

**All-Party Parliamentary Group
for Youth Employment
Report**



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**Impact Of Vocational Qualifications
On Young People's Employment and
Labour Market Outcomes**

September 2021 - January 2022



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This report was written by Laura-Jane Rawlings, Joshua Adcock and Sophie Wheeler of Youth Employment UK.

Executive Summary

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment ('the APPG') presents this report from an inquiry into the impact of vocational qualifications on young people's employability and labour market outcomes.

The Coronavirus pandemic has brought new challenges and exacerbated existing ones across most areas of society. The previous inquiry by the APPG, *Making Youth Employment Policy Work (2020)*¹, assessed the Government's youth employment policy response to the growing socio-economic and labour market concerns as a result of the pandemic.

This inquiry seeks to understand the impact of proposed changes to post-16 education policy on future labour market outcomes of young people.

The Department for Education (DfE) has proposed the streamlining of post-16 qualifications by removing funding for some vocational, technical, and other vocational technical qualifications (VTQs), such as CTEC and BTEC qualifications by 2024-2025.

T Levels, A Levels and apprenticeships are intended to be the main options for students at Key Stage 5.

Recently the Government has announced a 1-year delay to proposed defunding of VTQs.

This inquiry heard oral evidence from a range of expert speakers, young people, and employers, and received written submissions from individuals and organisations.

Key findings

Contributors to this inquiry are largely supportive of the addition of T Levels to Post-16 education provision. There is support for the government's ambition to raise the profile of vocational education and create parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways.

Every submission of evidence including oral and written has shared a number of significant concerns about the proposed roll out of T Levels and the defunding of VTQs.

Key concerns are focused on disadvantaged students, as growing evidence including the government's own research has identified that it is young people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups, from socioeconomic disadvantage groups, those with Special Education Needs and those living in rural and coastal areas who will be most disadvantaged by the proposed policy agenda.

Experts share that VTQs such as BTECs are supporting social mobility with more students from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups studying BTECs and progressing on to

¹APPG for Youth Employment: [Making Youth Employment Policy Work. Inquiry Report \(2020\)](#)

university supporting a wider inclusion and social mobility agenda. This successful transition further supports employers looking to recruit skilled young graduates from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The body of evidence included in this inquiry shows the likelihood of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) will rise under the proposals as the system will not provide enough opportunity for educational study post-16 for many young people.

The APPG for Youth Employment is particularly concerned with this evidence, understanding the scarring impact of youth unemployment that will not only affect young people but the productivity and economic growth of the country.

The inquiry also found that the future skills needs of employers are likely to not be met by these proposals. Evidence put forward to the APPG for Youth Employment suggests that there will be a narrowing of professional skill development, particularly in key industries such as care, creative, science and technology, sectors vital to the future economy. Detailed within the body of evidence was the fact that skills in sectors relating to renewable energy and the “green” economy that will impact the government's commitment to Net Zero are also missed out within much of the T Level content. It was argued that with a fast paced and changing skills landscape that T Level qualifications will not be able to adapt and respond to the changing employment and economic landscape as standalone technical qualifications.

Experts shared concerns about the viability of a national roll out of T Levels, identifying concerns with the resources available to providers that will prohibit high quality delivery such as teaching expertise, facilities, and in finding the work placement support, particularly in areas of the country that have small non specialised employment communities. There are also significant concerns about the course content and the key transition year which is still in development. These concerns point to a disjointed and unequal system where young people would not have the options of careers and pathways of their own choosing.

Linked in to this concern is the concern that the careers education system will not be ready to support young people with the choices available to them. Few young people know about T Levels despite an expectation that they will be a primary option for many in September 2022. Universities and employers also have a mixed view on the qualification and have not yet adapted their recruitment/entry qualifications to accommodate the T Level option. Raising concerns about the transition opportunities for young people once they complete their T Level study.

The accumulation of this evidence is presented in the appendix within this report and in the summary of the two evidence sessions. Based on this evidence the APPG for Youth Employment is making the following recommendations to the government.

Recommendations

Young people play an important role in society and in the economy, the levelling up agenda is supported by the APPG for Youth Employment and a key component of this agenda is to

ensure that all parts of society are treated equally and have equal access to good quality opportunities, therefore it is recommended that the government remove the arbitrary hard cut-off timeline for defunding VTQs and ensure that there is a system which offers a guaranteed level 3 education opportunities for every young person; opportunities that will lead to quality employment and/or further study in HE.

For this system to exist, we need to have access to up-to-date evidence on student outcomes across all Level 3 qualifications. The government should commission an independent longitudinal study (of five years at least) of the impact of T Level qualifications on young people's progression into HE and Employment, including geographic and sector progression, alongside a similar analysis of reformed RQF applied general qualifications. This evidence should be sought before finalising which VTQs should be defunded.

We recommend an iterative process that will see the slow and steady roll out of T Levels over time which will allow for thorough evaluations and ensure equal provision of quality opportunities across sectors, geography and the different types of learners.

The government should not be looking at qualification levels in silo but include plans for Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in the round, ensuring that there is a full and considered strategy for young people to move through the education system and that there are no unintended gaps in provision. Government should ensure that it retains a variety of qualifications at level 2 and below, which can be used alongside high-quality non-accredited provision.

We recommend that the government works closely with employers and sector specialists who have concerns about T Level work placements and the course content to review the unintended gaps and map an alternative route where T Levels do not work.

The government must increase focus on Level 2 apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds who are unable to follow a T Level or A Level route. Ensuring that there is an apprenticeship pathway for every young person who wants one before defunding VTQs.

The government should conduct a review of the careers education system to ensure that all pathways to employment are clear to all young people and those who influence them such as their parents/carers and teachers. Including the development of a central register of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Government should reserve some funding models and associated approaches to VTQs which would allow for rapid change and different approaches, particularly in response to the economic impact of the pandemic, Brexit, and the global climate emergency.

Introduction

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment was created in 2014 and exists to:

1. promote youth employment in all its forms and the vital role of young people within the economy,
2. to ensure young people's voices are heard,
3. to highlight the need for quality opportunities; and to share best practice.

Summary of the review of post-16 qualifications (2019–2022)

DfE began the 'official' review of post-16 qualifications in 2019²; initially looking at Level 3 and below, the Government confirmed that T Levels and A Levels would be the main choice for young people with overlapping VTQs losing funding.

In January 2021, DfE published the white paper *Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*³. This paper sets out reforms to further education, recognising that the economy is changing rapidly; the pandemic, Brexit, climate change, the expected growth of jobs requiring STEM education or training had collectively snowballed into a skills shortage in recent years – young people did not have the knowledge, skills and behaviours required in the current and future economy.

Stage 2 of this consultation⁴ saw the focus narrow to Level 3 and the further reiteration of Government proposals to remove funding for VTQs, including BTECS, that overlap with A Levels and T Levels. The outcome⁵ of this consultation confirmed defunding would go ahead for any VTQs that overlap with T Levels, Apprenticeships, 'occupational–entry technical qualifications areas not served by T Levels' and 'specialist qualifications' would lose funding by 2023.

DfE have not specified what qualifications will lose funding but have said "All qualifications will need to pass the new approvals process to be eligible for public funding"³, must be on a list of approved qualifications, providers and be in a contract that allows termination if a provider "ceases to be on the list"⁶.

In the second reading of the Education and Skills Bill in the House of Commons, Secretary of State for DfE, Nadhim Zahawi MP, announced a delay to the defunding by one year (now by 2024 at the earliest)⁷. As of July 2021, an estimated 30% (or ≈260,000) of 16–18-year-olds are currently studying Level 3 VTQs such as BTECS⁸.

This inquiry was open between October 2021 to January 2022 and sought to understand:

2 [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below](#) in England: Stage 1, March – June 2019.

3 [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#), White Paper, January 2021.

4 [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3](#) in England: Stage 2, October 2020 – January 2021.

5 [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3](#) in England: Policy Statement, July 2021.

6 [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill](#): Bill 212 2021–22.

7 [Hansard: Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, Volume 703](#): debated on Monday 15 November 2021.

8 [#ProtectStudentChoice](#): support from 118 MPs and Lords.

1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?
2. If the Government's proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?
3. If the Government's proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?
4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place.

The inquiry heard oral evidence from guest speakers including young people, those working in the education and training sector, and employers. Speakers included:

Noni Csogor, *Research and Policy Manager at Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA)*

Charlie Deane, *Principal and CEO of Bury College*

Euan, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

Martin McLean, *Senior Policy Advisor at National Deaf Children's Society (NCDS) & Disability subgroup Chair of the Youth Employment Group*

Ella, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

Guest panellists

Stephen Evans, *Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute (L&WI)*

Catherine Sezen, *Senior Policy Manager at the Association of Colleges (AoC)*

Tom Richmond, *Director of Education and Skills think tank (EDSK)*

Tom Bewick, *Chief Executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB)*

The APPG for Youth Employment invited members, organisations, and individuals to submit written evidence focused on the follow questions:

1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?
 - a. Which students will benefit from the changes?
 - b. Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?
 - c. Is there enough planned provision to support Level 1 and Level 2 learners?
 - d. Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?
 - e. Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skill gaps).
 - f. Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?
2. Will the Government's proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?
3. Will the Government's proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?
 - a. Are there specific short-term implications?
 - b. What are the long-term implications?

This report brings together the written and verbal evidence presented to the APPG for Youth Employment with the APPG's own recommendations to the Government.

Overview of evidence received

All meetings in this inquiry took place remotely due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic; our hosts, guests, speakers, and attendees signed up to Zoom meetings and were able to participate via video and audio link. All resources, including meeting recordings and slides were made available on the APPG for Youth Employment website⁹.

Meeting Overview

In the first meeting of the inquiry, the Chair outlined the purpose of the inquiry and the key questions it set out to answer. The Chair stated the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) youth employment statistics (October 2021) capture the challenge facing young people in the labour market including that the youth unemployment rate (12.2%) is 7.7 percentage points (ppts) higher than the all-age unemployment rate (4.5%).

Noni Csogor, Research and Policy Manager at Sixth Form Colleges Association outlined current Government proposals to defund some VTQs, including BTECS, and highlighted the key concerns of the *#ProtectStudentChoice* campaign¹⁰ which included:

- the pace at which the defunding of qualifications is proposed to be delivered,
- the undervaluing of Level 3 BTEC qualifications to future earnings, training, and employment pathways,
- the disregard for different learning styles and educational needs of young people that VTQs currently satisfy
- the disproportionate impact the proposed changes would have on the most disadvantaged students.

Noni Csogor argued that VTQ's, including BTECS, should be retained alongside T Levels in recognition of the different purpose they serve in the qualification landscape to pupils from diverse backgrounds. Further evidence should be gathered by pupils and practitioners as part of an impartial evidence-based assessment, which would provide greater evidence upon which to make decisions regarding the proposed defunding of some VTQs including BTECS. This test has not been met by the Government yet.

Questions were asked by the Chair and attendees regarding the finite funding available for qualifications and the potential for BTECS to be a route to T Level qualifications. Noni Csogor suggested that we do not currently have a sufficient understanding of the T Level qualifications and would need to wait 5–10 years for T Levels to be fully embedded into the

⁹ <https://appgyouthemployment.org/home/meetingsevents/>

¹⁰ <https://www.protectstudentchoice.org/>

current national system before decisions are made regarding the role of T Levels. Noni Csogor also noted that BTEC qualifications are more oriented towards Higher Education than T Levels which are geared towards direct pathways into employment. Specifically on funding of Level 3 qualifications, Noni Csogor stated that T Levels require a higher level of funding than BTECS and therefore a mix of T Level and VTQs, including BTECS, in the landscape is unlikely to have a significant impact on Government budgets

Charlie Deane, Principal and CEO of Bury College suggested that the planned defunding of some VTQs does not appear to fit in with the diversity and complexity of the needs of young people in the post-16 landscape. He suggested that qualifications such as BTECS which retain a greater degree of flexibility regarding future pathways would be more beneficial to young people as the majority of students do not know what they want to do at that age and those who do may change their minds further down the line.

Charlie Deane raised concerns around how we measure the success of a qualification – whether a person has gone on to work in the sector they studied in should not be the only measure of success. Instead, we should be focussed on developing soft skills such as confidence and resilience, which would produce better employees and ‘activate’ the development of other more technical skills.

Highlighting the disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students, Charlie Deane stated it is these students who may struggle to achieve the grades necessary to access T Levels, may struggle whilst on the course, and may have less time for work placements due to already working to support their family.

Youth Employment UK Ambassador Euan shared his experience of undertaking A Levels alongside a BTEC course in Business which he credits with enabling his acceptance onto a degree apprenticeship. He notes that he uses the skills and knowledge he developed during his BTEC Business course heavily in his day-to-day work. Euan highlights the value that he and other young people have gained from BTEC courses and argues that they should be retained to promote greater student choice.

In the second meeting Noni Csogor provided an update on Government announcements that had taken place since the last meeting. The three main changes are:

- a year delay to the defunding of some VTQs (from 2023 to 2024) and some academic qualifications (from 2024 to 2025),
- the exit requirement of a pass in English and Maths has been removed and as a result a student without those grades will not fail their T Level,
- a change in rhetoric from DfE with the Secretary of State, Nadhim Zahawi MP, beginning to acknowledge the quality and value that many BTEC qualifications represent.

However, Noni stated there are issues yet to be addressed such as:

- the definition of technical and academic qualifications
- greater transparency and impartiality surrounding the criteria by which VTQs will be judged as being effective and not duplicating existing qualifications.

- plans to develop an evidence base should be published by DfE, including details of how the longitudinal study and subsequent analysis would capture student satisfaction, outcomes, and earnings.

Senior Policy Adviser at National Deaf Children Society Martin McLean highlighted the challenges that young people with SEND, including deafness, currently face in the education system which can make progression through Level 3 qualifications difficult. For example, delayed language development in deaf children can affect executive function and memory. However, Martin McLean noted how diverse a group young people with SEND is, and different educational programmes will suit different young people within that cohort. Government data indicates that only 45% of deaf young people achieve level 3 qualifications equal to or above 2 A Levels, it is therefore important for there to be sufficient focus on level 2 qualifications and how these can create routes to employment for deaf and disabled people.

Martin McLean noted areas of the reforms that are strongly welcomed by NCDS; steps to improve the quality of VTQs are important due to the causal links between positive employment outcomes and good quality vocational training for deaf and young people with SEND. So too is their support for increased teaching hours, although this should be equal across all types of education. Young people with SEND often struggle to secure work experience placements when compared with their non-disabled peers – for this reason, the substantial workplace is welcome as long as it is accessible. The removal of English and maths as an exit requirement will also support young people with SEND studying a T Level and places parity esteem as to requirements on A Level course.

Despite these positive aspects of the reform, Martin McLean cautioned that the introduction of T Levels and defunding of VTQs, including BTECS, may make it more challenging for young deaf and disabled people to achieve level 3 qualifications. There is insufficient longitudinal data available on the impact of different qualifications on the labour market outcomes of deaf and disabled people. Moreover, DfE's own Equality Impact Assessment highlighted these issues but did not highlight any mitigations. This is partly due to the broadness of BTEC qualifications, compared to the specialised T Levels, which open a wider labour market for young people. These issues are compounded by extremely poor quality CIAG for young people, which Martin McLean stated is often “plain wrong” – young people with SEND will require more specialised CIAG if we expect young people to choose a vocation aged 16 – 17 and the current CIAG system is not fit for purpose for young people with SEND.

Youth Employment UK Ambassador Ella Sanderson discussed her experience undertaking a Level 3 course in Childcare Development. She appreciated the benefits undertaking a vocational course conveyed including increased confidence and the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge she had developed in class into a vocational setting and welcomed the fact that T Levels include the opportunity to undertake a work placement. However, she also raised concerns that retaking Maths GCSE led to increased stress and that as she was unable to secure a passing grade, she was not able to receive a full diploma for her course. She expressed concerns that the current Maths and English GCSE requirement to receive a higher Level 3 course is unfair and would lead to more young people receiving a lesser qualification as a result.

The APPG then heard from a panel session:

Chief Executive of L&WI Stephen Evans noted some of the positives and negatives of T Levels are not so clear cut:

- Whilst the increase in teaching hours narrows the gap between the UK and other countries; it does not close it,
- The work placements aspect is a wonderful opportunity for young people and employers value the chance for in-work training and skills development, however the pandemic meant some of this was virtual which defeats the point of the placement.
- Some Government interventions are welcome, and the L&WI have heard positive feedback, however young people, employers and providers in L&WI's network that these amount to 'a list of initiatives' rather than 'a coherent offer'.

The more pressing concerns raised by L&WI were:

- The removal of English and maths as an exit requirement is a problem when there are 9 million adults with low numeracy and literacy in the UK – the only country in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) apart from the United States with equal levels of literacy and numeracy among the young and old. A Levels should have been levelled up to these requirements, rather than T Levels levelled down,
- T Levels appear to narrow the curriculum, rather than widen learning, knowledge and therefore opportunities.
- The decision making of DfE around defunding VTQs. Whilst it makes sense to remove funding for older qualifications to drive up demand for new ones; people will only do qualifications they have heard of, and employers will engage with the ones they understand. Therefore, how are we deeming which Level 3 VTQs have been a success and those that should lose funding? Should it not be the proportion of young people achieving Level 3 by 19 years old? L&WI are not sure the current T Level offer, will do that.
- Regarding labour market outcomes, we need to track people once they have finished a qualification for five years in the labour market to assess what they have achieved. Making decisions on defunding right now, is the wrong one.

The APPG then heard from guest panellist Catherine Sezen, Senior Policy Manager at AoC. The purpose of T Levels is to better prepare young people for the world of work – skills shortages. Feedback heard by AoC from current T Level students suggest students enjoy gaining practical skills alongside learning new knowledge, and staff have enjoyed the new qualifications and the opportunity to design programmes to meet the needs of students and their local labour market.

Colleges in AoC's network have welcomed the delay in funding but also raised concerns around English and maths requirements that are central to a student's next step into education, employment, or training.

However, issues remain within the current vocational and technical qualifications landscape that could undermine the post-16 proposals:

- the current low apprenticeship start rate among young people,
- the focus on the delivery of qualifications is too narrow, there is little mention of the need for broader development such as the acquisition of general life skills,

- students on other Level 3 qualifications will not benefit from additional hours allocated and distorting the market.
- CIAG does not start early enough and must be more comprehensive, impartial, and hands-on in order to meet student's needs.

There are also areas of T Levels themselves that require more attention:

- T Levels are a much larger programme than current programmes, they will be funded at the same base rate. Some colleges may struggle to run all the specialisms outlined thus far in T Levels with that level of funding. This becomes more challenging in technical areas facing skills gaps where teacher recruitment can be an issue. Additional funding is needed to recruit more staff and make the roles an attractive offer compared to working in the private sector.
- Employer engagement presents another challenge and there must be an overarching strategy that allows employers and FE providers of all sizes, across all regions, to establish clear current and future workforce needs whilst providing the right placements, in the right places, at the right times. That is a complex problem that requires a relationship stronger than what currently exists.

Guest panellist Tom Richmond, Director of EDSK, refers to four key principles that should underpin any education reform: rigour, coherence, value, and aspiration¹¹. Qualifications should be rigorous, coherent with the current offer and should encourage aspiration amongst young people with equal value assigned to different pathways.

Coherence is a particular problem and young people have no obvious signs as to what is different about a qualification and what it has to offer them. EDSK's biggest concern is that T Levels appear to be unlinked with the other parts of the UK's 11 – 18 education system: between Level 2's and T Levels, between universities and the T Level development, and between T Levels and apprenticeships. The proposals place T Levels somewhere in between a full-time education and training-based employment; in direct competition with apprenticeships. DfE made claims that T Levels could be used to facilitate both employment and higher education progression, but in the Sainsbury review they were intended to lead to employment. T Levels should focus on doing one thing and doing it well and on whether this reform is right from a young person's perspective.

Chief Executive of FAB, Tom Bewick, raised concerns that the Government has not learned from previous attempts to reform VTQs that date back to 1847¹², with the notable first Samuelson Report¹³ in 1882. The Sainsbury Review taught us that the Government is not involved enough in technical education.

