

Frequently Asked Questions on Equivalencies

Why is the Foundation Diploma listed as equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-G in terms of the Achievement and Attainment Tables? Shouldn't it be listed as equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades D-G?

Students who take GCSEs can achieve either at level 1 or at level 2. Students achieve level 1 by *not achieving* level 2 - 5 GCSE grades A*-C. It is therefore possible for a student to achieve up to four GCSEs at grades A*-C and one or more GCSEs at grades D-G and be counted as having achieved Level 1. This is why the column for Level 1 learners in the Achievement and Attainment Tables is labelled as 5 GCSEs A*-G. And it is the Level 1 column that the Foundation Diploma will count against. Hence our original announcement said the Foundation Diploma is equivalent to 5 GCSEs A*-G.

However students taking the Foundation Diploma will only be able to achieve the equivalent of grades D-G for their principal learning and project, which will determine the overall Diploma grade. They will, though, be able to achieve Level 2 in their functional skills and also in their additional and specialist learning because they could take a GCSE as part of their ASL and again could achieve GCSE grades A*-G for that element of their Diploma. For this reason too, we said the Foundation Diploma is equivalent to 5 GCSEs A*-G.

We recognise this is a complex concept to explain simply to parents and young people. Given that the overall Foundation Diploma grade will be determined by achievement in the Principal Learning and Project and that students can only achieve Grades D-G for that element of their Diploma we recommend that in communicating to parents and young people you, and we, adopt the following language when describing the 'equivalence' of Diplomas:

- Foundation Diploma is equivalent to 5 GCSEs at level 1 (e.g. 5 GCSEs at grades D-G)
- Higher Diploma is equivalent to 7 GCSEs at level 2 (e.g. 7 GCSEs at grades A*-C)
- Progression Diploma is equivalent to 2.5 A levels
- Advanced Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 A levels

Will the separate parts of the Diploma count in the AATs even if someone doesn't complete the full Diploma?

Yes they will. So a student who achieves their principal learning and project but not their additional and/or specialist learning or functional skills will be awarded AAT points for the principal learning and project and these will count in the AATs.

Similarly, if someone didn't achieve their principal learning and project but did achieve their additional and/or specialist learning, they would achieve points for the additional and/or specialist learning alone. The value for the

component parts of the Diploma at each level are shown in the table published on both the QCA and DCSF websites.

Why don't the Foundation and Higher Diplomas attract more performance points post 16 than pre 16?

Qualifications at the same level have to be given the same performance points whether they are studied pre- or post-16. Some students might start a qualification pre-16 and complete post-16, for example. So the points awarded to the Foundation and Higher Diplomas will be the same pre- and post-16.

Does the equivalence of 7 GCSEs for the Higher Diploma include points for Functional Skills or not?

No – the equivalence of 7 GCSEs includes points for the Principal Learning and Project and Additional and Specialist Learning only. Functional skills will attract their own performance points as a stand alone qualification - at Level 2 equivalent to 0.5 GCSE A*-C for each functional skill. In the early years of Diploma delivery, when Functional Skills have to be taken as a stand alone qualification, Diploma students will be awarded these points in addition to any performance points for achievement in English and Maths GCSEs. But by 2010 we expect most students taking a Higher Diploma at Key Stage 4 to be achieving their functional skills through English and Maths GCSEs. Functional skills would then be recognised in points for achievement of those GCSEs.

Why is an Advanced Diploma 'worth' more than three A levels, when its published guided learning hours (1,080) remain the same?

The Advanced Diploma's value in terms of both Achievement and Attainment Tables (AAT) and the UCAS tariff is equivalent to 3.5 A levels. Both 'value' decisions recognise that the Diploma – a composite qualification demanding that learners complete a number of components, from subject learning with a minimum 50 per cent applied content, to skills in a variety of disciplines – is an inherently broad, stretching and challenging qualification.

Because the curriculum beyond Key Stage 4 does not include mandatory elements of English, maths, ICT or work-related learning – all hurdles for the achievement of the Advanced Diploma – the AAT points reflect these additional requirements. Taking into account functional skills and work experience requirements results in the Advanced Diploma attracting an AAT points value equivalent to that of 3.5 A levels.

The UCAS tariff assigns a maximum possible 300 points to the principal learning and project components, and 120 points to the additional and/or specialist learning component. The decision was based on meetings of six Expert Groups, featuring representation from academic subject specialists from member institutions (numbering five in the majority of instances,) and examiners for both the Diploma, and in most cases, two benchmark awards.

What is a Progression Diploma equivalent to?

A Progression Diploma comprises two of the three available components of the Diploma at level 3: principal learning and generic learning. It does not require the additional and/or specialist learning component.

In terms of both AAT points and the UCAS tariff, the Progression Diploma is equivalent to 2.5 A levels. It attracts a total possible 300 points under the UCAS tariff, and performance points equivalent to 2.5 A levels.