and Guilds TechBac, a new curriculum for 14-19 years olds, which they will be delivering to their engineering students. The City and Guilds TechBac is a student's full-time programme. It comprises:

- a Tech Level qualification in engineering
- the Extended Project Qualification – now well recognised and valued by higher education and employers
- practical work experience and critical work-place skills developed through the TechBac skills zone, which focuses on skills such as communication, digital skills, enterprise, innovation, self-development and workplace literacy

North Lindsey College says it chose the TechBac because it gives students recognition for what a good curriculum should deliver and higher education and employers say they want, technical and professional skills, along with strong behaviour skills. It presents an opportunity to give students a broad, rounded, coherent programme of study.

Students get the specific knowledge and skills in engineering they need for positive progression, whether that is to higher education or directly to employment. But they also get the transferable skills and knowledge employers and higher education say young people currently lack.
North Lindsey teachers are very positive about what the whole programme offers.

- *The new Tech Level qualifications allow us to concentrate on the learning. They don't force us to teach to the assessment.*
- *They are closely linked to industry but have academic rigour.*
- *They are assessed rigorously in all the traditional areas but are not assessed continually: they have synoptic assessment – an essential preparation for higher education.*
- *The programme enables project-based learning, which supports the college's whole ethos. The Extended Project Qualification gives students recognition for their work.*
- *The online skills zone gives students an understanding of the transferable skills they are developing throughout the programme.*
- *We are meeting the needs of the T-shaped learner – traditional learning with a broader range of skills. Most importantly, students are developing the skills to take ownership of their learning.*
- *We are making our students more work-ready – blurring the line between education and industry. We're also preparing them effectively for higher education, either immediately or in the future.*
- *Students often develop skills without realising what they have learnt.*

Challenge 2.3 – The need for greater clarity and transparency in university admissions policies

Universities are developing a growing understanding of BTEC and similar qualifications and recognising the achievement of individual students. A look at university entry requirements on the UCAS search tool indicates the majority of universities now accept BTEC, even for unrelated courses.

However, it would appear it is more difficult for students with applied or technical qualifications to find out what the entry requirements are than it is for A level students. For the latter, there is less difference between universities, and generally the requirements are quite clear.

It is important to differentiate between those students who have chosen an Extended BTEC as their full programme and those who have taken mixed (A level and BTEC) programmes. The latter appeals to many students and keeps a wide range of progression options open.

It is helpful if students can understand why universities ask for specific entry requirements. Key reasons are:

- essential prior learning
- proven track record in a particular style of learning and assessment
- breadth of knowledge and ability
- focus and commitment to a particular subject area

However, many applicants with BTEC or similar qualifications express frustrations.

- It can be difficult to find transparent information on whether their qualification is likely to meet the basic standard entry requirement. Preferred or required units are rarely easy to find or available at all on university websites. Statements are often vague and ambiguous, e.g. 'relevant units required' without an explanation of which or how many.
- Sometimes applied or technical qualifications are not even mentioned in entry requirements. Students can be faced with statements like 'contact admissions staff' or 'applicants considered on an individual basis'. Many students do contact universities personally and have had positive responses. However, it makes them feel that their BTECs are not really mainstream, and considered only under sufferance.

Sometimes information given on university websites can be confusing and suggests a lack of understanding of BTEC and other Level 3 qualifications. Examples given are:

- the lack of clarity about the different sizes of qualification – between Extended Diplomas, Diplomas, Foundation Diplomas and Certificates
- unachievable unit combinations are sometimes required
- the lack of understanding that a student can't do a specific module if it hasn't been structured into their course by their school or college.

When making offers, it is helpful if universities look behind the qualification at:

- the student's full study programme

- the exact composition of the qualification a student has taken, particularly where it is an Extended Diploma

In respect of grading, they may wish to consider not only requiring particular grades, e.g. D*D*D, but also a specified number of distinctions overall, e.g. 13/18, or asking for distinctions in specified units.

Most importantly, it would be very helpful to students if essential or preferred units and grades were clearly published on the UCAS search tool and on university website and published materials.

An academically high-achieving student and talented athlete with a sports science BTEC was turned down by a prestigious university for insufficient science content. An audit by her college revealed that the exact units taken meant she had studied two A levels worth of science. The university admitted her – and changed its admissions policy.