Where VTQs are designed and owned by third parties, T Levels are designed and owned by the government, unintentionally creating a conflict of interest for the government. To complicate matters further the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education ('The Institute') must report to the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP, on the success of; procurement, roll-out and convening of employer panels; and hold an

¹¹ [Re-assessing the future: Part 2 – the final years of secondary education](#). See for definitions of Rigour, Coherence, Value, and Aspiration.

¹² [Some sources for the history of Technical Education in England – Part Three](#). (Armytage, 1957), (pay wall).

¹³ [Samuelson Reports \(1882 and 1884\): Reports of the Royal Commissioners Technical Instruction](#). London: HM Stationery Office.

accreditation register to decide funding on an unpublished criterion. Contribution to student choice should be the ultimate success criterion used to evaluate qualifications.

Whilst Tom Bewick agrees with Noni Csogor that the narrative of the Secretary of State for DfE, Nadhim Zahawi MP, had changed when shifted upon taking office when talking to select committees and the media – yet when talking to the SFCA in November it was a return to the old narrative of removing funding for qualification if they duplicate T Levels, regardless of their success.

Tom Bewick referred to other OECD countries and the number of 16–24-year-olds undertaking technical education when stating the UK rate is too low. In Switzerland, around two-thirds of 16–24-year-olds go straight into technical education whilst doing A Levels – firstly in the format of 80% classroom based and 20% work placement, before reversing that breakdown in the second year.

Tom Richmond suggested that without sufficient engagement of employers and other key stakeholders T Levels will struggle to improve labour market outcomes or deliver at scale, as it currently is not clear what value employers will get from delivering T Level placements as compared to other work experience placements such as apprenticeships. Stephen Evans added that access to T Level placements in particular sectors may vary across the country. He suggested that whilst employers are willing to help with work experience, they need to be given greater clarity on what good looks like. Key to addressing those two concerns is linking T Levels with industrial levelling up strategies. Catherine Sezen stressed the importance of greater engagement with young people as a stakeholder, particularly those that are undertaking T Levels right now. AoC also shares concerns about parity of access across the country.

During the question-and-answer session, Harry (young person) disclosed his learning disability and voiced his concerns that T Levels may not meet the needs of young people with SEND, referring to Martin McLean's point on young people with SEND achieving Level 2, and therefore may not be able to progress to T Levels. He recommended that the Government should seek more accessible alternatives to support young disabled people into work such as supportive internships and other enrichment activities. He also highlighted how progress on employment rates of young disabled people has currently stalled. Rabia Lemahieu, Disability and Skills Manager at Disability Rights UK, states that young people with SEND will not qualify for access to work during their T Level and so issues of transport and support are likely to arise for young people with SEND participating in T Levels.

Inquiry submissions: overview of written evidence

This inquiry had 17 responses from:

*Association of Colleges (AoC),
Creative & Cultural Skills (CCS),
Dawn Bonfield MBE,
Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB),
Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ),
Sarah Spibey,*

London Council: Young People's Education and Skills (LC: YPES),
MillionPlus,
Natspec,
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER),
Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR),
Pearson,
Prince's Trust,
Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng),
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS),
Youth Employment UK.

This section of the report will summarise the response, written responses to the inquiry are published in full in the Appendices.

Summary of response submissions

Written evidence overwhelmingly suggests that there is a significant amount of young people that will be disproportionately affected and disadvantaged by the proposals to defund vocational qualifications. Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) referenced the Department for Education's (DfE) own impact assessment which estimates that 4 percent of learners who are currently studying a level 3 qualification would not be able to access the new provision because of entry requirements. Noting that there is expected to be over 2 million 16-18 year olds by 2024 meaning more than 80,000 young people would be left without a level 3 education pathway.

Apprenticeships may be the alternative route available for learners not able to move onto T Levels or A Levels; but there were only 53,100 apprentice starts or 16-19 year olds between 2020 and 2021. There is no guarantee of this number increasing or the availability of apprenticeships matching the needs, ambitions and geographical locations of young people left behind in the Level 3 reforms.

FAB also highlighted DfE's evidence that suggest those young people at risk of becoming NEET are more likely to be impacted.

*"The qualifications which are likely to be withdrawn are taken by higher proportions of Black and Minority Ethnic students, students with lower prior achievement, students with SEND or eligible for Free School meals. These are the very students we most need to encourage to participate and progress in order to address structural inequalities." **AoC***

*"...disadvantage those from poorer communities, rural and coastal areas, those without access to good and cheap transport and those without personal or family connections with employer. ... The removal of engineering BTECS and other vocational qualifications at level 3 will create a vacuum which, as early evidence suggests, will not be replaced by an uptake in the number of young people taking T Levels." **RAEng***

“The existence of a T Level in a similar area should not negate alternatives that are structured differently, that provide an alternative for young people who learn differently.” **Prince’s Trust**

Youth Employment UK found that 72.7% of young people have never heard of T Levels whilst in school. Many young people at 16 do not know what they want from a future career, the option of flexible study that keeps pathways open is one that provides comfort to many students. Youth Employment UK found in the 2021 Youth Voice Census that young people are not consistently getting access to quality careers education or work experience, meaning making life choices at the age of 16 is too much of an ask of young people whilst the system does not offer CEIAG at the same level to all young people..

Evidence points to the fact that employers are likely to be disadvantaged by the proposals. The current labour market is tight, and skills shortages present before the pandemic have been exacerbated, making recruitment more difficult and costly to employers. The defunding of VTQs which currently offer a reliable skill pipeline may increase the challenges and costs faced by employers.

“Employers will be negatively impacted by the proposed reforms because they will lose a reliable pipeline of talent which they have recruited, used and valued for many years. As a result, employers will have to seek recruits from other sources which will take time and resources adding to their recruitment costs.” **NFER**

“Evidence suggests that employers will be impacted by skills gaps if BTECS are defunded. Level 3 BTEC Nationals support almost a quarter of a million students in 17 core subjects each year. There are sectors in which T Levels will not fully replace BTECS and other existing qualifications” **Pearson**

The Prince’s Trust also notes that 85% of the jobs that will be available in 2030 have yet to be invented, highlighting the need for an adaptive education system.

The APPG received responses which included wider fiscal implications of the post-16 reforms.

“Many qualifications under threat of defunding contribute to the UK education export strategy and to net education export targets. Applied General qualifications overall contribute £180m annually to GDP” **Pearson**

*“...the UK has a strong track record of exporting education and training across the world. Education and training exports were worth **£21.4 billion in 2017**. It is likely there will be a negative impact on the reputation of existing UK vocational qualifications as a result of the defunding of them by the UK Government.”* **OCR**

“Pearson’s Spotlight on Workforce Skills reports that research shows that BTEC learners tend to be earning more than A level learners by age 22, even accounting for the fact that A level learners are more likely to enter the labour market later. A narrowing of employment opportunities for these young people will result in their working life becoming precarious as they move in and out of poorly paid jobs which will mean less taxation revenue for HMRC” **NFER**

London Councils argue that the removal of funding for certain VTQs is irreversible and therefore caution is required. Roll out of an unknown programme at scale could lead to unforeseen unintended consequences for the DfE, for providers and importantly young people themselves. The costs of a failing programme and impact on the credibility of education reforms will be far reaching.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the current overrepresentation of students with additional educational challenges studying VTQs (disadvantaged, EAL, SEND and minority communities) it is likely that the most disadvantaged students will be disproportionately negatively impacted by the proposed defunding of VTQs.

If education reforms are going to disadvantage these young people at this early stage, we would expect to see this reflected in labour market outcomes. This is concerning given the APPG for Youth Employment's previous inquiry into employment policies that found the most disadvantaged groups, often with multiple barriers, are more likely to have worse labour market outcomes. However, these are casual links as data on T Level labour market outcomes will not be available for some time.

Evidence received by the inquiry suggests that there are a number of significant and interlinking factors that must come together to make T Levels a success - as of yet, it is unclear whether T Levels can bring factors together and replicate that across the country. For disadvantaged young people, those with SEND and from minoritised communities, these factors may present themselves as barriers. For T Levels to work a young people must:

- know the career, and within which sector, they wish to pursue,
- have received or have access to quality CIAG,
- have achieved the entry requirements at Level 2 study,
- be able to afford a T Level (travel costs, work clothing, food, unprovided equipment and loss of potential income if they work and have to take time off to fulfil the work placement),
- have time and capacity to commit to a large and demanding course,
- live in an area with T Level provision
- live in an area with an engaged and diverse labour market (across sector and employer size)

The government should remove the arbitrary hard cut-off timeline for defunding VTQs and ensure that there is a system which offers a guaranteed level 3 education opportunity for every young person, an opportunity that will lead to quality employment and/or further study in HE.

The government should commission an evidence-based approach to the roll out of T Levels by commissioning an independent longitudinal study of the impact (positive and negative) of the new qualifications on young people's progression into HE and Employment, including geographic and sector equality. This evidence should be sought before finalising which VTQs should be defunded.

We recommend an iterative process that will see the slow and steady roll out of T Levels over time which will allow for thorough evaluations and ensure equal provision of quality opportunities across sectors, geography and the different types of learners.

The government should not be looking at qualification levels in silo but include plans for Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in the round, ensuring that there is a full and considered strategy for young people to move through the education system and that there are no unintended gaps in provision. Government should ensure that it retains a variety of qualifications at level 2 and below, which can be used alongside high-quality non-accredited provision.

We recommend that the government works closely with employers and sector specialists who have concerns about T Level work placements and the course content to review the unintended gaps and map an alternative route for young people where T Levels do not work.

The government must increase focus on Level 2 apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds who are unable to follow a T Level or A Level route. Ensuring that there is an apprenticeship pathway for every young person who wants one before defunding VTQs.

The government should conduct a review of the careers education system to ensure that all pathways to employment are clear to all young people and those who influence them such as their parents/carers and teachers. Including the development of a central register of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Government should reserve some funding models and associated approaches to VTQs which would allow for rapid change and different approaches, particularly in response to the economic impact of the pandemic, Brexit, and the global climate emergency.

Appendices: Written Evidence

Appendix i: Association of Colleges

The Association of Colleges is pleased to submit evidence to the APPG on Youth Employment inquiry on the impact of vocational qualifications on young people's employability and labour market outcomes. We represent more than 90 per cent of the 234 colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. English colleges educate over 1.7 million students every year and employ approximately 106,000 full time equivalent staff. Colleges are inspirational places to learn, preparing students with valuable employability skills, and helping to develop their career opportunities.

1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

a. Which students will benefit from the changes?

Students will benefit from a greater number of hours on T levels, more in line with the hours in other countries and from the opportunity to experience the workplace and activities associated with it in the sector of their choice. Current students enjoy the practical skills acquisition alongside learning new knowledge.

b. Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

Students on other Level 3 programmes may not benefit from the additional hours allocated to T levels. Students will need to be well prepared for the challenge of summative assessment. The T Level transition programme needs to be funded more generously to help prepare students adequately to progress to and be successful in T Levels.

The question remains as to whether disadvantaged students will be disproportionately affected by these changes. The qualifications which are likely to be withdrawn are taken by higher proportions of Black and Minority Ethnic students, students with lower prior achievement, students with SEND or eligible for Free School meals. These are the very students we most need to encourage to participate and progress in order to address structural inequalities. The government's own analysis shows that the most disadvantaged students are twice as likely to be enrolled on qualifications likely to be withdrawn than the least disadvantaged. Will the Transition programme offer meet the needs of these students and allow them to progress?

c. Is there enough planned provision to support Level 1 and Level 2 learners?

We are currently waiting for the consultation on Level 2 and below. This is where the most impact on improving successful outcomes can be made. Most, though not all, learners who start at level 2 and below will have encountered challenges or barriers in their previous learning experience whether that because they have SEND needs (around 25% of all 16 to 18-year-olds and 17% of 19+ or adult learners in colleges), disrupted education, EAL background. It seems odd therefore that the current plans for the transition programme which prepares students for T levels for example is funded at 540 – 600 hours rather than for the same number of hours as T levels which are funded for around 50% more hours.

d. Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

T levels are much larger programmes of study than current programmes – additional hours are funded but at the same base rate. Will it be possible for colleges to run all the specialisms they wish to? Groups need to have around 16 students in them to be viable.

In the technical areas where there are skills gaps it is of course difficult to recruit teaching staff when they can earn so much more on site because there is a skills gap. This needs to be addressed through better base rate funding.

e. Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skill gaps).

For the technical landscape in particular to be successful there needs to be an overarching strategy of how employers (small, large, medium and micro) are going to be engaged in the system. This needs to be followed through at regional level by sector – in the spending review we heard that by 2025 there will be 100,000 students on T levels. The average college currently works with 700 employers so over half of those employers will need to offer placements as well as provide work experience for transition, apprenticeships, traineeships, HE placements. And it is more than just placements we need a strategic relationship, not just a transactional one, where employers are working with colleges to consider their workforce needs and pipeline.

f. Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

CEIAG is often raised a key area for focus. Careers education, information, advice and guidance is central to all key stakeholders understanding the new landscape; young people, adults, parents/carers, schoolteachers and employers. For younger students CEIAG needs to start early, it needs to be comprehensive and impartial and as much as possible hands on to really get to grips with employment opportunities available locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

2. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

We know that there will be 'other' qualifications alongside T Levels, Apprenticeship and A Levels post-16. There will be large qualifications alongside A levels in areas such as performing arts and sport where there are no T levels and there will also be small qualifications which will be able to be studied alongside A Levels to make up a programme to meet individual student needs. There will also be additional qualifications in the technical space alongside T Levels and apprenticeships in subject areas where there are no T Levels.

Key challenges here are:

- What the process and criteria are for both types of qualification?
- Ensuring there are no unintended consequences. For example, the current qualification model in the subjects of Hair and Beauty, motor vehicle maintenance and repair is that students take a one-year Level 2 and a one-year Level 3 – how will this work in the new landscape where the T level is a two-year qualification? Can students go straight to T Level if they don't have what are currently considered to be the foundation skills at Level 2? This needs clarifying.
- Is the amount of assessment suited to meet the needs of all young people? There is a variety of assessment; exams, projects and skills assessments and students can achieve at different levels in both (A*-E in core and project; pass, merit, distinction in the specialism. However, this amount of assessment may prove daunting and a

barrier to successful engagement and achievement. This needs to be carefully monitored.

- Evaluating why so few 16 to 18-year-olds start an apprenticeship. Currently only 2 per cent of 16-year-olds start an apprenticeship – why is that?
- Ensuring that there is the ability to be responsive to meet changing employer needs eg. to design and implement new qualifications to support the sustainability agenda
- It needs to be remembered that in the case of 16-to-18-year-old students in particular this is their upper secondary phase of education, and it isn't just about qualifications it is also about employability, preparing them for life and the joys and challenges that brings. It is also about engaging in sport, arts, engaging in the community through volunteering, understanding, and embracing difference.

3. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

- a. Are there specific short term implications? b. What are the long-term implications?**

The Government's intention is that reform of technical and vocational qualifications means that young people and adults are better prepared to meet the needs of the labour market. Continual evaluation of impact is vital to make sure the system works for employers and young people.

While the system is employer driven it is crucial that students and by extension those that facilitate their learning and success are always in the passenger seat – it is students not employers that will succeed or fail in the new landscape; that of course in turn will impact on meeting labour market needs.

For further information or to discuss these themes in more detail contact:

David MacKenzie, Public Affairs Manager - david.mackenzie@aoc.co.uk /
07553 891837

Appendix ii: Dawn Bonfield MBE CEng FIMMM FICE HonFIStructE FWES

Dawn Bonfield MBE 3 December 2021

Notes

- Response from Dawn Bonfield MBE CEng FIMMM FICE HonFIStructE FWES
- I am responding to this consultation as an individual, and on behalf of the engineering sector where I have most experience
- My comments relate mainly to students taking engineering BTEC qualifications
- I have been involved with the development of the content of the Engineering Design T level
- I work as a Royal Society Entrepreneur in Residence at King's College London, and a Royal Academy of Engineering Visiting Professor at Aston University
- I am not responding on behalf of Aston University, but am using some of my experiences with intake of BTEC students at that institution, as well as anecdotal evidence from other colleagues
- Any data included is indicative, and confirmation should be sought from the HEIs in question for accurate data
- I am also a member of the Royal Academy of Engineering Education and Skills committee, and have seen and contributed to the response that they have submitted

Q1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

The removal of funding will curtail a tried and tested pathway into engineering careers, namely through BTEC vocational qualifications, onto engineering higher education courses, potentially resulting in a worsening skills crisis in the engineering sector. Replacement of this BTEC pathway with an alternative pathway through the acquisition of T level qualifications is not guaranteed in the short term, as many schools, careers teachers, and parents will not be aware of the merits and values of this new pathway. I have an additional worry that the T level pathway will not be as accessible to all students in all parts of the country as BTECs currently are, based on the need for a work placement to be completed before the qualification can be gained. The need for work placements will potentially further disadvantage already underprivileged students, leading to lack of opportunity to those who would otherwise have had a route into engineering.

I agree that in the long term, a much simpler landscape of qualifications will be a good thing, but care should be taken to ensure that qualifications that have been successfully delivered over many years and not cut overnight, but a much smoother transition is planned.

a. Which students will benefit from the changes?

Students with more science and engineering capital, and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds will benefit from the changes, as they will be more likely to be able to find the work placements needed to successfully complete T level qualifications. There will also be a regional differentiation as some regions will have more placement opportunities than others.

b. Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

As per previous response, I think that those who will be left behind are those without science, engineering and social capital and those from regions of the country where work placements are harder to find, or are linked to particular industries that individuals do not wish to work in. I think it may also disadvantage those in rural communities where transport to their work placement is expensive or hard to find.

I also think that an engineering qualification requiring a work placement may provide an additional barrier to those students from under-represented groups, such as young women, who already face barriers to entry to engineering. One more barrier (i.e. the need to find and complete a work placement) may be enough to put them off entering engineering.

Currently, in Higher Education Institutions like Aston University, which take on students with BTECs to both their Engineering Foundation Level degree course, and their full degree courses, a relatively large number of students benefit from this pathway option.

As an example, in 2017/18 almost 20% of the intake to engineering and physical sciences degree course had BTEC or a mixture of A level and BTEC qualifications.

Anecdotal evidence from a number of Universities points to the fact that the students from the BTEC pathways need different types of support than A level students, and this is notably related to the students' lack of examination practice, which is usually the predominant assessment method at University. The BTEC students may also need additional types of support to help them become independent learners, and I feel that the work placements

offered by the T levels would create more independent students who may be more equipped to survive in the University environment.

c. Is there enough planned provision to support Level 1 and Level 2 learners?

I am not aware what planned provision will be in place to support level 1 and 2 learners on to T levels, so can't comment, but do know that a level of knowledge and understanding is required, so expect that they will need support in achieving this starting level.

d. Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

I am sure that any disruption to the numbers of young people able to find pathways into engineering will result in further lack of skills in an industry which is already facing a skills shortage, and this will impact the UK's ability to deliver the changes that are needed to achieve our net zero, and other strategic challenges.

I imagine that there will also be fiscal implications to the FE colleges who were previously providing vocational qualifications that get cut, if equal numbers of students are not attracted to T levels, as well as to HEIs who take students from the BTEC pathways.

e. Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skills gaps).

Employers will certainly be impacted if fewer skilled individuals are available for work in the engineering sector. Also, employers are well aware of the skills that students will possess who have completed BTEC qualifications in engineering, and it will take time before the same level of knowledge is acquired for graduates of the T level qualifications.

Employers will also be impacted as they will need to play their part in offering work placements, in order to allow students to complete their T level qualification, which is something that employers have repeatedly said will be difficult for them to achieve in the numbers required.

f. Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

Yes, I imagine that any changes that simplify the vocational qualifications on offer will help careers advisers provide better guidance, once they are aware of the new qualifications on offer, but in the short term they will have to receive some training on what the new qualifications entail, I would imagine.

I would like to see some central register of vocational qualification and apprenticeship training being provided by the government, equivalent to the UCAS system, to help young people see what their choices are on a national level, rather than the onus put on them to find the availabilities at a regional level.

Also a centralised information point for the new qualifications would be sensible until the new qualifications are bedded in.

