

**Universities and vocational education**  
**Vocational Qualifications Day - Westminster Hall Debate**  
**9 June 2015**

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### Background

1. The eighth annual [VQ Day](#)<sup>1</sup> is Wednesday 10th June 2015. Neil Carmichael MP (Conservative, Stroud) has secured a Westminster Hall Debate at 1430 on Tuesday 9 June on the topic of 'Annual Vocational Qualifications Day.'
2. High quality vocational qualifications are of great importance to the higher education sector. Universities not only offer a wide variety of vocational and technical qualifications themselves, they also value vocational qualifications as part of the university application process.
3. This short briefing highlights some key figures related to universities and vocational qualifications.

### million+

4. million+ is a university think-tank, supported by universities across England and Scotland. Our recent work has focused on the role of universities in their regions and communities, whether through supporting businesses with research and cutting-edge technology or in supporting public services such as schools and hospitals in the education of teachers, health professionals and social workers.

### Summary

5. Nearly **a quarter** of students accepted to university places included a BTEC qualification as part of their application.
6. Universities offer more than traditional Bachelors undergraduate programmes: **10 per cent** of UK domiciled full-time students are enrolled on programmes such as foundation degrees and HNDs that tend to be of vocational and technical nature. For part-time students this figure is **28 per cent**. However, between 2010 to 2012-13 the number of part-time students in universities in England declined by **40 per cent**. The majority of this reduction was in these highly vocational course.
7. There are **46,000** students in England whose employer pays the majority of their course fees, largely because the courses are highly vocational, having been designed with employers. A further **95,000** students have their fees paid by a public sector body, mostly in education, health and social care.

### University entrants with vocational qualifications

8. 23 per cent of students who applied prior to the June deadline included a BTEC qualification in their UCAS application<sup>2</sup>. There is a difference between traditional school leavers and mature

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vqday.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/end-cycle-data-resources/applicants-and-acceptances-groups-applicants> Table DR2 033 05

students, with older applicants being more likely to apply with at least one vocational qualification.

9. Students are increasingly likely to apply to university with a vocational qualification. The number of applicants with BTEC qualifications has nearly doubled since 2008.
10. Universities are autonomous institutions and set entry requirements independently. Entrance requirements vary across different subject areas.

### **Vocational programmes of study in universities**

11. 10 per cent of UK domiciled full-time students are enrolled on programmes such as foundation degrees and HNDs that tend to be of vocational and technical nature. For part-time students this figure is 28 per cent<sup>3</sup>. However, although such a large proportion of part-time students in higher education study vocational qualifications, the mode of study has faced serious challenges.
12. From 2010 to 2012-13 the number of part-time students in universities in England declined by 40 per cent, linked with the introduction of the 2012 Higher Education reforms. Although this decline was widely known in higher education policy circles it has often been ignored in political commentary about the impact of these reforms on university application.
13. The vast majority of the drop in part-time numbers was in courses known as “other first degrees,” namely HNC/Ds, Foundation Degrees, DipHE and other qualifications that tend to be technical and vocational.
14. However many full-time university and honours degree programmes are vocationally focused and lead directly to particular careers and occupation of a professional and technical nature.

### **Employer-funded higher education**

15. There are **46,000** full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in England whose employer pays the majority of their course fees, largely because the courses are highly vocational, having been designed with employers.
16. A further 95,000 students have their fees paid by a public sector body, mostly in education, health and social care.
17. Employers are also involved in the creation and shaping of courses they do not directly financially contribute to, including through professional accreditation bodies as well as more informal consultation.

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### **About million+**

million+ is a university think-tank. We use rigorous research and evidence-based policy to address and provide solutions to complex problems in higher education.

For further information about this briefing or about million+ please visit [www.millionplus.ac.uk](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk) or contact:

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Higher Education Statistic Agency figures 2013-14.