Challenge 2.4 – Effective application choices

Applied General and Tech Level qualifications are different from A levels. They are vocationally-orientated and taught and assessed to some extent in different ways. They are, however, mainstream qualifications pursued by a large and growing number of young people, and proven to provide successful preparation for higher education study.

In terms of progression, the aim is to enable students to select the HE courses that are right for them, and to help them understand what those are. In order to achieve that, information needs to be clearly available to help these students make informed choices of HE programmes to reflect their learning style preference, resulting in entry, success and completion.

Students with BTECs and other Level 3 qualifications would benefit from knowing if HE courses are modular or assignment-based and the nature of the assessment, so they can choose the most appropriate courses.

In the best schools and colleges, applied and technical students are being encouraged to understand their qualifications, engage in early research, and be prepared to promote what they can offer in their dealings with university staff.

The most effective providers of Level 3 qualifications research HE progression options carefully before introducing new programmes. They make sure they are aware and accept universities' requirements for prior knowledge and consider this when creating learning programmes which will maximise students' progression options. This can be achieved by creating a 'Y-style provision', allowing students to pursue a broad first year, with tailored specialisation in the second year related to their chosen HE or career options.

The more universities, schools and colleges talk to and challenge each other the better each will understand their respective issues. This happens very effectively in local networks. Colleges report that, by engaging directly with universities, a dialogue can be opened up which helps all parties to better understand the mutual benefits of levelling the playing field for applied general and technical applicants.

Here is an example of what one curriculum leader needed to do to ensure that her health and social care students could make informed and valid university choices.

A curriculum manager for health and social care at a large and successful sixth form college of around 3,000 students delivers the Cambridge Technical Diploma in Health and Social Care. This qualification is the size of an A level and most of the students are also taking two A levels.

The students want to progress into a range of courses including nursing, social work, psychology and teaching.

Last year it came to her attention that a number of universities her students, and those from other colleges, wanted to go on to, were not accepting Cambridge Technicals, including some in their local region. She therefore felt she had to be proactive on behalf of her students.

She carried out a survey of 71 universities. Of the 44 which replied, 39 said they would accept both BTEC and Cambridge Technicals, two said they would accept neither, and three said they would accept a BTEC but not a Cambridge Technical.

She also encouraged her students to call universities and to act as ambassadors for the qualification on open days. They had varying degrees of success.

The most pleasing response came from one high-tariff university which replied, 'We welcome applicants offering a profile of Pearson BTEC or OCR Cambridge Technicals combined with other BTEC/Cambridge Technicals or combined with GCE A levels.'

Two other high-tariff universities agreed to change their overall policy as a result of the approach.

'I will always fight for my students and am pleased with the immediate outcome of this exercise. However, I'm looking forward to a time when all accredited qualifications are on a level playing field and students will be clear from the beginning of their courses if they're going to be accepted by the university of their choice.'

Dr. Susie Nyman, Curriculum Leader, Health and Social Care, Farnborough Sixth Form College

Challenge 2.5 – Providing appropriate support

There is an indication that some students with applied or technical qualifications can struggle in the first year of university – the 'first year wobblers'. Once they get through the first year the difference from other students is less apparent.

There is a good deal of support available, but it is ad hoc with varying degrees of success. Some universities provide support on a case-by-case basis, but there is a feeling it could be more targeted. There is justified concern about stigmatising particular groups of students.

When students drop out, the reasons can be complex and are often more personal than academic. Students with applied or technical qualifications often come from a widening participation cohort and there can be a range of reasons why they aren't coping.

Examples are available of good structured support.

- Designing special introductory modules, particularly in mathematics.
- Teaching mathematics separately to A level and Applied General students – the issue is not the amount of mathematics but that students with BTEC mathematics have studied more applied, while those with A level have generally studied more pure mathematics.

Colleges with mixed FE and HE provision are well placed to recognise the needs of students and put in support early on. Cornwall College flags up students who need a watch. If they struggle with an assignment they are referred to an academic adviser who works with them. However, funding cuts have made this approach difficult. West Nottinghamshire College doesn't give specific support, but because staff teach

across FE and HE, they understand the teaching and learning issues in the HE sector and can ensure students are well-prepared. *'We are preparing them for the future so they will succeed.'*

The Transitional Bridging programme at Northampton University is one example of a sensitive, inclusive approach to transitional support.