Q2. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

I don't have sufficient visibility of the future economy and the skills mix that is needed to judge this, but I do know that skills change all of the time, and a system that is able to reflect this, and be agile will be required to provide the provision that the country needs.

Recent changes have shown that jobs that are required today could not have been predicted only a few years ago, so we see that things change quickly. I do not see much flexibility being built into the T level qualifications – in fact quite the opposite – which would enable this flexibility to be realised.

One area in particular that I think is currently missing is Off-site construction, and I feel that this is a serious omission to the T level provision.

Q3. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

Personally I think not, for the reasons given in the answer above. More flexibility is required to provide training that is agile and can be adapted to need. I do not see sufficient provision of 'green skills' that will enable us to reach net zero. The boundaries in place with T levels, which require them to lead to job specialisations, are not helpful, as jobs will become specialised in areas that have yet to be determined.

Q4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

Fewer students will find pathways into engineering if BTECs (in particular) are cut before new pathways are established.

a. Are there specific short-term implications?

b. What are the long-term implications?

The long term implications of a disruption to the supply of sufficient engineering skills is an ability to deliver against the long terms needs we have, and the commitments that we have made to delivery of R&D, post covid recovery, the levelling up agenda, and net zero.

There is also an implication on individuals who are deprived of equal access to career paths that would take them to well paid, secure and successful careers, and create a fairer and more equal society.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that current successful pathways into engineering are retained in conjunction with T level qualifications so that one can be ramped down whilst the other ramped up. A hard cut off of BTECs will be detrimental to young people and to FE and HEIs delivering engineering qualifications, and so detrimental to the engineering sector as a whole.
- Ensure that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and from traditionally under-represented groups in engineering are not disadvantaged by the requirement for a work experience placement, nor by the regional variations that lack of placements will impose.

Appendix iii: Federation of Awarding Bodies Building a world-leading technical education system

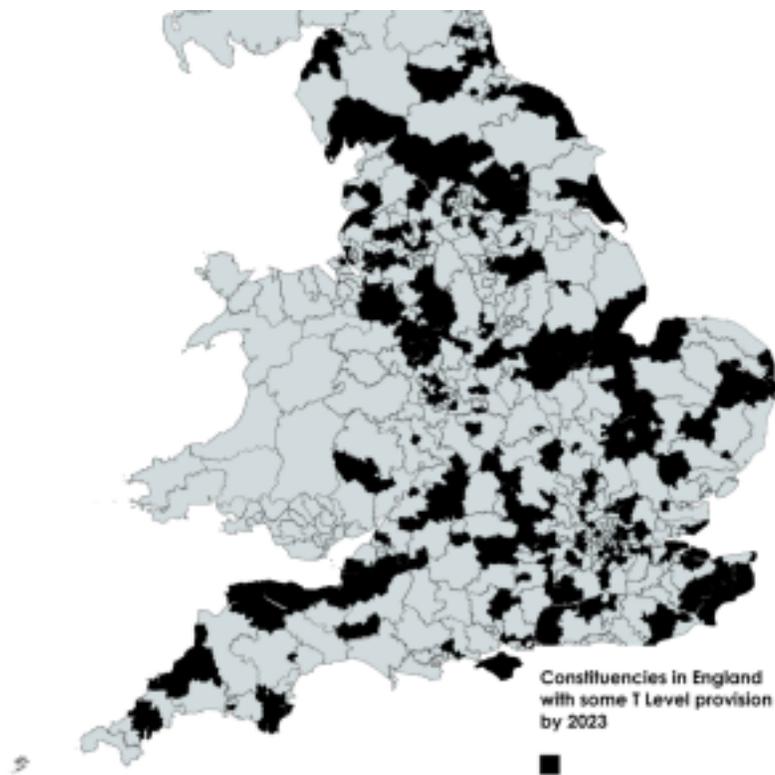
Response to the APPG for Youth Employment's inquiry on the impact of vocational qualifications on young people's employability and labour market outcomes

Building a world-leading technical education system

- The Skills Bill sets out the government's desire to become a world-leader in apprenticeships and technical education by 2030 and to 'level up' the country through dramatic changes to the qualifications landscape at level 3. **However, the government's proposals are likely to exacerbate inequalities and undermine the overall goals of the government's 'levelling up' agenda by disproportionately impacting disadvantaged young people.**
- The Skills Bill sets out proposals for a new qualifications landscape for learners aged 16- 19 that forces them down an academic (A Level) or technical (T Level) education track. Applied general qualifications do not play a significant role in the government's plans despite an estimated 259,291 learners currently studying for a BTEC qualification.¹ Learners often take qualifications like BTEC alongside A Levels because they are undecided on their future progression route and this tried-and-tested option leaves them well-placed to progress to university or an apprenticeship. As former Education Secretary David Willetts stated in the House of Lords debate, '[these qualifications] straddle that divide between vocational and academic—and that is a good thing, too. It is totally unrealistic to expect every teenager neatly to fit into one of just two specified routes.'²
- The Department for Education's own impact assessment estimates that 4 per cent of learners who are currently studying a level 3 qualification would not be able to access the new level 3 provision because of the expected entry requirements (p.7).³ Given that the ONS expects there to be over 2 million 16-to-18-year-olds by 2024, this means that more than 80,000 young people could be stuck without a level 3 pathway. Apprenticeships may be a useful route through to work for some, but vacancies are unlikely to meet demand (only 53,100 apprentices starting between 2020-21 were aged between 16 and 19).⁴
- The Department's impact assessment shows that their qualification reforms will disproportionately impact those at risk from becoming NEET, learners with BME backgrounds and those with a low likelihood of university progression (children of manual workers, in certain parts of the country). Yet, research shows that existing level 3 provision is already helping to support these learners. For example, the Social Market Foundation found that 44 per cent of white working-class students enter university with at least one BTEC and 37 per cent of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications. **The qualification landscape must include pathways to further study and work at level 3 that can enable all learners to progress.**
- Existing technical provision will begin to be phased out in favour of T Levels from 2024 – a one-year delay from the government's initial timeline. The rollout of T Levels is still at an early stage with a small initial cohort beginning their studies in 2020. While teacher and learner testimonies have been positive, we will not see the first graduates from the programme until summer 2022. Crucially, there are many parts of the country without any T level provision. The government's **own list** of T Level providers suggests that only 134 schools and colleges will have experience of delivering a Digital T Level by 2023 – the point at which the government wanted to

stop funding all alternatives in this subject area. This is only 40 per cent of the total number of school sixth forms and colleges in England, meaning that the majority will have to switch to delivering an unfamiliar qualification at the expense of tried and tested alternatives.⁵The Secretary of State announced a one-year delay to implementation on 15 November 2021, but is that concession enough to ensure that the education system will be ready to fully implement these reforms? Crucially, awarding organisations and other key stakeholders are still awaiting detailed guidance on what qualifications will be defunded and the criteria that new qualifications will need to meet. **Given this, and the early stage of rollout for T Levels, it seems short sighted to discuss defunding alternative qualifications until we know that teachers and employers are confident that T Levels and other reformed qualifications are appropriate replacements.**

- The Department for Education's list of 194 approved T Level providers for 2020-23 shows patchy distribution across England. While centres in some parts of the country will have been effectively trained and introduced to the new T Level qualifications, the map below shows constituencies across the North, Midlands, South West and East Anglia are likely to miss out on essential preparation time and CPD opportunities. The availability of T Levels in an area is also contingent on there being sufficient work placements (at least 315 hours in duration). Is it fair to cut off career options to learners just because there aren't, for example, sufficient engineering work placements in their local area?



Meeting employer needs

- **Extensive employer consultation is already a key part of the qualification development process for awarding organisations, yet this has been downplayed by the government in their explanation of the proposed changes at level 3,** suggesting that T Levels are different from established qualifications because they 'actively involve employers.'¹⁶ An in-depth case study is provided in appendix 1 to

provide an example of how awarding organisations already work with employers and other key stakeholders to develop high-quality technical qualifications.

- In sectors where practical experience is deemed essential (such as horticulture), qualifications combined with work placements/traineeships are an established route into work and also provide an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills on-the-job. This is particularly important when there is a shortage of apprenticeship places to offer the combination of work and study. **This highlights the importance of having a diversity of qualification pathways to meet skills needs alongside apprenticeships.** Pye Tait (2019) spoke to 1,101 employers in the horticulture sector and found 'a lack of apprentices and (sector specific) apprenticeships in the sector' (p.80) alongside a significant skills gap.⁷ The study suggests that a lack of appropriate and available training opportunities is a key barrier to skills development and the employers surveyed stated that they were unable to fill 14 per cent of skilled roles (such as gardeners and arboricultural consultants). With a projected increase in these roles of 23 per cent, reducing established qualification pathways in areas such as these will exacerbate the existing shortfall in skilled labour. **Careful engagement with all stakeholders (including employers) is needed to help the Institute and Department understand where existing qualifications are essential in meeting skills needs and where a blanket cut to provision could have devastating consequences.**
- **The government's planned reforms at level 3 are likely to exacerbate skills shortages in some sectors because fewer learners will be coming through the system with level 3 qualifications.** 79 per cent of respondents to a survey of providers (93 per cent of FE colleges) that we delivered in December 2020⁸ agreed that withdrawing funding from the level 3 qualifications as proposed in the government's level 3 consultation (January 2021) would affect their capacity to meet student demand in certain sectors. We know that some sectors are already struggling to recruit level 3 qualified staff. In childcare, for example, the National Day Nurseries Association's 2018-19 workforce survey found that 77 per cent of employers struggled to recruit level 3 employees.⁹

3 December 2021

¹ Estimate from the SFCA/#ProtectStudentChoice campaign.

² Skills and Post-16 Education Bill debate, 12 October 2021, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-10-12/debates/49E8CD08-E5F1-420B-8A15-E9B58AA8FE17/SkillsAndPost-16EducationBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-10-12/debates/49E8CD08-E5F1-420B-8A15-E9B58AA8FE17/SkillsAndPost-16EducationBill(HL)).

³ Department for Education, Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Second Stage Impact Assessment, https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3/supporting_documents/Impact%20Assessment%20%20Review%20of%20post16%20qualifications%20at%20level%203_.pdf.

⁴ ONS statistics, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2020-21>.

⁵ Data on school & college numbers from the Association of Colleges and Make Happen (<https://www.makehappen.org/>)

⁶Skills Minister Alex Burghart quotes in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, Fourth Sitting, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-12-02/debates/25ea01c5-6b32-4fd4-9437-f98eb26f1659/SkillsAndPost-16EducationBill\(Lords\)\(FourthSitting\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-12-02/debates/25ea01c5-6b32-4fd4-9437-f98eb26f1659/SkillsAndPost-16EducationBill(Lords)(FourthSitting))

⁷2019 Horticulture Sector Skills Survey, <https://www.pyetait.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/OrnamentalHorticultureSkillsSurvey-Report-FinalReport-29Oct19.pdf> ⁸Survey delivered in conjunction with ASCL, AoC and

AELP.

⁹NDNA 2018-19 England Workforce Survey,

https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Reports_and_surveys/Workforce_survey/nursery_workforce_survey_2019.aspx

Annex 1: Case Study: GAVFX – A qualification developed to meet employer needs in an emerging industry

In 2017 the AIM Qualifications Level 3 Extended Diploma/Diploma in Games, Animation and VFX Skills were approved as Tech Levels. They were originally developed in 2015 in partnership with NextGen Skills Academy: a ground-breaking initiative invested in by both government (the UKCES Ownership of Skills initiative) and industry. NextGen's employer steering group consists of Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe, Microsoft, Ubisoft Reflections Double Negative, Framestore, Blue Zoo, Creative Assembly, The Imaginarium, Playground Games and Centroid, who offer their ongoing support ensuring these qualifications reflect the nature and pace of industry growth.

The qualifications were developed in response to employer identified problems with available qualifications and a recognition that graduates entering industry were not occupationally ready. Industry concluded that in order to secure graduates with the right skills and knowledge, they must enter university adequately prepared with skills and knowledge specific for the job role, supported by a sound understanding of all aspects of the production pipeline. Rather than a bank of optional units, it was imperative that essential units for demonstrating competence should be mandatory with synoptic assessment

Named as Qualification of the Year at the 2016 Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) Awards, these Games, Animation and VFX qualifications are recognised for their innovation in meeting the STEAM Agenda (science, technology, engineering, art and maths).

The flexibility in the qualification design has allowed centres to respond to the challenge of COVID-19 by delivering online, as praised by Former Skills Minister Gillian Keegan: <https://www.sunderlandcollege.ac.uk/the-college/news/article/mp-praises-colleges-innovative-response-to-covid-19/>

'AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group were selected by the NextGen employer steering group as the awarding organisation to work with industry and develop the new extended diploma. AIM's reputation for producing exceptional qualifications and their understanding of the creative industry, meant that they totally understood what was needed. The result was, an Ofqual approved vocational qualification designed to give students two years of study in a combination of art, maths, coding and vocational skills (crucially with mentorship, teaching and support from industry) that they previously weren't able to access in any existing qualification.' Amy Smith, Head of Talent at Framestore

'Starting to deliver the NextGen AIM Qualifications course has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for our students, tutors and the college. With our previous course I found that sometimes we would be teaching outdated techniques or software. With NextGen and AIM Qualifications the indicative content is more adaptable and, as it's designed together

with industry, I know that our students are learning the most up-to-date techniques and software available.'

Tony Lewis, Loughborough College course tutor

'The AIM Qualifications level 3 diploma and extended diploma in Games, Animation and VFX is a key part of the creative learner offering at Sunderland College. It offers a stretching curriculum which prepares our students ably for HE at the best institutions in the subject areas and promotes a model of 'learning by doing' as prescribed by the employers who wrote the qualification. It follows a creative work flow pattern with quick iteration of projects, followed by reflection and further learning.

Because it was entirely written by employers our staff are confident that it teaches the skills our students will need not only for further learning at HE but also accelerate their progression in the workplace. It teaches the creative and technical skills, transferable across all 3 sectors and wider creative industries, but still allows the student to specialise their skills in the second year, preparing them for HE. Sunderland College take advantage of the employer engagement and tutor CPD run by NextGen Skills Academy, which was designed to support to the qualification at its development, which enriches content for both students and our teaching team.' Jane Reed, Sunderland College Faculty Director

'I did the NextGen AIM Awards level 3: Games, Animation and VFX Skills course at Nescot College, graduating in the 16/17 academic year. The course taught me the key skills I needed to excel in my future career in the VFX industry and covers many areas, including the use of industry standard software, so we were all able to learn and understand how these pieces of software are used professionally. I applied for the apprenticeship very early on, I was very fortunate to be invited to an interview and was offered the position shortly after. Starting at DNEG was a massive adrenaline rush! Being at one of the top VFX houses in the industry really did have a huge positive impact and what an honour!'

Connor Tong, L4 VFX apprentice at DNEG

'I think I would have really struggled in my first year of university, if I didn't know the correct methods of modelling and I would definitely been a year behind, progress wise. I learned a lot of PBR workflows and traditional workflows in college.'

Tyler Hartshorne, ex AIM GAVFX learner, studying Computer Games Art at Teeside University

'The partnerships that the course has with many of the biggest names in the Games, Animation and VFX industries, was definitely a big selling point for me and was something I hadn't seen offered anywhere else. One highlight of the course was definitely going to London to attend the NextGen Academy Showcase event, where I was able to present my portfolio to many companies in the industry.'

Adam Lyons, ex AIM GAVFX learner, studying Computer Arts at Abertay University

In comparison with many equivalent qualifications, this example demonstrates a more dynamic and successful approach to technical education, evidenced by the enthusiasm of industry to recruit from these qualifications directly onto apprenticeships at level 4. Designed by industry for industry, they are continually informed and supported by the sector who are represented at AIM Board level.

Appendix iv: JCQ

[JCQ VTQ Policy Group Response to the APPG on Youth Employment's inquiry: The Impact Of Vocational Qualifications On Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes](#)

JCQ welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important inquiry. The Government's reforms propose some of the largest-scale changes to technical qualifications since BTECs were introduced in 1974. The reforms to Level 3 should also be considered alongside other significant interventions such as the Advanced GNVQs in the 1990s to early 2000s and later on the Advanced 14-19 Diplomas which were withdrawn in 2013. There are important lessons to be learned from all of these previous interventions and consideration should be given to how best to phase in such a significant level of reform now.

Although JCQ acknowledges that the proposed model draws on research in other high performing jurisdictions we are concerned that it may not accommodate the full range of programmes and routes to further education and employment that are required to meet the needs of the diverse population of 16-19 year olds.

Young people should be able to make a meaningful choice at 16 that doesn't preclude choice at 18. For this reason, we would prefer to see reforms broadened to accommodate a greater variety of qualifications within some proposed constraints, and that no route be defined entirely by a single outcome – whether that be progression straight into employment or via higher education.

What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

The removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications risks putting a lot of unnecessary pressure on young people to make a binary decision at 15/16 years old, when many of them aren't ready to do so. This is because the removal of some of the existing vocational and technical qualifications would reduce the option to blend academic and vocational qualifications, forcing a stark choice that risks limiting flexibility in progression either to higher education or straight to employment. Among the qualifications that could be defunded are many that are proven to be highly valued by learners; millions of whom have chosen them to progress into higher education, into work or further training. It would be a mistake to lose them all if choice is constrained too strictly.

The narrow choice between A-Level, T-Level and apprenticeships would not meet the needs of a large proportion of the 16-18 cohort. JCQ would like DfE to allow more time for reforms to be successfully implemented, following a clear withdrawal model including standard annual reviews that take into account possible unintended consequences such as:

- fewer people achieving Level 3 outcomes as breadth of options are reduced
- greater drop-out rates from young people being encouraged to take up wrong course for them at too early a stage
- the potential loss of qualifications and awarding organisations needed to service Post 19 learning
- a hiatus in provision leaving students with fewer choices and potentially no local offer for their desired pathway

JCQ is proud of the breadth and strength of the range of options provided by its members; qualifications that are designed to be representative of the population at large and to be aspirational for all learners.

There are qualifications that have a higher number of SEN students, not because they are of a different standard but because they offer a different course structure, assessment type or adapted learning materials. To remove funding from these would have a disproportionate

impact on those learners according to the Government's own impact study. Impact on the most disadvantaged cannot be dismissed so lightly and we hope that Government will work with stakeholders to ensure that these risks are satisfactorily addressed.

Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

The Government's reforms work well for individuals who know exactly what they want to do at a young age and though there are great career advice improvements being made through the Gatsby Foundation network and its important benchmarks, it's still unusual for that certainty to exist. Much more will need to be done to ensure that young people who cannot or do not pursue T-Levels are given the advice they need to progress into employment or the next stage technical training.

The Government reforms suggest a re-routing away from Degree level HE options. However vocational HE courses are often a route into highly skilled technical and professional employment. HE is incredibly diverse and vocational provision in HE needs to be valued and understood when drawing up the provision for both the academic and technical routes.

Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

T-Levels are a positive development in technical education but need time to fully embed within the existing landscape which is why we welcome the recently announced one year delay to reform. However, the new timeline still does not give enough time for T-Levels to become properly established before funding is removed from many other existing technical qualifications. This seems to be a high-risk strategy for such a significant reform.

The proposed technical T level route is a big commitment for a 16-year-old and more demanding and restricted in many ways than the A Level route. It would be preferable to offer learners the option of some limited combinations of vocational/technical and academic qualifications.

The Government must take time to consider what learners and employers value in existing qualifications that might be missing from T-Levels and what the cost is to learners and employers of a qualification no longer being available that was the chosen route for an individual's education and career progression, or covered the preferred skills set for a particular employer.

It will be important that where there is no alternative option to an apprenticeship, a classroom based course be made available as a funded option so as not to limit options, especially for key occupational pathways at a time when options to employment and further study should be kept as broad as possible. Accessing an apprenticeship relies on employers being able to and having the inclination to create the opportunity, in areas where there are no such opportunities learners are automatically disadvantaged by not being able to study a subject they are interested in. This in turn could have negative consequences for future labour market demand and succession planning.

At a recent JCQ Policy Event, Lee Hornsby from the Federation of Creative Industries explained the impact that the reforms would have on his sector where there are serious skill shortages with employers struggling to find crew and productions staff in particular; in the

meantime there has been a drop in take-up of creative courses. In 2019 about 2.1 million people worked in the creative industries with a further 1.4 million jobs were directly supported by the creative industries contributing around £116 billion to the UK economy; the creative jobs pipeline is a vital component of the UK's economic growth.