The Transitional Bridging approach emerged from research with early childhood studies (ECS) students joining the School of Education at the University of Northampton. ECS is an interdisciplinary degree, and one of the challenges faced is the support needed by students with traditional and non-traditional backgrounds as they transition into academic study.

The research findings indicated there was a mismatch between tutor expectations of previous learning experiences and what students had actually experienced. Many of those participating represented the first cohorts into higher education who had been educated in the context of the National Strategies approach to education. What emerged was that all students, including those with A levels, had received high levels of support at school, college and on Access courses. This involved repeated draft marking, shifting hand-in dates for assignments, parental support in writing them, and providing revision guides. They rarely used libraries and presented a variable picture about how to undertake appropriate searches on the internet.

The research led to an increased focus on the students' transition into university and 'bridging them' into academic study. The Transitional Bridging Tutorial Tool enables the student and tutor to discuss previous educational experiences and develop an action plan for the individual student and the whole cohort.

The aim is to support students at the very start of their degree through valuing their previous experiences and developing their understanding of what is different about higher education. Through scaffolding their engagement with academic study and wider university services we have found that general student support lessens as they become more independent in their learning; they know when to seek support and from whom, and assignment grades improved.

'Don't expect them to identify the skills they lack and be able to find them themselves.'

'It is essential not to blame the students and to have a holistic approach, working with the other support systems around.'

'We have shifted the bell curve on results. By the time students leave they are autonomous learners.'

Dr. Eunice Lumsden, Head of Early Years, Northampton University

Foundation courses

A growing number of universities offer full or part-time courses, specifically designed to bridge the gap between degree study and prior learning. These have different titles, the most common being foundation year, year zero or foundation course, and can be offered as standalone programmes or as part of an extended degree. They are designed to develop skills and the subject-specific knowledge required to undertake a degree course.

Birkbeck College, London is one of the most established universities in this area. Their Certificate of Higher Education Introductory Studies (HEIS) is aimed at those wanting to develop their academic skills and potential to take their studies to the next level. Teaching is varied and interactive, including short lectures, group work, discussions, class visits and student presentations. Various forms of assessment are built into the modules, allowing students to gradually develop confidence, skills and knowledge.

HEIS is a Level 4 course in its own right, but students who take it at Birkbeck often use it to progress to other universities where they start in the first year. It is a very supportive programme in which students acquire not only subject knowledge, but also study skills, which are a real asset to them in their ongoing studies. The skills developed are wide-ranging but include organisation skills, the ability to take initiative, the confidence to be critical about their subject and well-honed research skills. They are given the opportunity to try a whole range of areas related to their subject area and look at it from different perspectives. They learn there is not just one answer and to think about things in a more complicated way.

Dr. Kerry Harman, Director of HEIS, Birkbeck College. London

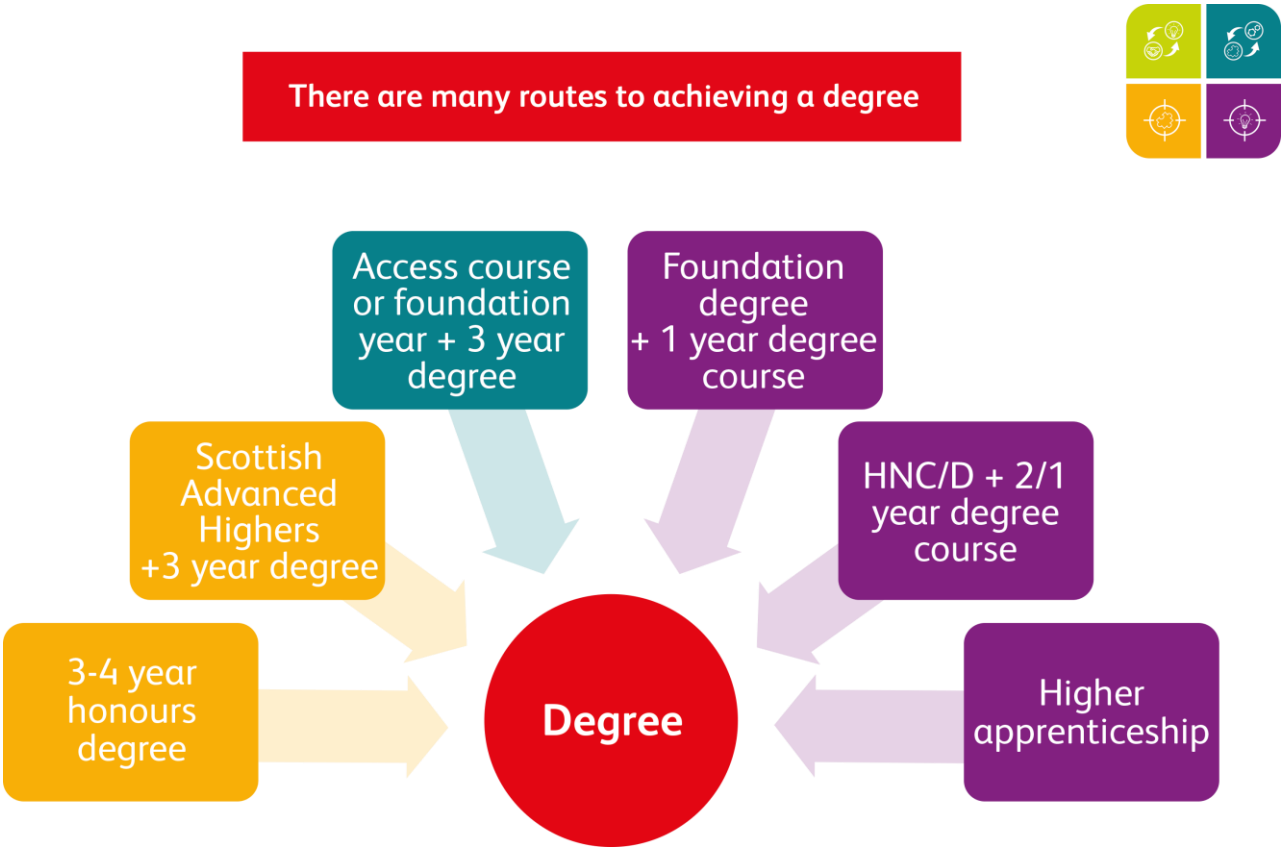
Challenge 2.6 – Raising awareness that the door to higher education is never closed

A key message for students is that there are many routes into higher education. Even if they do not go to university at age 18, either because they haven't got the grades or because they choose not to, there will be opportunities to do so at a later stage in their learning journey. We point out to them the many ways of achieving a degree. This may be full-time, part-time, inside or outside employment.

The following are only examples of how it can be achieved. Enterprising students, and providers, will find ways to enable progression, without compromising standards.

- Three - four year honours degree.
- Scottish Higher and a three-year degree.
- Access course and a three-year degree.
- Foundation year and two or three years of a degree.
- HNC and two years of a degree course (three years in Scotland).
- Foundation degree or HND and one year of a degree course (two years in Scotland).
- Higher apprenticeship.

Figure 9: examples of routes into higher education



Section 3: Suggested actions

Actions to help address challenges related to the complexities of and changes to the Level 3 qualification landscape

All of the organisations involved in qualification reform and those who work with students making Level 3 qualification and progression choices have a responsibility to clarify the landscape and help young people navigate it successfully. Key actions are:

- know and understand the range of qualifications available at Level 3 and how they are changing
- ensure that students understand how qualifications support different progression routes, i.e. provide routes into HE, employment and/or apprenticeships
- encourage students making Level 3 choices to construct a programme that offers them the best blend of skills and knowledge to meet their learning style preferences and ultimate employment aspirations
- ensure that parents, teachers, HE admissions teams and academic staff, IAG advisers and employers understand the changes to qualifications and what they mean for progression

Actions to help address challenges related to progression into HE for students with newer and less traditional qualifications

- Ensure that information about HE course teaching, learning and assessment styles is made clear and transparent.
- Encourage students to consider teaching, learning and assessment styles when making HE choices.
- Support collaboration between Level 3 providers and HE to develop a mutual understanding of the units HEPs require for particular courses of study.
- Ensure there is clarity on how HEP admissions policy will be responding to qualification changes.
- Ensure there is clarity and transparency about HEP's admissions policies in respect of applicants with newer and less traditional qualifications.
- Share and disseminate good practice in respect of recruiting and supporting students with newer and less traditional qualifications.
- Work with SPA to update its good practice on admissions to reflect qualification changes.
- Consider strategies to identify and support students who might find transition into HE challenging.