Any reforms that might further limit options and access of learners throughout the UK to pursue creative careers should be of concern to everyone. Creative T-levels when they start could well be a good option for learners, not just for those living around creative and cultural hubs but for those in more rural areas where providers might face more challenges to secure industry placements. For those learners who don't suit T-Levels – there have to be other options available to equip learners for a creative career, including via university study options. It is also important to note that working class voices are already missing from the creative industries and that reducing the number of qualifications available will likely exacerbate the impact on opportunity and social justice.

What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

Existing qualifications serve a multitude of learner needs and employer needs. There is no guarantee that T-levels alone can fulfil all of these needs, especially in the short term.

Among the largest vocational subject areas without a T-level route, DfE has for the most part acknowledged that there will be a need for qualifications to remain (Sport, Art & Design, Public Services, Performing Arts). However, the Health & Social Care T-Level or Childcare T-Level may not meet all the needs that are met by current a diversity of provision in Level 3 health and social care or childcare qualifications. We also suggest that the Construction/BSE sector is not best served by one large two year programme at 16-18?

Brenda Yearsley from Siemens UK who recently spoke at a JCQ Policy Event explained that her organisation's success is all about inclusivity and diversity of recruitment. Despite the quality of A Levels and potential of T-Levels, defunding a number of vocational qualifications will definitely leave some technical skills gaps, added to concerns about the availability of T-Level industry placements; there is a strong case for applied generals as part of a mixed programme which Siemens considers provides breadth and depth alongside A Level programmes. This echoed insights from the early years sector, Jill Mason from Kids Planet Day Nurseries emphasised the importance of a variety of routes into a sector which is experiencing an ongoing recruitment crisis exacerbated by the pandemic and which requires a constant stream of new recruits to meet mandatory ratios. As Jill put it the most important thing is to get the right people on board, enthusiasm is more important at the outset than a specific qualification.

Brenda described the type of candidate Siemens looks for at interview, who might have less good academic results than other applicants but applies knowledge well, has good teamwork skills and can talk confidently about technical elements. Applied knowledge is a central part of many of the qualifications that the Government proposes to defund despite their demonstrable value to UK industry.

JCQ's membership covers all four nations of the United Kingdom. Portability is an urgent concern in an increasingly fragmented education and skills landscape. Despite devolution in education policy, many vocational qualifications are offered across the UK and their value is recognised in each country. This is particular true of the technical sectors where skills accreditation for employment sees UK geographical boundaries as meaningless.

Moves to take funding away from some of the qualifications on offer will create an uneven playing field for learner options in the different UK nations and limit their ability to move around for work purposes.

Finally, the Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted the economy and labour market in ways that we have not seen or experienced for decades. At a time of serious disruption, having a flexible and varied education, skills and training landscape is vital. This means having a variety of accreditation options to choose from plus curriculum and standards that are responsive to change and open to innovation from a vibrant qualifications' market.

For further information please contact:

Madeleine Jennings

Policy and External Affairs Manager

Joint Council for Qualifications

madeleine.jennings@jcq.org.uk

Appendix v: London Councils

London Councils Young People's Education and Skills Response to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment's Inquiry 'The Impact Of Vocational Qualifications On Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes'

Summary

We ask the Group to call on the government to call in plans to defund BTECs and other Applied General Qualifications at least until T levels have proven themselves.

Background

London Councils represents London's 32 borough councils and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion.

The Young People's Education and Skills Board is a partnership body supporting local authorities and strategic partners who have responsibilities for the education, skills and employment of young people, to deliver their responsibilities for young people's effective participation, achievement and progression. Young People's Education and Skills is the only forum in London where London government (local authorities and the Mayor of London/Greater London Authority), representatives of educational settings and business representatives come together strategically to review the crucial 16 to 18 (key stage 5) stage of learning and consider the impact of education and skills on London's labour market and economy. Young People's Education and Skills sits within London Councils.

The Young People's Education and Skills team has collated this response from its work and that of the Boards since T Levels were first announced.

Suitability of T levels

We support the introduction of T levels and technical education in general. Because of this support we used the various consultations before T levels were made available to urge the government to spend more time considering the design elements and pilot the qualifications ahead of its planned roll-out. We believe that there are some design flaws, particularly in the transition year, that needed to be resolved by design, rather than in the course of implementation. We are concerned that having pressed ahead with the introduction of T levels, issues may emerge that have either not been foreseen by ministers or the DfE or for which inadequate contingency planning has taken place.

For that reason, we have opposed plans to defund Applied General Qualifications, including BTECs, before T levels have become firmly established within the learning landscape. Although the government has announced a short delay in its decision, we believe that even more time will be needed before T levels can have demonstrated adequately that they have earned the confidence of young people and their families as well as businesses and the educational establishment and have contributed to the skills base of the country.

Take-up of Applied General Qualifications

Approximately one in five young Londoners at key stage 5 take Applied General Qualifications, either alongside A levels and other qualifications or exclusively. Increasing numbers of young people find that Applied General Qualifications, especially BTECs, provide a route to further and higher learning through both higher level vocational and technical qualifications acquired in employment and in Higher Education Institutions.

For those young people entering employment after having taken Applied General Qualifications at key stage 5, the qualifications they have gained provide access to higher skilled and better paid employment on entry into the labour market than would otherwise be accessible. Moreover, they provide a platform upon which upskilling and, where necessary, reskilling can be built later in life.

Since the participation age was raised to 18, London has seen a shift towards more young people entering schools sixth forms and many more young people have been following the route through A levels to university. The latest figures show that more than 60 per cent of young Londoners progressed to university after key stage 5. The education system seems to have served these young people well, even though some will not have attained a degree at the end of their studies nor secured graduate-level employment after leaving. Of the remaining 40 per cent (that is, those who did not go to university), a high proportion continue learning after the age of 18 – often because they needed more time to make up for lower-than average results at GCSE before entering a level 3 course – with some continuing through higher level skills programmes having pursued Applied General Qualifications. Unfortunately, around one in eight young people either do not sustain settled employment or do not secure a place in further or higher education. On one level, this points to clear priorities for everyone associated with the education system to address; but it also demonstrates some systemic issues that require attention at policy and funding levels; for example, the quality and impartiality of careers education, information, advice and guidance and the preparedness of young people to enter the world of work.

T levels and businesses

As yet, the impact of T levels on business competitiveness and productivity is unproven. While we hope that evaluation will subsequently prove the benefits of T levels, it is far too soon to demonstrate with certainty that they have delivered the impact that is anticipated. Defunding established, understood and proven qualifications while the government's policies are being rolled-out appears precipitous. We support efforts to retain Applied General Qualifications, particularly BTECs, until T levels have proven themselves, having ironed-out any flaws in their design.

Evaluating T levels

We urge the government to use established methods of longitudinal studies to track the progress of T level candidates into employment and the Higher Education system to demonstrate their effectiveness. We further suggest that the government should use pending changes in the organisation of post-16 learning to gather authentic feedback from employers on the effectiveness of T levels in improving business performance. While T levels are rolling out across sectors for 16 to 18 year-olds, the government may also wish to consider whether they are appropriate vehicles for delivering its wider skills agenda, for example in 'levelling up' the economy, addressing skills and labour shortages, countering the demographic 'time bomb' of an aging population profile that will rely on a more adaptable adult workforce, delivering on the pledges of a new green economy and the extensive refitting upon which they are based. It may prove that Applied General Qualifications provide greater certainty to deliver on these objectives in the short-to-medium-term. Defunding Applied General Qualifications for 16- to 18-year-olds will create major turbulence in education and the labour market. Removing this essential component at this stage would be unwise and would be difficult to re-establish if it proves necessary to do so in the future.

T levels and youth employment

There is still some uncertainty whether T levels will establish themselves as providing the definitive credentials young people need to secure career pathways. It is less clear whether T levels can replace BTECs as the qualifications of choice for adults seeking to demonstrate an increase in their skills or to reskill in new occupations. While these may emerge in time, we argue that it is unwise to remove proven alternatives such as BTECs. This may prove an irreversible decision that places the future of many young people at risk and could destabilise skills pathways, removing options for upskilling and reskilling that underpin government strategies. It could potentially set-back young people's employment prospects and optimism for the future. We argue that this is too great a risk to take and therefore urge further postponement of the decision to defund Applied General Qualifications.

Apprenticeships

The annual London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) and London Councils survey of over 1,000 business leaders in Greater London reported in November and showed that after 4 years the apprenticeship levy is still struggling to have the impact it should do.

- Overall, only 7 per cent of London businesses currently employ apprentices, showing no real change from 2020 (8 per cent), although this is significantly higher for large employers (42 per cent), again in line with the 2020 figures.
- 38 per cent of business leaders said they did not know if they needed to pay the levy, up from 18 per cent in the 2019 survey, and of those employers required to pay the apprenticeship levy only a third (33 per cent) currently employ apprentices.

Contact details

This written evidence to the Group's inquiry is from the London Councils Young People's Education and Skills Board.

Please contact Peter O'Brien, London Councils Young People's Education and Skills, 59½ Southwark Street, London SE1 0AL

email peter.obrien@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Telephone 020 7934 9743

Appendix vi: MillionPlus

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment Inquiry

Submission to "The Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes"

Connor Mckenzie, Head of Policy & Research
2021

25 November

[MillionPlus](#) is the Association for Modern Universities, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We represent a range of higher education institutions across the UK.

Q1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

- a. It is hard to see which students will benefit from the removal of funding for BTEC and other applied general qualifications. While it is likely that many students will benefit from the introduction of T Levels, the constriction of choice for students does nothing for the opportunities of young people in England. It would appear that the only real beneficiary of the removal of funding for BTEC qualifications is the government's own agenda on technical education, and its ability to demonstrate its performance in this regard. The government has previously shown its intent to create a situation where there is no other technical or vocational option at Level 3 other than T Levels (except for apprenticeships). This will ensure that demand for T Levels is strong, as they are the only game in town.
- b. There is serious concern across the education sector that removing funding for BTECs could negatively impact on access and participation to higher education. BTECs have played a critical role in widening access and participation into many communities and household that have traditionally been underserved by our education system. Students at MillionPlus institutions who are black, from working class backgrounds, or from low participation neighbourhoods are all more likely to have taken BTECs and used them as part of their progression into higher education. This is why it is a more significant issue for modern universities, as they have traditionally served communities with higher take-up of BTEC qualifications, with students who have been able to access and benefit from higher education through this route.

- c. The objective of government to improve technical education in England is an admirable one, however there is a fear that in the development of this agenda some of the bigger picture might become lost. The decision to propose a removal of funding for BTEC and other applied generals is perhaps an example of this. Both the Prime Minister and the previous Secretary of State for Education have been explicit in their emphasis that this agenda is about prioritising the “other 50%” who do not go to university. But it is unclear how a restriction of options at level 3 serves the so-called “other 50%”. There is a logic to streamlining the qualifications available to young people to ensure they can optimise their choices. However, ultimately the end goal is to create an education system that is clear and understandable so that people can make decisions about progression that are most suited to them. Arguably the most critical factor is improving the Information and Guidance (IAG) for people so that they can make the most informed choice, irrespective of the menu of options. Improving IAG will have a more profound effect on optimising choice of educational pathways. Some students in the so-called “other 50%” may well benefit from having a more streamlined technical option with the introduction of T Levels. However, it is also likely that many of this group will not be served by their options being narrowed. Many young people are still making decisions on where their next steps might be while studying at level 3, and may not yet have a fully-formed view of their direction of travel. BTECs have historically afforded a degree of flexibility in terms of their progression, most crucially because they can be combined with a mix of different types of qualifications and can accommodate a mix of different subjects. In short, early specialisation may be good for some young people through T levels, but it certainly will not serve everybody, and this reality must impact on government thinking. MillionPlus is pleased to see that the government has decided to halt the decision to defund BTECs and delay any action for at least one year. It is hugely encouraging that the department has been explicit about wanting to adopt an “evidence-led” approach here. But this does not mean the concerns voiced here have been removed. In some respects, this only delays them.
- d. There is a serious question over the accessibility of level 3 qualifications if funding for BTECs and applied generals is removed. The initial plan for T levels was to create a minimum exit requirement for GCSE English and Mathematics. This would threaten access and progression for thousands of students across the country who currently have access to BTECs and therefore act as an impediment. The only logical outcome of such a policy would be that T levels will be more restrictive than the current set of options for young people and therefore will not serve the whole of the “other 50%”, creating a whole swathe of each cohort who are unable to progress in their education (if there is only the binary option of T levels or A levels). For these reasons MillionPlus was pleased to see that the this exit requirement for T Levels has now been removed, a move that will support young people, irrespective of whether they progress into higher education or not.
- e. The rationale from government for the removal of funding for BTEC and applied generals appears to be based on some analysis that these qualifications do not produce as strong outcomes as other level 3 qualifications. Ministers and officials have made reference to this evidence, but it has not been shared with the sector as part of the consultation. It is concerning that the education sector has not had the chance to critically assess this as part of this process. It is likely that many differences in outcomes between BTEC and other level 3 qualifications will be explained, at least in part, by the demographic and socioeconomic factors pertaining to each cohort. That is to say, the difference in outcomes of BTEC and A level students largely reflects social backgrounds. Furthermore, even if we were to accept that there are differential outcomes after controlling for all factors, there remains the question: what are going to do to support these young people if they don't have BTECs or applied generals? As has been explained above, the initial plan for T levels only makes them accessible for

part of the "other 50%". In a binary choice between A levels and T levels, it is likely there will be many who will not be served with any option for progressing their education, and the government agenda on technical education will therefore fail to serve them. The framing of this should be what can we provide for these young people to invest in their futures? And not, what can we take away to make things simpler?

Q2. Will the government's proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

- a. The key concern here is over the scaling up of T levels and whether supply will be sufficient to support the demands of young people (in replacement of BTEC and applied generals). Qualifications often experience some teething problems in the roll-out or early implementation phase. There is simply no way of knowing for sure if T levels will operate effectively across the board and at scale. The phased approach adopted by government to introduce T levels allows a more iterative process where issues can be identified along the way without having widespread impact. This will generate some insights into "what works" in the case of T levels. However, there will still be unknowns, since the challenges and issues could vary considerably from one occupational route to another.
- b. The early stages of the phased approach also tell us little about the capacity of T levels to operate at scale. The government is expecting T Levels, an as yet unproven qualification, to essentially replace BTECs and applied generals. This requires T levels to generate a significant level of supply on a national scale. One major issue in relation to supply is that of placements. T level students are expected to complete a placement as part of their qualification (minimum 45 days), but placements with employers are notoriously difficult to secure for pupils/students. There are serious questions over whether there is enough capacity in the system to provide placements for students once T Levels are operating at full-scale across all 15 occupational routes. Research commissioned by the DfE has shown that some providers in the early roll-outs have struggled due to: "... *the limited size of the local labour market; internal staffing and capacity issues; lack of relevant employers; and issues with transportation and placement accessibility*". Moreover, when surveyed, at least 70% of T level providers described the process of securing placements "*difficult or very difficult*" in the following routes: Digital; Creative & Design; Construction; Engineering & Manufacturing. In short there are some concerns over supply-side issues of T levels and the ability to scale these up on a national level.
- c. The point about the local labour market highlighted above also suggests that any issues related to this might develop unevenly across the country, which would be completely counter to the government's ambition to 'level up' the country. MillionPlus hopes that these issues do not materialise in the wider roll-out of the qualification, but it is prudent to be aware of the potential challenges of this exercise. Based on this, it seems illogical to remove any funding for qualifications that may be able to pick up the slack in the event of any supply-side issues.
- d. MillionPlus has long-standing reservations about the 15 occupational routes that underpin the government's technical education approach. The concern is that these occupational maps might be too rigid to adequately support individuals through the economy of the 21st century, where the labour market is likely to undergo significant evolution as technology and automation change how and where we work. Most young people today are likely to have multiple different career changes throughout the course of their lifetime. MillionPlus has previously expressed these concerns in consultations and meetings with officials on the subject of technical education. Whilst we accept that the occupational routes are a feature of the system as designed, it

would be sensible to keep their utility under review, to ensure the system speaks to the idea of the “future economy” that was the focus of so much of this reform agenda.

Q3. Will the government’s proposed ambition for T Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

- a. Modern universities work closely with many employers in their regions on a number of different fronts, and this includes working with them to inform the curriculum of certain courses, particularly those with a vocational focus. As such, it is in the interest of employers that there are a broad range of qualifications at level 3 in England that can support progression to higher education, be that at level 4, 5 or 6, within an apprenticeship or a more academic form of study.
 - i. Removing BTEC qualifications is therefore not in the interest of employers as it limits choices for many young people and potentially limits progression pathways which can enhance employability. This applies to any student who might be thinking about doing (or would have done) a BTEC, but is most acute for those types of students who would normally combine BTEC study with A Levels. MillionPlus wants to see a scenario where the government’s new suite of technical qualifications (T Levels & Apprenticeships) sit alongside A levels and BTECs so that the maximum choice and opportunity is afforded to people in England. This is what will support the needs of employers in the coming years.
- b. At the very least we believe it is sensible for no decisions to be made in terms of funding until a clearer picture is available about the level of demand for new qualifications, the practicality of supply, and how they will integrate into schools, sixth forms, colleges and universities. Making rash decisions on BTECs, which are a tried and tested formula, could cause disruption in the education sector, which by extension will cause problems for employers.

Q4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place? Short/long term

- a. Whilst it is difficult to accurately assess the future impact, the most salient point is that education increases the employability of young people. The more options that are available to young people, so that they can find an educational pathway that suits their needs, the better. Employment is not the sole purpose of education. Indeed, higher education can broaden the horizons of students in many ways beyond finding a job. However, modern universities take employability of their students very seriously and take steps to develop their curriculum and student experience in ways that prepare students for life after graduation. This could be hampered by the proposed changes, by limiting the options of students.

FOOTNOTES

¹ <https://www.tes.com/news/T-levels-industry-placement-challenge-requires-robust-response>

² Department for Education (2020) Process Evaluation of support for T Level Industry Placements
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916867/Process_evaluation_of_support_for_T_Level_Industry_Placements.pdf

Appendix vii: Natspec

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment

Vocational Qualifications and the Labour Market Inquiry

Written evidence from Natspec, December 2021

Executive Summary

- As the membership association for specialist further education (FE) providers, Natspec is concerned that current government proposals for qualification reform will disadvantage young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- The removal of funding from applied general qualifications will take away a proven progression route to higher education and employment for young people with SEND who particularly benefit from the range of sizes, structure, flexibility and assessment approach of BTECs.
- T levels are too large, too inflexible, and require too much work placement, even with the mitigations proposed, to be accessible for many learners with SEND.
- Government should not therefore remove funding from level 3 vocational qualifications until and unless T levels have been independently evaluated as providing an equally effective route for learners with SEND and other forms of disadvantage.
- With no firm proposals from government on qualification reform at level 2 and below, it is difficult to comment on the sufficiency of planned provision.
- To meet the needs of learners with SEND who make significant use of qualifications at this level, it will be important to retain a range of qualifications at Entry level, level 1 and level 2 covering employability skills, vocational skills and vocational tasters, and alternative English and maths qualifications, in addition to GCSEs and Functional Skills. Non-accredited provision should also be more widely valued particularly in relation to developing personal and social skills.

About Natspec

Natspec is the membership association for organisations which offer specialist FE for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. We represent 110 colleges and approximately 6,000 students, all with high needs and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The majority of our member colleges offer some form of accredited provision, the greater proportion being vocational, relating to personal, social skills and/or employability, and English and maths, mostly at level 1 and below. Some of our members offer level 2 qualifications, including GCSEs and BTECs. A small number offer A levels and BTECs at level 3, sometimes in partnership with a general further education college. Member colleges also make considerable use of non-accredited provision. We are concerned that current government proposals for qualification reform will disproportionately disadvantage young people with SEND.