Conclusion

For learners completing Level 3 qualifications, progression routes have been constantly evolving and will continue to do so. The full implementation of the raising of the participation age, the changes in qualifications, and the commitment to and exponential expansion of apprenticeships, are key catalysts at this point in time.

Applied General, Tech Level and other non-traditional qualifications are now a significant part of the landscape at Level 3. At Huddersfield New College, a high-achieving college of 2,400 students, two-thirds of students take a BTEC qualification, either as their full programme, or combined with other qualifications.

For some HE courses three A levels will always be the most appropriate and only acceptable preparation. However while Applied General and Tech Level qualifications form an integral part of the curriculum offered by colleges, apprenticeships and school sixth forms, and while the learners who take them aspire to higher education, they must also be recognised as a valid progression route into higher education, where there can be the right fit between student and course.

This report recognises the complexities in the structure of these qualifications, and the significant changes in curriculum and assessment to be implemented for Applied General and Tech Level first teaching in 2016. It acknowledges that not all students holding these qualifications transition into higher education seamlessly or without support. However, we also flag up the benefits of these qualifications and the educational value they add to many young people, some of whom have not progressed effortlessly through their learning. It is for each higher education provider to decide the parameters of its admissions policy.

We hope that the information presented and new resources provided will help teachers, advisers and admissions staff provide better advice on Level 3 qualification choices and progression pathways.

'It really means making sure that any decisions are based on research on the reality of what a BTEC or similar qualification actually means, as opposed to an assumption about what it might be. Universities are going to benefit from this because they are going to get a lot of students they otherwise wouldn't have got across the threshold.'

Tony Sturdy, Senior Careers and Education Adviser, Huddersfield New College

Appendix 1: Glossary

AQA: A UK awarding body for qualifications offered in schools and colleges.

Awarding bodies: Organisations which design, develop, deliver and award qualifications in the UK.

CQFC: The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales: the framework that recognises the levels of qualifications in Wales.

DfE: The Department for Education in England.

Foundation degree: A higher education qualification worth two-thirds of a bachelors' degree which usually takes the equivalent of two years full-time study.

Foundation year: A one year programme to bridge the gap between prior learning and higher education study.

GLH: Guided Learning Hours: the measure used to define the size of existing qualifications. It is the number of teacher-led hours required to support the delivery of a qualification.

HEP: Higher Education Provider

HNC: Higher National Certificate: a work-related qualification provided by higher and further education in the UK, equivalent to the first year of university study.

HND: Higher National Diploma: a work-related qualification provided by higher and further education in the UK, equivalent to two years of university study.

IAG: Information, advice and guidance

Licence to practise: A qualification that meets the legislative requirements to carry out a specific job.

Level 3: The level of the qualifications in England, Wales and N. Ireland that lead to higher education. A levels are Level 3 qualifications.

NVQ: A competency-based qualification that gives proof of competence to do a specific job.

OCR: A UK awarding body responsible for qualifications offered in schools and colleges.

Ofqual: The Office for Qualifications and Examinations is the regulator for all qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. It is accountable to the UK Parliament and the N. Ireland assembly.

Pearson: A UK awarding body for qualifications offered in schools and colleges.

Performance measure: A measure used by the government in England to hold schools and colleges accountable for curriculum and attainment.

Qualifications Wales: The independent organisation responsible for regulating general and vocational qualifications in Wales.

QCF: The Qualifications and Credit Framework: the unitised and credit-based framework for vocational qualifications in England, Wales and N. Ireland until October 2015.

RQF: The Regulatory Qualification Framework: the new framework for the regulation of all qualifications regulated by OFQUAL in England, introduced in October 2015.

STEM: Science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects.

WJEC: A UK awarding body for qualifications offered in schools and colleges; it is the largest provider of qualifications in Wales.

Appendix 2: Contributors

We are very grateful to the following people and to the students of their respective institutions, who contributed both to the research phase and to the creation of the case study videos.

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