Impact on students with SEND of the removal of funding from level 3 vocational qualifications in favour of T levels

Applied general qualifications at level 3, the BTEC in particular, offer learners with SEND a valuable route into higher education (HE). Removal of funding from BTECs would almost certainly have a detrimental effect on progression to HE for students with SEND. While

numbers of students at Natspec colleges, which provide for students with the most complex needs, progressing into HE are very small, the vast majority of these do so on the basis of BTEC achievement. Prematurely removing funding from BTECs could deny access to a vocational pathway for some young people with SEND, resulting in a loss of progression opportunities open to their non-disabled peers and a consequent reduction in longer-term life chances

The government's own impact assessment report concludes that "16 to 19 year olds who... have a history of SEND support... are more likely to be impacted" along with "adults... with learning difficulties or disabilities." These findings echo the overwhelming message from consultation respondents, including Ofqual, that the government's proposals would disproportionately disadvantage those with SEND, reducing the likelihood of their achieving at level 3 and/or progressing to HE. We are particularly concerned that government is dismissive of this issue because the number of students disadvantaged will be "relatively small". This justification certainly does not sit comfortably with the 2010 Equality Act.

We appreciate that government has taken on board Ofqual's advice to consider the accessibility of T levels for learners with SEND at the development stage and welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement of the uncoupling of English and maths qualifications from T level achievement which

will benefit some learners with SEND. However, we are not reassured that the range of mitigations proposed will be sufficient. Curriculum leads in Natspec member colleges have undertaken careful analysis of T levels, comparing them with their current BTEC offer, and concluded that T levels are simply too large and too inflexible to provide a meaningful route for their students. In particular, they have identified that the BTEC suite of complementary qualifications helps support progression from level 2 to level 3 and allows students to gradually build from a smaller to a larger size of level 3 qualification. The range of different sizes of qualifications at level 3 is vital for students with SEND whose progress can be unpredictable, especially where their education is interrupted by periods of ill health. Some specialist colleges plan their BTEC delivery over an extended time frame, using the smaller qualifications as a starting point while they work to develop students' independence skills, improve their confidence and unblock barriers to learning, for example for visually impaired students, by exploring different approaches to enable them to find an effective working medium.

The large amount of work placement required for T levels, even taking into account adjustments that can be made for students with SEND, is also likely to prove a barrier. Currently specialist colleges have the flexibility to time the work placements for BTECs to fit the readiness of the student and in a way that is appropriate for their overall welfare and educational progress. Mis-timing work placements can lead to breakdown and a long-lasting negative impact on the student.

Examples of effective use of BTECs with learners with SEND are included in Annex 1.

Recommendations

1. Government should not withdraw funding from level 3 vocational qualifications 2024 until or unless there is conclusive evidence that T levels are able to provide a pathway to HE and/or employment for learners with SEND and other types of disadvantage that are as effective as BTECs, or more so.
2. Government should commission an independent evaluator to undertake a comparability study between now and 2024 to ascertain the relative merits of applied general qualifications and T levels in terms of their effectiveness in supporting the progress of students with SEND and other types of disadvantage. The findings should then be used to help determine future policy in relation to level 3 qualification reform.

Sufficiency of planned provision at Levels 1 and 2 and at Entry level to meet the needs of learners with SEND

Following a call for Post-16 Level 2 and below study and qualifications in November 2020, the government delayed publication of any specific proposals to allow further research to be undertaken. The Secretary of State recently indicated that a consultation document would be published before the end of the year. It is therefore still unclear exactly what provision is planned at level 2 and below. The following observations relate to some of the potential developments signalled by ideas floated in the Department for Education's 2020 call for evidence.

The potential of removing funding from qualifications in employability skills

For some learners with SEND acquiring general employability skills may be just as – or even more – important – than building their sector-specific skills, which may be easily learnt on-the-job. Some learners with SEND may need more explicit teaching of these skills than their peers, particularly where they struggle with social interaction. Recognising achievement of these skills through qualifications can not only support progression to further learning and to employment, it can also be useful in motivating learners and rewarding effort and achievement. This can be particularly beneficial for learners who have never before gained external accreditation and/or have had negative prior experiences of education.

A possible move to a single Entry level

While the distinction between Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3 may seem minuscule to those who are not familiar with working with learners with SEND, to professionals who work with these learners, the Entry sub-levels represent significant steps in a learner's progress. Many learners with SEND will make much slower progress than their non-disabled peers and these smaller steps allow for that progress to be observed, recognised and recorded. The sub-levels give teachers a framework within which to set achievable yet stretching goals for individual learners. For some learners they can provide a 'ladder' up to level 1. For others, including some with more complex needs, the sub-levels serve a slightly different purpose. The nature of their learning disability may mean that they are not able to progress vertically up through the levels. In this case, the sub-levels allow their achievements to be recognised at a level appropriate to them. Were there only an Entry 3, they would be stuck for ever 'working towards' a level that would never be in their reach.

A potential removal of funding from most English and maths qualifications which are not Functional Skills or GCSEs

While many learners with SEND, with the right support, will be able to access GCSEs and Functional Skills, there are some whose SEN (in particular where they have difficulties with cognition) means that level 1 is an unachievable goal. This makes GCSEs inaccessible per se. Some learners with SEND will be able to achieve parts of the Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) or GCSE content but not all. However, the assessment model for both types of qualifications requires learners to demonstrate competency across the full range of content, thus excluding learners who are not able to do this. In addition, learners must be able to achieve all aspects of these qualifications at the same level, making them unsuitable for learners with a spiky profile.

Many learners with SEND are capable of applying English and maths skills effectively within contexts relevant to them (e.g. on their work placement; in making their own meals or figuring out their journey to college). However, they are not always able to demonstrate this ability through the medium of an external assessment, as required for GCSEs and FSQs. Some learners with autism particularly struggle with scenario-based assessment.

Currently, many learners with SEND are able to have their English and maths achievements through alternative qualifications which

- use portfolio-based assessment which allows for a diverse range of evidence types to be submitted and enables learners to show that they are capable of applying maths and English skills for authentic purposes
- are 'bite-sized', enabling learners to focus in on specific aspects of English and maths that are relevant to their lives and progression routes, including intended job roles
- in the case of larger qualifications feature rules of combination that permit units to be achieved at different levels allowing learners' spiky profiles to be reflected.

A potential move to greater use of non-accredited learning

Natspec member colleges already make considerable use of non-accredited learning for young people with SEND, in many cases combined with one or more qualifications. Non-accredited learning is very useful in supporting personalised learning for young people with SEND. It allows providers to include the particular knowledge, skills and behaviours an individual needs in order to achieve their individual learning goals, free from the constraints of a qualification. However, many SEND providers currently avoid the use of non-accredited provision because

- they are fearful of falling foul of DfE guidance or ESFA funding conditions which do not make it explicitly clear that non-accredited provision is an acceptable route for some learners with SEND
- they do not feel confident about developing non-accredited learning programmes or assuring their quality; they are uncertain how to guarantee that learners will be offered a high-quality, purposeful, and stretching programme without the underpinning structure of a qualification.

Recommendations

3. Government should ensure that it retains a variety of qualifications at level 2 and below, which can be used alongside high-quality non-accredited provision. Learners and providers should be able to make an informed choice about whether a learner would benefit from qualifications, non-accredited learning or a blend of the two.
4. In order to meet the needs of learners aged 16-25 with SEND who are working at level 2 and below, planned provision should include:
 - vocationally-specific awards and certificates at Entry 3, level 1 and level 2 which give them relevant, up-to-date basic knowledge and skills to support progression either to qualifications at the next level or directly into work
 - vocational taster qualifications which allow exploration of a number of sectors to support an informed decision before specialising
 - employability skills awards and certificates at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3 and levels 1 and 2, which recognise the generic skills that will support their progression into employment
 - alternative English and maths qualifications at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3 and level 1, that enable them to demonstrate specific skills in context through portfolio-based assessment.
5. In relation to non-accredited provision:
 - DfE and ESFA should ensure that young people, providers, local authority commissioners and LA staff/contractors writing EHC plans understand that non-accredited provision is an acceptable – and in some cases, desirable – offer for learners with SEND, where it is underpinned by robust quality assurance

- DfE should grow provider confidence in use of RARPA (a system of recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning) and promote consistency and quality by funding RARPA training and peer review.

ANNEX 1 CASE STUDIES

1. Student from The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC)

This 21-year-old student is in their third and final year at RNC in Hereford. They are registered severely sight impaired and have glaucoma and aniridia. Most of their family are also severely sight impaired. The student is very anxious and lacks confidence, struggles to make eye contact, and will revert into themselves when under pressure. Prior to attending RNC they were educated in a mainstream setting. At school they undertook 5 GCSEs and twice re-sat mathematics and English at a local college before gaining a grade 4 in both subjects. At the local college they also studied a level 2 BTEC in Information Technology and Art, Design and Media. Due to feeling a failure at school this student lacks confidence in their ability and finds praise difficult to take. They will often say 'I want my family to be proud of me.'

The student started at RNC in September 2019. In their first year at RNC, they studied a BTEC Level 3 Extended Certificate in IT, OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Certificate in Business, Braille, mobility, independence and living skills and learned how to use with assistive technology. In July 2020 they achieved a Merit in their BTEC IT and a Distinction Star in Business. Last year they broadened their level 3 learning by moving on to the BTEC Diploma in IT where they achieved a double Merit, and the OCR Level 3 Cambridge Extended Certificate in Business for which they achieved a Distinction Star. Although this student's grades are fantastic, there is so much more to their journey than the qualifications achieved.

Following the BTEC and OCR technical courses in a specialist setting has provided a context for enabling them to develop skills and manage their visual impairment as an adult. The college has been able to build on the soft skills of time management, visual presentation, and eye contact, alongside IT skills such as presentation of work, document types, use of software, while also building their skills in using large print and screen reading software and trial various alternative assistive technology solutions. In the small group settings, they have been able to develop their personality, have the peer support of fellow students and grow into adulthood.

Being able to build up to a level 3 BTEC Diploma over a two-year period allowed this student the time to develop their skills and independence, taking small steps at an appropriate pace, and being stretched and challenged at the right points in a timely manner. We have been able to manage their low self-esteem and build their confidence year-on-year. A T level, which requires a student to be in placement straightaway, would have been very difficult for this young person - and for most of our students, who are generally not ready to be in the workplace when they start their course, typically not having had the opportunity to undertake part-time work or sometimes any work experience before.

In their first year, alongside a placement with RNC's own technical support team, this student had an external placement with the Blended Learning Consortium based at the Heart of Worcestershire College. The student travelled by train from Hereford to Worcester and walked to work independently. At their placement they advised on accessibility of resources and created resources to be used by learners. The user feedback they offered was disseminated across the consortium and integrated into all future development work.

Now in their final year, this student has started a placement in the Technical Support Department of Worcester University, demonstrating their development while on course with us. Having a lighter timetable has enabled them to take on an additional role providing learning support in some business lessons at RNC, furthering their range of work experience. They have taken on the role of student ambassador and been elected as Vice Chair of the Student Representative Group. They have also had the courage to post on social media about visual impairment following an incident where they were abused on a train in relation to their use of a white cane. All evidence of their holistic development.

Despite arriving at RNC with no ambition to enter higher education, this student now has a place at Worcester University in September 2022 to study Information Technology.

2. Charlie from Queen Alexandra College (QAC)

Charlie is a residential student currently in his third year of study at QAC. He is 22 years old and studying Performing Arts. His primary SEN is communication and interaction needs. He also has developmental delay resulting from Fragile X Type E and has a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition.

Charlie has chosen a Performing Arts programme as his ambition is to become an actor. Since being at college, he has achieved the Level 1 BTEC and is now on the Level 2 BTEC in Performing Arts. Alongside performing arts, Charlie's programme includes employability, travel training, mentoring, tutorial/PHSE, English and maths and dyslexia support.

The flexibility of the BTEC programme has meant that we have been able to front load the support and the personal social development skills which Charlie needed in order to access the more academic aspect of his education. This has been important for Charlie and for many of our students as they may need additional input in order to be able to reach their potential. The BTEC programme has suited Charlie because

- he has been able to study the performing arts qualification alongside other subjects without feeling overwhelmed
- it has given us the space to include support activities in the form of mentoring and confidence-building for an example, that have been crucial in enabling Charlie to engage in the academic studies,
- clearly structured units have been selected to support Charlie's pathway enabling him to talk with confidence about what he has studied, how each unit is relevant to his chosen field, and what he has left to cover in his programme
- the coursework focus means that Charlie has been able to perform true to himself, rather than being overwhelmed by exam focus assessment, due to his anxiety
- the content is practical and although has an employability focus it isn't overwhelming or assume that students are ready for the number of workplace hours associated with the T levels. Charlie has support in his work placement which is addressing many related work skills but not Performing Arts vocational skills. It is an ideal stepping stone onto the Supported Internship programme.
- it offers the flexibility to select a size of qualification suitable for Charlie's needs, while other students may be on an award or diploma.

It is clear to us that the BTEC programme has been developed by educationalists with an understanding of the diverse needs of learners, rather than by employers who may understand the skills needed in their workplace but do not have a deep understanding of the learning needs of young people.

Charlie is planning to engage with the supported internship programme as his progression pathway which will allow him to have initial support in the workplace via a job coach. That support will then be tapered away as he gains experience and confidence. The breadth of experience and knowledge afforded by the BTEC is similarly opening up a wide range of different progression and work opportunities for many other students with SEND. For those who progress onto a Level 3 BTEC, familiarity with the BTEC structure and terminology makes the level 2 a particularly useful foundation.

In his last annual review, Charlie stated, "I'm proud of Achieving my Level One Performing Arts and moving on to the Level 2 too".

3. Peter from Hereward College

19-year-old Peter has a number of disabilities, with his primary diagnosis being autism. He struggles with change, meeting new people, loud noises and uncertainty. Peter's EHCP notes that he is not able to cope with lots of information in one go, and too much information can have an adverse emotional effect on him. Due to the severity of some of his conditions, he is currently receiving support from external agencies. He lives at home with his mother, father and siblings. Prior to starting college, Peter was on a reduced timetable at school, attending for one day per week, with just one lesson on that day. Following a period of support in the form of familiarisation meetings to address potential triggers, Peter had a phased entry into college where he started by taking a Pearson BTEC Level 2 First Diploma in Creative Media Production.

The BTEC gave Peter the opportunity to study and achieve at level 2, something that was critical in getting him successfully back into education, after not attending school. Many learners with SEND need this incremental pathway into Level 3 learning. They also benefit from the fact that the lower level BTECs are structured in the same way as the level 3 BTEC allowing them to progress seamlessly through the levels. It provides them with reassurance and familiarity with the processes throughout their learning time which assists in removing a large part of the learners' worry, allowing them to concentrate on learning and achieving.

Level 2s require a much higher level of confidence from the start of the course than many learners with SEND possess. The requirement to work with managers and supervisors who would almost certainly not have any detailed understanding of learners' needs would limit almost all of our learners. Peter, for example, has needed time to settle into his surroundings and make friendships with his peers, which would have been negatively impacted by having to meet and work with additional new people in a new, unfamiliar work setting. Peter completed Digital Media Production before progressing onto a BTEC Level 3 Diploma in the same subject.

Because of the smaller unit structure of BTECs, we are able to bring in clients external to the college on a shorter-term basis without requiring them to make the higher level of engagement required of a long-term commitment to a project. Alongside realistic work scenarios, Peter has had the opportunity to produce work for real-world companies. For example, he recently produced a promotional video where he had to communicate with the client to develop his idea to meet their needs. This video was then used by the client for promotion of an event. This mix of scenario-based activity and work with real clients has allowed Peter to step out of his comfort zone at an appropriate point and for short periods. It helps him to build his confidence gradually and learn to cope and strategise methods he can build on each

time, ultimately leading to being ready to move on at the end of the course, armed with knowledge, experience and strategies that will enable him to succeed.

The different sizes of BTEC available allow us to match the qualification to the learner. Peter would have found an Extended Diploma, equivalent to 3 A levels, a daunting prospect and would have been overwhelmed by it. The Diploma has been a challenging but manageable goal for him. If the T level had been his only option, Peter would not have been able to access level 3 education. He would have been unfairly disadvantaged in terms of achievable qualifications and deprived of a positive experience and ultimately the chance of getting the jobs he would love to do.

Peter would like to work within the creative industries. Through the flexibility of the BTEC, including in its assessment approach, we have been able to provide him with opportunities to write for multiple scenarios including radio, TV, and advertising, in addition to participating in the different roles of the floor production team, such as directing, camera work and sound production. For example, he has recently recorded a voiceover for one of the professional college videos using his skills developed in a music-based programming unit. As a result he has had taste of a range of different job roles and been able to develop specific skills for each role.

Perhaps the biggest impact for Peter of engaging in the BTEC course has been on his well-being and the softer skills he has developed, including an ability to support other learners. His ongoing experience of one success after another has allowed him to develop into a confident young person, able to address for himself some of the triggers for which he needed so much support with at the beginning of his course.

4. David from Hereward College

David is heading towards his final year at Hereward; it has been a long journey where time has been critical in allowing him to develop as a student and as a person. David has a primary diagnosis of autism and also has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He started out on an Entry Level 3 course which allowed him to explore a range of different sectors to identify an area where he would like to specialise. It also enabled him to develop academically, emotionally and in terms of behaviours. Having identified an interest in ICT, David went on to study the subject at level 1, progressing from there to achieving a BTEC level 2 Diploma. David is now in his second year of the level 3 BTEC Diploma.

The BTEC programme has been an excellent vehicle for David because:

- the availability of BTECs at different levels has allowed David to make a huge amount of progress in a structured and manageable way over time. Similarly, the different sizes of qualification have aided a gradual path through each level.
- the flexibility to pace small amounts of employer interaction over time have built his confidence so that he is now ready for the challenges of a rigorous work placement. The work experience requirements of a T-Level qualification would have been overwhelming for David and would have curtailed his ambition and ability to progress into employment.
- the units are structured in such a way as to be self-contained which has aided David's understanding of what he has achieved so far and what he still needs to complete. Similarly, the grading criteria are easy to follow so he knew how well he was doing. This is particularly significant for learners like David who are autistic, where clear structures and ease of understanding are important.

- the approach to assessment has allowed us to be flexible and make the most of local opportunities, take account of local employability factors and meet David's particular needs. David and his fellow students have even been able to input into assignment design.
- the size of the qualification has given us to time build David's social, emotional and employability skills alongside his vocational skills and knowledge. This is particularly relevant for learners who may come from backgrounds of poor attainment and low levels of literacy and may have significant delayed development of their social skills and emotional resilience and understanding. For David, this wider curriculum and support package have allowed us to nurture him so that he has become a confident young adult.

David plans to spend one more year at Hereward College on a supported internship programme which will give a supported route into paid employment where he will be able to apply the ICT skills that he has gained through the level 3 BTEC.

Appendix viii: NFER

Written evidence submitted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

1. About NFER

NFER is the UK's leading independent provider of educational research. Our significant expertise in the post-16 education and training sector informs the vocational and technical education policy discourse through research, conference presentations, consultations, contributions to policy and practice development, and knowledge exchange through networking. Our Optimal Pathways portfolio coordinates our extensive research in this priority policy area to maximise its impact.

2. Executive Summary

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment Inquiry into the Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes. In doing this, we are pleased to contribute to thinking in this priority policy area which seeks to enable and support young people to make successful transitions from education to employment. In addressing the questions listed in the Call for Evidence, this submission draws on up-to-date research evidence.

We acknowledge that the post-16 education and qualifications landscape is complex and challenging for young people, their parents/carers, and employers to navigate. However, we believe that the government's current proposals for reforming post-16 qualifications will not benefit most young people, employers or the economy. The [recently announced](#) one-year delay in implementing the reforms, which would entail cutting funding for most Applied General qualifications, provides a timely opportunity for the government to reconsider its plans and examine in-depth their implications for all stakeholders. In doing this, we suggest that the Department for Education (DfE) takes into consideration the following points:

the approach to the proposed reforms is unbalanced focusing too much on the *supply* of new qualifications while under-valuing the *demand* for existing Applied General

qualifications (e.g. BTECs and Cambridge Technicals), a well-proven, distinctive and respected brand used by many young people, employers and higher education.

- the provision of T Levels, large and academically-demanding courses equivalent to three A levels, is likely to benefit young people who have the necessary ability and clear career intentions which is not the case for many 16-19-year-olds.
- eradicating Applied General qualifications will create a substantial gap in relevant education opportunities, particularly given the uncertainty about the adequacy of planned education provision for level 1 and 2 learners, still under development, and the lack of entry-level apprenticeships.
- the proposed defunding of Applied General qualifications will impact many young people, especially 16 to 19 year olds who are from BAME groups, have a history of SEND support or are from a disadvantaged background, by taking away a valuable post-16 education route which meets their learning needs and enables them to progress to employment or higher education. This will significantly narrow their education options and severely reduce their skills development and employment prospects resulting in some entering insecure, poorly-paid occupations and/or becoming NEET.
- without improved provision of high-quality careers information, advice and guidance that enables all young people to make informed and appropriate post-16 education and career decisions the proposed reforms will fall short.
- there will be negative social and economic outcomes should the proposed reform of post-16 qualifications go ahead. These include: serious implications for young people's wellbeing connected to precarious employment and the scarring effects of unemployment; a slowing of improvements in social mobility and attempts to reduce regional disparities; the loss of a reliable talent pipeline leading to skills shortages that will impact on productivity and the rebuilding of the post-pandemic economy; and risks to developing a high-wage, high-skilled economy.

Recommendations

We recommend that the government should:

- respond positively to the powerful evidence which confirms the value of Applied Technical qualifications, and situate them alongside T Levels, the T Level Transition Programme and increased entry-level apprenticeships as a vital part of a renewed high-quality, inclusive post-16 educational and training offer which will serve the essential needs of a significant cohort of young people, employers and the economy
- drive forward a sustained increase in entry-level apprenticeships (level 2) to address the gap in training at this level which will strengthen a progression route to employment valued by young people and employers
- accelerate the improvement of careers advice, information and guidance to ensure that it is fit for purpose to underpin a reformed post-16 landscape and guarantees access to appropriate high-quality provision which enables young people to make fully-informed decisions about their post-16 choices.

Q1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

a. Which students will benefit from the changes?

Students who have the required GCSE entry qualifications and the ability to take and complete an A level course or a T Level (equivalent to three A levels) will benefit. Students who want to follow the T Level pathway will benefit if they have a strong sense of career

direction and their post-16 career choice aligns with the available T Levels. To benefit they will also need the ability to meet academic entry requirements (which usually include GCSE grade 4+ in English and maths) and the capacity to cope with the size of a T Level which includes 1800 total guided learning hours (compared to 1080 for Applied General qualifications and three A levels) and a large industry placement (minimum 45 days).

b. Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

We think several groups will be adversely affected by the proposed post-16 qualification reforms. These are young people who:

- currently take Applied General qualifications which, having an applied learning approach, are appropriate for their abilities and needs and enable them to successfully progress to employment and/or higher education. It is [estimated](#) that at least 30 per cent of 16 to 18-year-olds are studying a level 3 qualification in England are taking Applied general qualifications, approximately 259,000 young people.
- would struggle with the academic nature of A levels and T Levels and who would therefore be left with few suitable options
- have caring responsibilities or have to combine study and part-time work to support themselves and their families for whom T Levels will not be appropriate due to their size and who will risk being shut out of level 3 qualifications
- are undecided about which career route to pursue and not ready to make the commitment to take a specialist T Level
- will not be suited to taking T Levels and may find the T Level too academic and the employer-set project particularly challenging. [NFER's research on T Levels](#) reports the 'significant demands' of this A-level equivalent qualification, with some providers and sector representatives perceiving it to be nearer to a level 3.5 than a level 3.

[DfE's impact assessment](#) concluded that 16 to 19-year-olds who are male, from Asian ethnic groups, have a history of SEND support or are from a disadvantaged background are more likely than other young people to be disproportionately impacted.

Overall, the negative impacts include the loss of:

- **occupational breadth** that Applied General qualifications (e.g. BTECs and Cambridge Technicals) currently provide – many young people will not have clear career goals and/or will not want to specialise at 16/17 which T Levels require
- **the different style of learning that Applied General qualifications provide.** This includes applied learning through real-life contexts and putting learning into practice straightaway; ongoing assignment-based assessment which means that work counts from the beginning and learners know what level they are achieving throughout the qualification and have the chance to improve; and external examinations which can be re-taken, again providing an opportunity for learners to understand where they need to improve and act on this understanding
- **qualifications which enable entry to higher education,** with increased evidence of BTEC learners' progression to university, with a higher proportion than A level students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and BAME groups and being the first in their families to go to university. Although there is evidence that some BTEC students can struggle at university, the answer is not to rule out BTECs as a progression route but to evolve them, and the support around them, so that they continue to provide an important route for social mobility and students are better prepared, and supported to cope, with the demands of university. (Evidence for these points can be found in [Reforming BTECs: Applied General qualifications as a route to higher education](#) by Scott Kelly at the Higher Education Policy Institute; [Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: The role of vocational routes into higher education](#) by the Social Market Foundation; and

the blog: [How successful are BTEC students at university?](#) by Pallavi Amitava Banerjee from the University of Exeter.)

- **an important route into certain professions**, such as nursing. One in five students on nursing degrees have followed a BTEC level 3, including in Applied Science which would no longer be offered under the current proposals. Some of these qualifications provide a good foundation for nursing degrees. A similar picture will apply to other BTECs which, if no longer offered, could reduce access to degree courses and professions. This risks the loss of high-quality Applied General qualifications which are well regarded and achieve positive labour market outcomes. (Evidence for these points can be found in a Higher Education Policy Institute blog: [Unintended Consequences: How Level 3 reform could damage progression to higher education, including for Nursing.](#))

c. Is there enough planned provision to support level 1 and level 2 learners?

There is level 2 provision for those young people interested in taking T Levels through the T Level Transition Programme which is a level 2 study programme designed to develop the skills, experience, knowledge and behaviours to support progression onto a T Level. It provides a package of preparation including English and maths, relevant technical knowledge and skills, work experience and preparation to support access to a T Level industry placement, and wider support and development to help students prepare for a T Level.

There is a dearth of entry-level apprenticeships. NFER's [Putting Apprenticeships to Work for Young People](#) noted that intermediate apprenticeships are an important part of the level 2 (GCSE equivalent) qualification landscape for the 17-year-old age group. The research reported that, out of those studying level 2 qualifications, apprenticeships make up almost a third (29 per cent) of the qualifications undertaken by young people with their highest qualification aim at this level. In general, pupils studying at this level are lower attaining and have more limited post-16 options. Apprenticeship starts for younger apprentices aged under 19 in August 2020 to January 2021 were a third lower than before the pandemic, and less than half the level of starts in 2015/16. The most disadvantaged apprentices saw the greatest reduction in starts before the pandemic, mainly due to the rapid decline in the availability of intermediate-level apprenticeships during this period which disadvantaged young people are more likely to take up. Similarly, there was a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged during the pandemic when some apprentices were laid off.

The government acknowledges that a larger range of high-quality level 2 qualifications is required to enable young people to enter the labour market and progress to level 3. The [DfE's policy statement](#) (July 2021) notes that some students who are most likely to face challenges in the proposed reformed qualifications regime will be those with lower attainment: 'The system needs to serve these students better. The reforms are intended to support the best outcomes and progression pathways for all at each stage in the system, whether this be at level 2 and below, at level 3, or beyond'. The DfE states that it is currently exploring a potential model for 16 to 19 year olds, which aims to better prepare individuals for entry into the labour market at level 2 and provides the core transferable skills individuals need to unlock successful careers or upskill later in life.

d. Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

The fiscal implications are likely to be lower taxation returns to HMRC as the earning and employment prospects will diminish for young people who would have taken Applied

General qualifications which often lead to secure, well-paid jobs. For example, [Pearson's Spotlight on Workforce Skills](#) reports that research shows that BTEC learners tend to be earning more than A level learners by age 22, even accounting for the fact that A level learners are more likely to enter the labour market later. A narrowing of employment opportunities for these young people will result in their working life becoming precarious as they move in and out of poorly paid jobs which will mean less taxation revenue for HMRC.

e. Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skill gaps).

Employers will be negatively impacted by the proposed reforms because they will lose a reliable pipeline of talent which they have recruited, used and valued for many years. As a result, employers will have to seek recruits from other sources which will take time and resources adding to their recruitment costs. It is highly unlikely that employers will be able to source young recruits with the knowledge, skills and work-readiness that young people with Applied General qualifications offer. This recruitment deficit will mean that employers will be short of the skills they need which, in turn, will impact on productivity at a time when the country is attempting to re-build the post-pandemic economy.

f. Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

The current provision of CIAG, which does not adequately prepare young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to explore the range of education, training and employment opportunities available, cannot support the proposed reforms. There is a lack of accessible and appropriate CIAG to help young people to navigate the complex post-16 system because most careers teachers and advisers do not have the specialist knowledge required to provide informed advice. CIAG needs to be provided much earlier to support young people's transitions at 16. Young people also need access to high-quality and relevant work experience and considerably more interactions with employers and the world of work in primary school and at Key Stage 3 to inform and support their post-16 decision making.

The [Careers Strategy](#) has had limited impact to date. For example, the [CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey](#) identified the main drivers of skills gaps which included poor careers advice aligned to industrial sectors, a lack of awareness among young people about routes into work, and a lack of young people's work-readiness, skills and behaviours. Better careers provision is an aim of the government's [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#). It states that a key aim is for careers education and guidance to be 'embedded in the life of every school and college'. It pledges to work with the education sector and business 'to develop a shared approach to careers education that will support young people to understand the modern workplace and develop the career management skills and attributes they need to compete in today's labour market'.

The Baker Clause, which requires schools to publish a statement online describing their careers programmes and how providers access their pupils to talk about technical education and apprenticeships, has not been effectively actioned though steps are being taken to strengthen its application.

Q2. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

The proposed reforms will not support the post-16 needs of all young people in the future economy. T Levels, Apprenticeships and A levels will play an important role in equipping some young people with the knowledge, skills and qualifications to enable them to function effectively in the future economy. However, if these pathways are the only post-16 options available, a significant number of young people for whom Applied Generals are appropriate qualifications will be educationally disadvantaged and left behind. This will severely reduce their skills development and employment prospects.

Q3. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

The reforms will not meet all employers' needs in the future economy. While T Levels, Apprenticeships and A levels will provide young people who have the knowledge and skills employers require and can further develop, they will not offer an exclusive solution to addressing industry's skills and productivity gaps. Applied General qualifications, which are respected and used by many employers, make a substantial contribution to industry and commerce noted in [Pearson's Spotlight on Workforce Skills](#) which reports that these qualifications contribute significantly to the UK education export strategy and to net education export targets.

Q4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

a. Are there specific short-term implications?

The likely impacts are that many young people who are denied access to Applied General courses and qualifications that meet their needs will not progress to secure full-time employment and will instead progress into precarious jobs, some offering zero-hours contracts with pay below the living wage, and many providing no career development or training. This will no doubt undermine young people's self-image, self-efficacy and confidence to seek more fulfilling remunerated work, which will continue to affect their employment prospects. The short-term employment implication is that the country loses an important talent pipeline and resource which could make a useful contribution to rebuilding the post-pandemic economy.

b. What are the long-term implications?

There is a real risk that some of these young people will become NEET (not in education, employment or training) as the opportunities for them to gain workplace skills and experience diminish. The scarring effect of becoming NEET and long-term unemployed can lead to a spiral of decline and feelings of hopelessness which can have psychological, social, and economic consequences for young people who often do not have access to adequate support. In turn, there are likely to be negative social and economic outcomes including a slowing of social mobility and attempts to reduce regional disparities, increased costs of and pressure on mental health services, increased costs of social benefits, and risks to developing a high-wage, high-skill economy.

Appendix ix: OCR

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment inquiry:

The Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes – OCR's response

OCR

[OCR](#) is a leading UK awarding organisation and is part of the newly merged Cambridge University Press & Assessment. This merger creates a larger, global organisation that offers world-leading academic research, learning and assessment, backed by the first-class teaching and research departments of the University of Cambridge.

We are a not-for-profit organisation providing GCSEs and A Levels and vocational qualifications, including Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals.

Executive Summary

OCR's response focuses on the impact of Post 16 reforms on the range of qualifications and options available to young people, largely at Level 3. While we welcome many features of the reforms, we believe there are a series of risks which need to be given careful consideration. In highlighting these risks, we argue that:

- Fewer young people will be able to access study at Level 3, impacting negatively on the number of people with NEET status, or those unable to escape low-paid work.
- There is a risk of young people specialising too early and of 'tracking' whereby learners make choices at 16 which set them on a particular pathway which is subsequently difficult to undo
- Reforms may lead to a reduction in access to Higher Education and the widening participation agenda
- There is a risk of losing a group of qualifications that develop the skills required for Higher Education (especially vocational degrees), such as some of our larger Cambridge Technical qualifications
- While the T Level route has the potential to provide good opportunities for those who wish to progress to a specific occupational route, it will not suit the needs or be accessible to all who do not take the academic route

- The reforms may close off some routes into employment, impacting on employers' ability to recruit skilled employees. We use the examples of Health and Social Care and Cyber Security to illustrate this
- There are widespread concerns from the sector about the quality of advice and guidance available to young people
- The removal of funding from a range of existing qualifications needs to be carefully managed and T Levels need time to embed and to be evaluated
- The reforms, if not carefully managed, could have a negative impact on the UK's education and training exports worth £21.4 billion

Inquiry Questions

Question 1: What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

The DfE's own impact analysis anticipates the reforms will reduce the number of Level 3 qualifications available to young people by 62%. Those qualifications most at risk of defunding at level 3 fall into two categories, already defined by the DfE. These are:

Tech Levels (Qualifications designed to lead to employment, apprenticeships or other further technical training.) All Tech Levels which overlap with T Level sectors are to be defunded. This is the case for most Tech Levels even where they are much smaller and narrower in purpose and design than the large full time T Level programmes.

Applied General Qualifications (Vocational qualifications taken in the academic route, preparing students for undergraduate study.) These will continue to be funded, but *only* if they are no larger than a single A Level and, with some exceptions, if they do not overlap with any A Level subject. The policy intention is that such qualifications would normally be taken alongside two full A Levels. This is an established model, but many students currently take more than one Applied General or Applied Generals which are larger than a single A Level.

The impact of the removal of these qualifications could include:

Fewer young people being able to access study at Level 3

Many schools and colleges have reported concerns that a choice between a largely technical or a heavily academic route at 16 will not be suitable for a significant proportion of young people at 16 who currently take options at Level 3 which are broader than T Levels or involve programmes with Applied Generals which are larger than a single A Level.

The final report of the Youth Commission of the Learning and Work Institute, "Unleashing talent: levelling up opportunity for young people," (Galliers, King and Maher, 2020), made a number of important recommendations for level 3 study that run counter to the direction of travel of the Post 16 Reforms. It highlights that in order to tackle youth unemployment and low pay, the number of young people qualified to level 3 must increase – the report argues for 75% attainment of level 3 by 2030.

Again, the DfE's own impact assessment highlights the risk that these reforms could diminish the number of young people attaining level 3, impacting negatively on the number of people with NEET status, or those unable to escape low-paid work.

The risk of young people specialising too early and of 'tracking'

Alison Wolf, in her landmark review of vocational education, pointed out that the trend in most countries is away from making specialist choices at 16: “[Delayed specialisation has been strongly encouraged by governments, many of whom have aimed to have the overwhelming majority of a cohort graduate with an upper secondary (age 18) certificate which gives access to tertiary studies... It has also been a response to families' own desire for extended opportunities and growing aspirations for higher education. The result has been to delay specialisation in the secondary curricula of almost all developed countries.”

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the OECD has spoken of issues of tracking in German vocational education. He said Germany needs to do more to open pathways to higher education for students pursuing vocational education and training. “On paper, the qualifications system is open. In practice, not too many people are using the pathway from vocational to higher education,” he said. “The possibilities are there. But the problem is that tracking in Germany starts so early, once you are in the vocational track you don't have a mindset for going into academic studies... More has to be done to create flexible pathways throughout the entire system.” There are clearly lessons here which can be applied to the binary choices at 16 that are a feature of the UK's Post 16 reforms.

A reduction in access to Higher Education and widening participation

There are over 100 000 learners annually who currently use vocational qualifications to access Higher Education – many of these qualifications are at risk of defunding. We know that these learners are disproportionately more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the risk to social mobility and widening participation has been widely highlighted.

We have worked closely with the HE sector to make sure that our Cambridge Technicals mirror their requirements. Our developers worked directly with a range of universities including: University of Leeds, University of Brighton, London South Bank University, Coventry University and Birmingham University. We have consulted with our Higher Education Forum throughout which includes members from the majority of the Russell group universities and a full range of other institutions. They are all telling us that Applied Generals of all sizes work for them and are widely used to facilitate entry to their degree courses.

Using UCAS data, we have been able to establish that since 2017, the number of candidates with Cambridge Technicals applying to study higher education courses has been steadily increasing.

Findings include:

- Over 95% of the students who applied to study a course in higher education with a Cambridge Technical received at least one offer and over 86% were accepted.
- The acceptance rate to Russell Group institutions was higher in 2019 than in 2018 (19% vs. 17%).

Loss of qualifications that develop the skills required for Higher Education (especially vocational degrees)

The work of Greatorex and Suto (2016), on establishing a harmonised taxonomy of the domains of knowledge covered in qualifications and levels of mental processing required to answer questions, has been used by OCR to demonstrate that its Cambridge Technicals test non-cognitive domain skills (21st century skills) including high-order decision-making, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

WonkHE and Adobe published a joint report about skills that academics in HE think graduates need after HE. While less directly relevant to post-16, as this is about skills to be developed *during* HE courses, findings point to the importance of soft skills such as communication, problem-solving and critical thinking which feature strongly in Applied General Qualifications.

Question 1a: Which students will benefit from the changes?

The T Level route has the potential to provide good opportunities for those who wish to progress to a specific occupational route, apprenticeship and/or further study. It will work best for young people who, at 16, have a clear idea of the career path they wish to commit to, supported by good advice and guidance. It seems likely that young people who live in areas that have an employment base in the sector they aspire to work in will have a better chance of securing the industry placement they need to underpin their T Level study – where you live matters.

Question 1b: Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

This is outlined in our earlier answers. We would like to emphasise that some vocational qualifications are taken by a disproportionately high number of SEN students, because they offer a different course structure, assessment type or adapted learning materials.

Question 1c: Is there enough planned provision to support Level 1 and Level 2 learners?

Given the limited word count we have chosen to focus our response on policies being implemented for level 3 qualifications. In relation to Level 2 and below, our key points are:

- The range of needs at level 2 and below are immensely varied
- This means there is a need for a wide variety of different qualifications so any bid to rationalise provision here would be dangerous
- An expansion in uptake of level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications pre 16, taken alongside GCSEs, would help people to prepare for technical study and to make informed choices at 16

Question 1d: Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

According to the DfE's own report, *UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education activity in 2017*, the UK has a strong track record of exporting education and training across the world. Education and training exports were worth **£21.4 billion in 2017**.

It is likely there will be a negative impact on the reputation of existing UK vocational qualifications as a result of the defunding of them by the UK government. This will threaten what is, to date, an impressive export record. It may also be unfortunate if learners in England are unable to access high quality UK-developed qualifications that are made available in other jurisdictions.

Question 1e: Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skill gaps).

OCR has taken care to ensure that its Cambridge Technicals contains content which keeps open the option of moving directly into employment and employment-based training for those taking these qualifications who decide not to progress to higher education. In developing the content we have worked with a wide range of employers including: **IBM; UK Athletics; Alton Towers; Mencap Sport; JLR; Kings College Hospital; Siemens; Fujitsu; and Cambridge TV.**

Siemens has pointed out the importance of such qualifications: “Qualifications such as Cambridge Technicals are important to fuel the expansion of, and investment into, the advanced engineering sector by furnishing an augmented pool of skilled, work-ready young people. In Siemens’ experience, and in conversations with our SME partners and supply chain, skills deficiency is a major obstacle to growth in the area that these qualifications will help counteract. Cambridge Technicals will help with the expansion of our Entry Level Talent specifically apprenticeships that require a broad and transferable skills base.” **Brenda Yearsley, School and Education Manager, Siemens plc**

It is worth looking at some specific examples of how the reforms might impact on important skills and routes into employment:

Health and Social Care

Our most popular Cambridge Technical is in Health and Social Care. It is twice the size of an A Level, and therefore likely to be defunded. Currently, it is typically taken alongside Biology A Level to lead to a degree in nursing, or alongside A Level Sociology to lead to a degree in social work. There are strong arguments for retaining this route to keep open a pathway into crucial areas of employment.

Cyber Security

The Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport has consistently warned of the importance of cyber security to UK PLC and the dangers of not having sufficient people with adequate cyber skills to deal with potential threats whether to public or private systems. The risk here is immense. Yet there is no provision for cyber security in the syllabus of the academic A level nor the technical T levels. The only qualifications in IT that cover cyber security at Level 3 are large Cambridge Technical and BTEC qualifications in the digital space. The removal of these qualifications means the removal of any current provision for this important subject. IfATE has confirmed that there is no intention to develop a T level in Cyber Security, despite the gaps in knowledge and skills highlighted.

Question 1f: Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

There have been improvements in some aspects of IAG in recent years, particularly in relation to the introduction of Gatsby Benchmarks and the 'Baker Clause'. However, we continue to hear deep concerns from education and training providers about the quality and availability of IAG and concerns about the levels of understanding of routes and options outside the traditional A Level route.

Question 2: Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

The proposed technical T level route is a big commitment for a 16-year-old and more demanding and restricted in many ways than the A Level route. It would be preferable to offer learners the option of some limited combinations of vocational/technical and academic qualifications. We also note with interest the comments of both the Chief Regulator and the Chair of the Education Select Committee about offering a smaller sized T level (2 A level equivalent) alongside another qualification type – A level, Applied General or another separate technical qualification.

Question 3: Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

(See our response to question 1e)

Question 4: What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

We have already outlined our concerns about NEETs, low pay and the risks of shutting off pathways to higher education and into certain sectors of employment

Question 4a: Are there specific short-term implications?

The removal of funding from existing qualifications needs to be carefully managed. Existing, well-established qualifications with high levels of employer recognition and strong market value should not be withdrawn, if at all, until T Levels are widely available and recognised and have been fully evaluated.

Caution and stability are vital - anything which undermines the reputation of new qualifications such as T Levels can be extremely damaging. Past experiences with government-developed qualifications such as GNVQs, NVQs, 14-19 Diplomas have illustrated how vulnerable such qualifications are at their point of introduction and how, often unfairly, public confidence in them can evaporate.

Where qualifications are to have their funding withdrawn a long period of notice (at least three years) would be required to allow colleges and schools to prepare.

Question 4b: What are the long-term implications?

We are concerned about whether the centralised system created by the Skills Bill will be sufficiently agile and responsive to adapt to a rapidly changing economy with what is needed on time and of sufficient quality. According to the DfE's own website there are currently 595 approved apprenticeship standards (across all levels), although the Open University has projected that 1,600 is likely to be closer to the final number created. Current plans anticipate that there will be 25 T Level pathways across the existing 14 sectors.

The quality of standards must be such that they can provide safe foundations for new qualifications. It was the Sainsbury Review that stated: "some existing apprenticeship standards, at least at face value, seem to overlap significantly with others, be firm- rather than occupation-specific, and/or contain insufficient technical content. If this is indeed the case, it risks a proliferation of low-value or niche standards, creating complexity and recreating all the problems of the previous system".

Occupational standards need to be reviewed regularly to allow for changes in technology and working practices, and they also need to be evaluated, with users, for their quality and functionality.

There will be times when employers and training providers will have to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and requirements. Even the leanest and most efficient of government bodies will struggle to respond quickly and innovatively to such circumstances and to absorb any associated risks. It seems likely that IfATE would struggle to develop new approaches (which might not involve T Levels at all) at the pace that might be required.

We would recommend reserving some funding models and associated approaches to technical training which would allow for rapid change and different approaches, particularly in response to the economic impact of the pandemic, Brexit, and, of course, the implications of the global climate emergency.

Footnotes

1. https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/post-16-level-3-and-below-qualifications-review/supporting_documents/Post%2016%20level%20and%20below%20qualifications%20review%20%20Impact%20Assessments.pdf
2. For more information about these categories see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546044/16-19_qualifications_technical_guide_2017_and_2018_performance_tables.pdf
3. Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report , Alison Wolf, March 2011, p174
4. <http://ncee.org/2017/09/after-the-shock-the-german-education-system-in-2017/> Bob Rothman
5. OCR's Cambridge Technicals are the fastest growing 3 qualifications designated by the DfE as Applied General qualifications, typically taken in combination with A Levels.
6. <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/skills-to-thrive-academics-perceptions-of-student-skills-development/>
7. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850263/SFR_Education_Exports_2017_FINAL.pdf

8. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?includeApprovedForDelivery=true>
9. <http://www.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/blog/what-are-apprenticeship-standards#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20apprenticeship%20standards,as%201%2C600%20standards%20by%202020>.
10. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers#:~:text=There%20are%2025%20T%20Levels,surveying%20and%20planning%20for%20construction>
11. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

Submitted by
Paul Steer
Head of Policy
OCR Examinations

policy@ocr.org.uk
December 2021

Appendix x: Pearson

APPG for Youth Employment inquiry - The Impact Of Vocational Qualifications On Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes

About Pearson

Learning is the most powerful force for change in the world. More than 20,000 Pearson employees deliver our products and services in nearly 200 countries, all working towards a common purpose – to help everyone achieve their potential through learning. We do that by providing high quality, digital content and learning experiences, as well as assessments and qualifications that help people build their skills and grow with the world around them. We are the world's leading learning company. Our key products in the UK include BTEC, Higher Nationals, and Pearson Test of English.

Executive Summary

- Caution is required when considering the removal of funding from existing courses that are high-quality and lead to student progression and employment.
- Future options need to be shown to work, before the defunding of qualifications that already deliver positive outcomes.
- Removing funding for BTEC Nationals will have a significant impact on disadvantaged learners at level 3 – narrowing learner access and op

What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

Which students will benefit from the changes?

We are concerned that **the current timeline for switching off funding for qualifications that overlap with T Levels does not allow sufficient time for evaluation of these new programmes** and the outcomes they support for students. Although Pearson welcomes the

introduction of T Levels and are one of four awarding organisations delivering the new qualifications, our understanding is that decisions to defund qualifications could happen before any students have graduated from the first T Level programmes. In the absence of a clear evidence base at the local and national level **this could narrow choice and opportunity for young people progressing to higher education and employment.**

Although the Secretary of State's announcement at Second Reading of a one-year delay to the current timetable is a step in the right direction, **we do not believe this will provide enough time to see whether new programmes are high quality and deliver positive outcomes for students.**

Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

Removing funding for BTEC Nationals will have a significant impact on disadvantaged learners at level 3. This is likely to affect several different areas:

- **Narrowing learner access and opportunity**

Based on DfE estimates 15% of all 16 to 19 enrolments at level 3, and 43% of non-A level enrolments at level 3 are for qualifications at risk of defunding as part of the review.¹

- **Diversity and inclusion**

Learners with SEN, from Asian and Black ethnic groups, males, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are all more likely to be negatively affected by the proposed changes. The proportion of learners currently enrolled on qualifications at risk of losing funding is twice as high in the most disadvantaged quintile (20%) than as in the least disadvantaged quintile (10%). 40,000 (25%) SEN learners could see their provision removed.²

- **Higher level skills, diversity and inclusion in higher education, and supporting higher level skills needs**

The proposed changes at level 3 (underpinned by this Bill) could have a negative impact on thousands of individuals progressing to HE, and high skilled employment. Qualifications, such as BTEC Nationals, are accepted by all UK universities. Around one in four enter HE with a BTEC - over 100,000 students a year.

The proposals could reverse recent trends to widen diversity and broaden inclusion. HESA data shows that a greater proportion of BTEC learners entering HE come from an ethnic minority background when compared with A level learners (17% Asian and 14% Black and 12% Asian and 5% Black respectively) and come from the bottom four socio-economic groups (32% and 17% respectively).³

Research by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) shows that widening access to HE will reverse from 2024. If half of the learners taking BTECs or a combination of A levels and BTECs were no longer able to progress to HE this would, relative to 2020, set participation by the most disadvantaged groups back to 2015/2016 levels.⁴The report finds that:

- Over a quarter of students from the lowest participation neighbourhoods may not enter HE under the new system.
- Removing funding for BTECs may set widening access work back 'years or even decades'.

- Students entering HE under the new system may be less prepared for HE study
- Students from widening access backgrounds may be forced into T Levels.
- T Levels are not designed to support HE progression.

Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

Many qualifications under threat of defunding contribute to the UK education export strategy and to net education export targets. Applied General qualifications overall contribute £180m annually to GDP, according to the 2021 Ofqual annual report. BTEC is taught and recognised in more than 80 countries around the globe.⁵

Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skill gaps).

Evidence suggests that employers will be impacted by skills gaps if BTECs are defunded. Level 3 BTEC Nationals support almost a quarter of a million students in 17 core subjects each year. There are sectors in which T Levels will not fully replace BTECs and other existing qualifications - meaning that certain industries reliant on skilled individuals at level 3, and at graduate level, will see their talent pipeline effected.

T Levels and BTECs do not overlap in a straightforward like for like manner. Some BTEC content may overlap with some T Level content, however, the primary aim of the T Levels is to support entry to employment in a specific occupation. All Level 3 BTEC Nationals are developed in consultation with employers and HEIs. Each subject has an HE panel to aid student entry into HE, and therefore graduate employment.

In some areas the T Levels do not cover large areas of the BTEC. The T Level in Health for example, has six specialisms but does not cover Social Care. The BTEC Health & Social Care supports progression to work and to both health and social care-related degree programmes, for example, social care, social work, public health.

Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy? // Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

Limiting the development of all qualifications to employer-led standards will not allow for the flexibility and agility needed to meet newly emerging demand, and jobs of the future. In the 2011 review of vocational education, Baroness Wolf argued that the micro-management of qualification specifications impeded awarding organisations' ability to respond to market need.⁷

300 unique employers and 75 professional bodies supported the development of the latest BTEC Level 3 Nationals and recognised the qualifications as being fit for purpose for their sector. The qualifications were confirmed as providing learners with the specialist knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers in the industry are looking for. By comparison, T Levels are still relatively unknown amongst employers. The latest Ofqual research found that the awareness of T Levels among employers was found to be 12%. This compares to approximately two-fifths (43%) of employers reporting having a very or quite good understanding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) in their sector.⁶

BTECs have support from industry and Higher Education Institutions who are delivering degrees leading to professional employment. They play an important part in the supply chains of qualified employees, including STEM employees, as those educated up to levels 4,

5 and 6 all require a level 3 education as their base. Government economic strategy (including the greening of the economy), and the 4th industrial revolution will require more rather than fewer less skilled employees with qualifications at level 4 and above. In STEM sectors for example, automation and emerging technologies are decreasing the need for level 2 roles and increasing the demand for level 3 and above roles.

Vocational qualifications that develop broad knowledge and understanding of an industry need to be available alongside T Levels. T Levels alone will not be sufficient to prepare us for the multiple roles that our changing economy will need.

What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place? Are there specific short term implications? What are the long-term implications?

Many qualifications at risk of defunding, including BTEC qualifications, have been identified by the DfE as 'High Value Courses' as they lead to higher wage returns, support the Industrial Strategy, and enable increased productivity.⁷ We know that BTECs have positive wage returns and employment outcomes:

- Evidence shows labour market outcomes for students progressing to first degree qualifications after attaining a level 3 BTEC are positive. Males and females respectively, progressing to HE with BTECs earn 18% and 22% more than those who do not progress to HE. Males and females respectively progressing to HE holding a combination of BTECs and A levels earn 15% and 23% more.
- Employment effects (in terms of the proportion of the year spend it employment) are typically positive and around 1.5 percentage points for males and 2 percentage points for females in possession of level 3 BTECs and a first degree compared to the group with level 3 BTECs as highest qualification. The employment effects estimated for the group holding a combination of BTECs and A levels (and a first degree) were also in the same range (1.5-2 percentage points) for both males and females.

NEETs As the number of those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is high, there are worries that current government policy could exacerbate this.

In its November 2021 data release, the ONS reported that the number of young people in the UK classified as NEET increased to an estimated 689,000 in July-September 2021 – up by 0.9 percentage points on the previous quarter. There was also a record quarterly increase of 70,000 in the number of young people in the UK who were NEET and economically inactive, currently estimated to be 421,000.⁸

The House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee's recently published report on 'Skills for every young person' expressed apprehension that the proposed post-16 reforms do not go far enough to address the concerning number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).⁹ The Committee made a number of recommendations, intended to "help ensure that all young people are supported into education, employment or training, equipped with the skills they need to get good jobs, and can avoid becoming NEET". Among these recommendations were that:

"The Government must reconsider its decision to defund tried and tested level 3 qualifications like BTECs, Extended Diplomas and AGQs. We support the amendment to the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill requiring a four-year moratorium on defunding these qualifications and urge the Government to reconsider this policy in its entirety."

Footnotes

1. Department for Education:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-high-value-courses-premium>
2. The government's own analysis shows that the most disadvantaged students are twice as likely to be enrolled on qualifications likely to be withdrawn than the least disadvantaged. See DfE Impact Assessment: Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-in-england>
3. HESA dataset available on request from Pearson
4. Research by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) suggests that level 3 qualification reform will “set access to HE back at least 5 years”.
<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/news/new-report-shows-level-3-qualification-reform-will-set-access-to-he-back-at-least-5-years/>
5. Applied General qualifications contribute £180m annually according to Ofqual annual report from Feb 21
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/960952/Annual_Qualifications_Market_Report_academic_year_2019_to_2020.pdf
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/perceptions-of-vtq-in-england-wave-4>
7. Department for Education:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-high-value-courses-premium>
8. Office for National Statistics:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/november2021>
9. House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee:
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5802/ldselect/ldythunemp/98/98.pdf>

Appendix xi: The Prince's Trust

The Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes- Written evidence submitted by The Prince's Trust

About The Prince's Trust

Youth charity The Prince's Trust helps young people to develop the confidence and skills they need to realise their ambitions, so that they can live, learn, and earn. Founded by The Prince of Wales in 1976, the charity supports 11- to 30-year-olds who are unemployed, struggling at school and at risk of exclusion. The Trust has helped over a million young people to date, and last year alone supported over 70,000 individuals.

Many of the young people helped by The Trust are in or leaving care, facing issues such as homelessness, mental health problems, or have been in trouble with the law. The programmes offered by the charity give vulnerable young people the practical and financial support needed to stabilise their lives, helping develop self-esteem and skills for work. Three in four young people supported by The Prince's Trust move into work, education, or training.

Our qualifications and work with schools and colleges

1. The Prince's Trust is an accredited awarding body, and we are drawing on the experience of delivering two of our core qualifications – *Personal Development and*

Employability and Employment, Teamwork and Community Skills – to support this response.

2. The Prince's Trust works in both schools and colleges to deliver personal development courses and qualifications through our Achieve and Team programmes. Our Team programme supports 16–25-year-olds to develop their skills and confidence – helping to prepare them for their next step. Individuals on this programme complete a qualification in *Employment, Teamwork and Community Skills* and can do this at Entry Level 3, Level 1, or Level 2. The Prince's Trust Achieve programme supports young people aged 11 to 19 to engage and succeed in education.
3. The Prince's Trust works with around 40 per cent of England's FE colleges, supporting around 8,000 young people through the Team programme each year and approximately a further 1,000 on the Achieve programme in these institutions. The Team programme is also delivered in partnership with colleges and uniformed services partnerships (including Police and Fire and Rescue Services).

This response:

1. The Prince's Trust's vision that every young person should have the chance to succeed, and our experience of delivering post-16 qualifications to disadvantaged learners, have led us to make the following key points in this response:
 - **Vocational qualifications can support the development of key skills as well as social mobility – and maintaining a wide range of opportunities for young people should be a priority**
 - **It is important to drive employability and labour market outcomes for all qualification levels, to avoid building a cliff edge into the number of young people reached**
 - **Post-16 qualifications are an important part of employability and labour market outcomes, but wider system change is necessary to engage hard-to-reach young people and ensure all young people access good quality work**

Vocational qualifications can support the development of key skills as well as social mobility – and maintaining a wide range of opportunities for young people should be a priority

Vocational qualifications are often exhorted as strong pathways for young people who know what career they would like to move into, but they also help young people to develop a wide range of transferable employability skills, providing merit for these qualifications as a foundation, rather than simply being a direct pathway to a fixed job.

Ensuring the skills system gives young people the best possible chance of employment or further education is welcome, but caution is needed to ensure that reforms that aim to make the system more efficient do not make it less effective.

1. A report by the EPI warned that England's narrow academic curricula may be limiting students' future earnings. They found that students who studied a greater diversity in their A Level subjects were likely to see a small boost in earnings compared to those who narrowed their choices. Based on this, whilst also considering the current emphasis on social mobility and Levelling Up, **the Government may consider whether offering a range of broad, diverse qualifications could lead to better long-term outcomes for young people.**

2. Research has found that disadvantaged young people are four times more likely to become socially mobile if they attend university. It is therefore important to recognise that half of white working-class and Black British students in England get into university with vocational qualifications such as BTECs. This demonstrates the importance of access, and the qualifications that support this access, to these institutions for young people who may not have progressed to higher education through traditional academic routes.
3. Whilst levelling up is a welcome acknowledgement of the desire to reduce place-based inequality, it is important to remember that movement, particularly of young people, is normal in any population. Increasing local opportunities and driving local pride will benefit many and mean that young people don't feel the need to leave to succeed, but this should not be at the expense of opportunities for young people to move and pursue opportunities elsewhere. Linked to this, **work is needed to ensure that the requirement for work experience placements on T Levels does not limit young people who wish to pursue an opportunity that is not available locally.**
4. **There needs to be more support for non-classroom-based learning in vocationally focused qualifications,** as classroom-based learning will not work for everybody. In a recent meeting of the Youth Voice Forum (subsidiary of the Youth Employment Group), young people called for a range of learning opportunities that best suit their needs, with many stressing that practical learning had given them a depth of understanding that they felt was missing from more academic learning.
5. **The existence of a T Level in a similar area should not negate alternatives that are structured differently, that provide an alternative for young people who learn differently.** An effective Lifetime Skills Guarantee can only exist in a system that works for all young people.
6. The Prince's Trust Group surveyed over 6,000 young people in the UK and abroad, finding that young people want to develop life skills that will prepare them for the world of work. **It is important that reforms consider the youth perspective: programmes that provide transferable skills beyond specialised technical skills appeal to young people and are more likely to keep them engaged in their learning.**
7. In a report between the Prince's Trust, The L&WI, and HSBC, employers who were surveyed were most likely to prioritise communication skills (18%), attitude and enthusiasm (15%), and an ability and willingness to learn (9%). Fewer employers mentioned qualifications (5%) and relevant skills (5%). It is therefore clear that from both youth and employer perspectives, there is a desire for life skills or 'soft skills', that are transferable and adaptable.
8. Skills shortages need to be addressed and present labour market shortages have brought them to the forefront of public consciousness. However, skills for work are only one part of this and skills for learning must be prioritised as well. For young people to succeed in work and life, it is integral they develop skills, confidence, and a set of personal behaviours that will equip them to thrive in whichever pathway they choose to follow.
9. While we need to meet skills shortages, flexibility will be needed to address long-term skills needs. Analysis suggests that 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been

invented yet and as such, it is difficult to anticipate the skills the next generation of young people will need. While improving the quality and standing of vocational qualifications is a welcome move, caution is needed to ensure that skills reform prioritising T Levels does not limit young people to a small technical area too early in their careers.

It is important to drive employability and labour market outcomes for all qualification levels, to avoid building a cliff edge into the number of young people reached

1. Learners often enter post-16 education at different attainment levels, as well as different stages in their lives, and it is important to ensure that the system is flexible enough to support all of them to develop the skills that they need to progress – whichever route they choose to follow.
2. It is important to recognise the diversity of people within the system and the fact that, for many, achievement below Level 3 is a positive achievement that can help them thrive in all aspects of their life. For some this will mean achieving a qualification in personal, social and employability skills, for others it will mean working towards academic or technical education goals.
3. The young people who receive support from The Prince's Trust through our personal development programmes are overwhelmingly working at Level 1 or below: only 5 per cent have Level 2 Maths, and 16 per cent Level 2 English on our *Team programme*. As such, gaining qualifications in personal, social and employability skills can be an important milestone for this group – and can be one which helps to re-engage them in learning more broadly.
4. Some learners will also need more time and support to understand and select which route to pursue – whether technical or academic, or in what subject or field – and supporting this process should also be seen as a positive aspect of the post-16 system. Getting this right will lead to better outcomes further down the line, as learners will be more committed to particular courses or determined to achieve a particular goal. The new transition phase introduced as part of the T Level reforms could play an important part in this.
5. While progression to higher level qualifications is a positive aim for individuals, it is important to recognise that this will not be the route that every learner follows. Some may progress directly from Level 2 to Level 3, others may move from Level 2 into employment or an apprenticeship, some may struggle to complete a qualification at Level 2, and others may leave education for some time before returning to complete a qualification at a higher level.
6. Statistics show that in FE colleges, the majority of 18+ learners are participating in courses at Level 2 and below, and while we welcome the aim of recent reforms to ensure that all available options present good opportunities for learners, **it is important to ensure that rhetoric and messaging does not have the unintended impact of devaluing qualifications below Level 3, or those that sit under the 'personal, social and employability skills' classification.**
7. Young people with SEND and those who are eligible for Free School Meals tend to be over-represented in post-16 qualifications at Level 2 and below – and the system must work to effectively support these groups. **We agree that it is vitally important to ensure that options at this level are of high quality, but also to ensure that they**

remain an easily accessible and widely available pathway. It is important that reforms do not lose sight of this.

8. As mentioned above, The Prince's Trust's *Team programme* includes an *Employment, Teamwork and Community Skills Qualification*. An independent Social Return on Investment analysis of the Team Programme carried out in 2015 monetised the value of the qualification at £14m per year. However, it found an even larger value of £15m in increases to participants' personal resources and skills.

In addition to this £29m of value to the individual, it also produced £14m in savings to the state:

- £12m in savings from crime prevention
 - £2.3m in saved benefit payments and increased tax payments
 - £160,000 in savings to the NHS Mental Health service
9. Whilst the qualification is of high value to the individual achieving it, it is clear that qualifications below Level 3 have broader benefits to society that should be recognised.

Post-16 qualifications are an important part of employability and labour market outcomes, but wider system change is necessary to engage young people furthest from the labour market and ensure all young people access good quality work

1. The most recent ONS Labour Market Statistics indicate that, whilst schemes to prevent a mass unemployment crisis have been very successful, the labour market is now facing a crisis of participation.
2. The number of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has risen to 900,000, which seems to be driven by an increase in economically inactive young people. Furthermore, the proportion of unemployed young people who are long-term unemployed has stayed around 40%, suggesting this group are not being reached sufficiently. It is important that skills reform does not further disadvantage those furthest from the labour market, but it also must do more to support these groups as evidence suggests that the existing system is not currently serving these groups as best it could.
3. In line with this, **we agree that promoting apprenticeships as a good route into employment would be a positive intervention, particularly in those sectors identified as utilising this pathway more frequently for their entry-level roles.** The recent trends in apprenticeship starts do however present some concerns.
4. Data shows a shift in the age profile of people starting apprenticeships between 2018/19 and 2019/20, with a higher proportion over the age of 24- this is in line with a general trend over the last decade that has seen a greater reduction in starts for those under 25 compared to those over 25. In fact, 47% of apprenticeships started in 2019/20 were by people aged 25 and over. Furthermore, only 31% of apprenticeship starts were at the intermediate level in 2019/20 compared to 65% in 2013/14 - further demonstrating the impact of changes to the system. These figures show a significant shift in who apprenticeships are serving and where they are supporting skills development. **Further reforms to the apprenticeship system are needed to ensure that opportunities for young people, and at lower levels, remain an excellent route into work.**
5. While engaging young people with the labour market is important, it is also important that the work they find is high quality. A survey of young people found that

62% of people feel the pandemic has made it harder to find high-quality work. Mental and physical health were cited as the biggest barriers to finding high-quality work. Amongst warnings of a youth mental health crisis, it is essential that work fosters good wellbeing in young people. The benefits of good quality work to the individual are high, and these benefits are often felt by the employer too, as good quality work and wellbeing are strong predictors of employee retention.

6. When it comes to ensuring a smooth transition from education into employment, in which young people have the information and guidance to make informed decisions about their future, **closer working between DWP and DfE is required**. This is particularly necessary for disabled young people, who struggle to find good information and advice about making the journey into employment.
7. **The Department may wish to consider the value of signposting and supporting young people into pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes as a bridge between classroom-based study and employment** – helping to build personal and employability skills, as well as preparing them for a successful experience in the labour market. This support is particularly valuable for post-16 learners who have struggled in school, and for those who may have lower qualifications.
8. Though it is important to review the value of qualifications for learners to ensure that we are supporting them onto positive pathways, **this value should be considered in terms of not only their opportunities in the labour market, but also a learner’s engagement with education, and how well it is building their technical and personal skills**.
9. As discussed earlier, skills demand in the labour market is ever changing and unpredictable. One of the best ways to address this is to ensure that young people have the skills and confidence to learn, so that they are able to easily retrain to meet demand. However, adult education funding is also essential to facilitate an adaptable labour market where labour supply is able to retrain to meet labour demand. **The AEB should be increased – both at a national and devolved level through relevant combined authorities**. This would enable providers to ensure high-quality provision, and to effectively deliver intensive programmes to learners who are NEET or harder to engage.

Footnotes

1. [A narrowing path to success? 16-19 curriculum breadth and employment outcomes - Education Policy Institute \(epi.org.uk\)](https://www.epi.org.uk/a-narrowing-path-to-success-16-19-curriculum-breadth-and-employment-outcomes)
2. [Disadvantaged young people four times more likely to become socially mobile if they attend university - Sutton Trust](https://www.suttontrust.com/disadvantaged-young-people-four-times-more-likely-to-become-socially-mobile-if-they-attend-university)
3. [Vocation, Vocation, Vocation - Social Market Foundation. \(smf.co.uk\)](https://www.smf.co.uk/vocation-vocation-vocation)
4. [Future of Work Report - Meet Generation 'Stand Up, Start Up' | Prince's Trust International \(princestrustinternational.org\)](https://www.princestrustinternational.org/future-of-work-report)
5. [Facing the future: employment prospects for young people after coronavirus \(princes-trust.org.uk\)](https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/facing-the-future)
6. [Realizing-2030-A-Divided-Vision-of-the-Future-Summary.pdf \(delltechnologies.com\)](https://www.delltechnologies.com/realizing-2030-a-divided-vision-of-the-future-summary.pdf)
7. Data from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-further-education-and-skills>

8. https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/post-16-level-3-and-below-qualifications-review/supporting_documents/Post%2016%20level%203%20and%20below%20qualifications%20review%20%20Consultation%20Document.pdf
9. [Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
10. [A06 SA: Educational status and labour market status for people aged from 16 to 24 \(seasonally adjusted\) - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
11. [UNEM01 SA: Unemployment by age and duration \(seasonally adjusted\) - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
12. [Apprenticeship statistics for England - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)
13. [Apprenticeship starts for young people continue to fall – DfE reveal \(feweek.co.uk\)](#)
14. [Apprenticeship statistics for England - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)
15. [Apprenticeship statistics for England - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)
16. [Not just any job, good jobs! Youth voices from across the UK | Institute for Employment Studies \(IES\) \(employment-studies.co.uk\)](#)

Appendix xii: The Royal Academy of Engineering – Education and Skills Group

Executive Summary

- Engineering is a vital component of all sectors identified by the government as being critical to achieving a green industrial revolution. The UK’s ambitions to meet net zero targets, to increase innovation and enterprise and to ensure that future engineers are educated and trained to meet the needs of an advanced digital economy are all at stake if investment in vocational and technical qualifications at level 3 is not maintained – and increased.
- The supply of talent through the education and skills system will fall far short of future skills demand from critical sectors of the economy which rely heavily on the availability of engineering and technology skills – and will negatively impact the employment prospects for young people.
- Students who have vocational and technical qualifications and who progress on to higher education are more likely than their peers to have come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The removal of engineering BTEC and vocational qualifications at level 3 would disproportionately affect students from those backgrounds.
- BTECs are a widely respected and vital pathway into the engineering profession. The removal of these qualifications will reduce both the number and diversity of those entering the engineering profession.
- Concerns remain over the speed and scale of technical education reforms and the practical implications surrounding the delivery of the T Level programme. Chief among these concerns is the viability of the 45-day work placement, the regional availability of engineering and manufacturing T levels and the disappearance of applied general qualifications.
- A greater focus on the T level transition options for young people are needed. It is essential that schools and FE providers receive additional resource to support the transition effectively.

1. What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

The DfE' proposes to replace the current options available for young people with three pathways: A levels, T Levels, and apprenticeships. Whilst we support all three routes into engineering, there will be groups that will not have good access to or will not be best suited to any of these three pathways.

Engineering BTECs and level 3 vocational qualifications offer valuable routes into the engineering profession, particularly for those who would not be suited to more academic routes like A levels and higher education. Additionally, BTECs are widely recognised and respected by engineering employers, and can offer an alternative pathway into engineering higher education. Currently, one eighth of engineering graduates have a BTEC in engineering – students who may otherwise have not taken engineering at degree level.

The removal of funding for BTEC courses will reduce the options for young people progressing into a career into engineering. The traditional pathway into engineering higher education is through good attainment in A level maths and often, physics

BTECs are beneficial for young people with lower prior attainment in GCSE maths and physics, because they can still progress to a successful career in engineering without taking a traditional academic pathway through A levels and degrees.

The removal of engineering BTECs and other vocational qualifications at level 3 will create a vacuum which, as early evidence suggests, will not be replaced by an uptake in the number of young people taking T Levels.

We remain concerned that there will be significant regional variation in those who will be able to take T Levels, with limited options available in some areas of the country. Young people from rural and coastal areas of the country typically have fewer opportunities and options available to them, particularly for routes into engineering. This runs counter to the government's levelling up agenda, with some areas benefiting from a greater variety of courses, and others being limited to very few options.

We welcome the news that the DfE is going to remove the level 2 maths and English exit requirements for the new T Levels. However, it is unlikely that this removal will have an impact on the number of young people choosing the new courses.

a. Which students will benefit from the changes?

Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and young people in areas where there is more choice available to them will be the main beneficiaries of the changes. Students who have the necessary higher prior attainment to progress to A levels or T Levels will also benefit from the changes due to a reduction in the competition in the jobs market.

b. Are there groups that you anticipate being left out/left behind?

As government proposals indicate that T Levels will replace level 3 engineering BTECs and vocational qualifications, regional provision for T Levels will leave many groups left out or left behind. Early evidence suggests that the provision of T Levels nationwide will be uneven, with some areas having good provision, and others left without any. The regional variation of T Levels appears to largely be due to the issue of work placements, and the number of employers willing or able to offer them, particularly with the costs and difficulties associated in delivering 315 hours of work experience to a young person.

Currently, the benefits of offering T Level placements for young people do not outweigh the risks and costs, a problem that is more severe in areas of the country which have higher levels of deprivation.

This will disadvantage those from poorer communities, rural and coastal areas, those without access to good and cheap transport and those without personal or family connections with employers. It is no coincidence that these are exactly the groups who are over-represented among BTEC students now.

c. Is there enough planned provision to support Level 1 and Level 2 learners?

There needs to be a greater focus on the T Level transition options for young people.

Under current proposals, students who undertake level 2 courses in further education need to be adequately supported if they wish to transition to engineering T Levels. It is vitally important that further education institutions and providers receive additional funding in order to deliver the transition successfully.

d. Are there any fiscal implications of the impacts you anticipate?

The likely reduction in the number of young people progressing into the engineering profession, at least in the short-term, as a result of the difficulties with placements will further exacerbate existing skills gaps and shortages across the UK economy and create significant problems for engineering and technology industries, who are already struggling to recruit the number of engineers needed. This in turn is likely to have implications for the economy and also on the government ambitions around net zero, and therefore future economic drivers.

The engineering sector is one of the largest contributors to UK economic growth, generating 21.4% of UK turnover in 2018. The government's build back greener plan also highlights the growing importance of engineers needed between now and 2050 to meet net zero targets.

In the building services sector, there is a rapid change needed for embedding the new technologies for net zero, the uncertainty and instability caused by the shifting of the educational infrastructure is poorly timed.

The government must ensure that new pathways into engineering are successful first, before removing proven valuable routes. The removal of pathways could create significant fiscal implications, with additional costs for recruitment, retention and costs incurred through persistent vacancies.

e. Will employers be impacted? (for example; additional costs, hiring implications or skills gaps).

With the removal of classroom based technical and vocational qualifications, employers will have to offer more work placements for apprentices and T Level students. This will create additional costs to businesses who will need to provide training, mentoring and workplace adjustments for work placement students. This will be more difficult for SMEs who will not have the staff capacity to do this in a cost-effective manner.

As mentioned above, this will also limit the number of young people going into engineering, which will create skills shortage across the sector. Furthermore, with potentially fewer numbers of young people taking vocational qualifications at level 3, the number of engineers at levels 4 and 5 will be impacted as level 3 BTECs offer logical routes to qualifications such as Higher National Certificates/Diplomas.

f. Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

Careers information, advice and guidance is already uneven across England and additional opportunities and pathways for young people could cause greater strain on careers advisors if they do not receive adequate training.

During periods of transition, careers services come under additional strain as advisors must become expert in new areas.

Under government proposals, the level 3 landscape could become fractured across the country, with considerable regional variation. In many areas of the country there will be a lack of local provision for engineering careers and therefore a lack of CIAG for different routes.

With careers services already under strain, it is essential that extra resources and funding are made available to ensure that adequate CIAG is available across the country. This will be particularly important for T Levels, with links needing to be established between local employers and T Level providers. The government should provide more resources to enable improved STEM related careers provision and ensure that schools, careers hubs and other local structures such as Local Skills Improvement plans and designated bodies overseeing this, are all sufficiently interlinked.

2. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

Streamlining the post-16 offer to young people is in principle to be welcomed but there is a great risk that the proposals will fall short in delivering the range and scale of employability skills young people need to succeed in the current and future economy. There have been numerous failed attempts by past governments with qualifications such as GNVQs, diplomas, Vocational A levels, City & Guilds and even BTECs. The simplification of the level 3 landscape fails to take into account the number of work placements that will need to be provided by employers, who simply do not have the opportunities or the resources to offer them. Surveys and even early conservative estimates would indicate that this is entirely unrealistic.

3. Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of employers in the future economy?

Not in the short to medium term. The proposed ambition for a simplified structure of either T Levels, Apprenticeships or A levels for young people fails to appreciate the nuances of the current structure at level 3. The three proposed routes will not adequately replace the BTEC route into engineering and will therefore fail to meet the ambitions of young people by restricting student choice. On-the-job training routes such as apprenticeships are costly for employers, with many SMEs unable to train apprenticeships due to the costs of training, recruitment, management, and other associated costs. Early evidence suggests that employers are unwilling to offer work placements for T Levels, one of the reasons cited is the cost associated with offering work placements. The engineering industry is also struggling with an ongoing skills shortage, if the proposed changes made by the government lead to fewer engineers, this will worsen the problem.

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

Due to the reduction of opportunities for young people, particularly those in areas in which opportunities are already limited and T Levels will not be available, it is likely that the new proposals will result in an increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

a. Are there specific short-term implications?

Specifically, the engineering skills shortage may increase in different regions of the country, entrenched problems of diversity in the engineering workforce will be exacerbated and more widely, there is a risk of an increase in the number of young people NEET.

b. What are the long-term implications?

Engineering is a vital component of all sectors identified by government as being critical to achieving a green industrial revolution. The UK's ambitions to meet net zero targets, to increase innovation and enterprise and to ensure that future engineers are educated and trained to meet the needs of an advanced digital economy are all at stake.

The supply of talent through the education and skills system will likely fall far short of future skills demand from critical sectors of the economy which rely heavily on the availability of engineering and technology skills.

There have been moderate increases in the number of engineering graduates over the last 5 years, but the disruption to technical and vocational qualifications at level 3 may well result in fewer numbers of young people taking engineering qualifications at levels 4 and above.

We remain concerned over the speed and scale of technical education reforms and the practical implications surrounding the delivery of the T Level programme. Chief among these concerns is the viability of the 45-day work placement, the regional availability of engineering and manufacturing T levels and the disappearance of applied general qualifications. We support the implementation of work placements, which can be very beneficial for young people. Therefore, if the government need to ensure that skills planning incorporates a regional overview to counter the possibility of no regional engineering T Levels. The government must also support student travel costs to placements.

Recommendations:

- The government must ensure that accessibility into T Levels is implemented on an equitable basis nationwide.
 - The requirement for 315 hours of work placement is challenging in many parts of the country and young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will be more affected than others.
- The government must reconsider an arbitrary date of 2024 for the removal of qualifications at level 3. Funding for BTECs and other level 3 vocational engineering qualifications should only be removed once other routes into the engineering profession have proved successful and would not disproportionately affect young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

This submission is made by:

The Royal Academy of Engineering – Education and Skills Group

The Education and Skills Group (ESG) is the body through which the engineering profession offers coordinated advice on education and skills policy to UK Government and the devolved Assemblies. It deals with all aspects of learning that underpin engineering. It is hosted by The Royal Academy of Engineering with membership drawn from the professional engineering community including all 39 Professional Engineering Institutions, the Engineering Council, EngineeringUK, the Engineering Professors' Council and other engineering organisations.

Footnotes

1. Centre for Vocational Educational Research (2019) 'BTECs, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome (LEO) dataset' <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp024.pdf>
2. Data retrieved from the Ofqual Analytics Vocational and Technical Qualifications Landscape tool: <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/VTO/VTOLandscape/>
3. [Spotlight on Workforce Skills](#), Pearson.
4. [T Level extended work placement research, Employer and college and training provider survey findings and case studies](#), AELP 2018
5. [Vocation, Vocation, Vocation, The role of vocational routes into higher education](#), Social Market Foundation. 2018
6. EngineeringUK 2019 Report <https://engineeringuk.com/research/data/2019-excel-resource/>
7. [IET skills for net zero and a green recovery, 2020 Survey](#). IET, 2020.
8. [T levels: Placements unlikely in 2021, say employers](#). TES, April 2021.

Appendix xiii: Sarah Spibey, Head of Faculty: Health and Science at Kendal College

Written Evidence Submitted by Sarah Spibey, Head of Faculty: Health and Science at Kendal College, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 5AY. 03.12.2021

These are the main points in this submission:

1. Introduction to my submission.
2. Forensic and Criminal Investigation learners will have no options if the BTEC is discontinued due to no directly comparable provision via A Levels or T Levels.
3. Progression routes taken by former BTEC Forensic Science (QCF) / Forensic and Criminal Investigation (RQF) learners in the past ten years.
4. Testimonials from previous BTEC Forensic Science (QCF) / Forensic and Criminal Investigation (RQF) on the impact if their programme was unavailable.
5. The impact on society if the Forensic and Criminal Investigation BTEC was discontinued.
6. The limited options of progression routes from the T Level Science and the impact this would have on the Biomedical Science learners.
7. Recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the APPG to consider.

1. **Introduction - My name is Sarah Spibey, Head of Faculty: Health, Science and Animal Care at Kendal College in Cumbria and I am writing in relation to the**

discontinued funding of the BTECs as the T Levels are launched. My courses include:

- Edexcel BTEC Level 3 National Diplomas in Applied Science / Biomedical Science.
- Edexcel BTEC Level 3 National Diplomas in Forensic and Criminal Investigation.
- Edexcel BTEC Level 3 National Diplomas in Health and Social Care.
- Edexcel BTEC Level 2 / 3 National Diplomas in Animal Care / Management.

The T Levels appear to cover most of the content and progression pathways of the Health and Social Care and Animal Care subjects, but the Forensic and Criminal Investigation, Applied Science and Biomedical Science subjects are not covered in the T Levels and I am extremely concerned that a large cohort of learners will be left with no options to study at Level 3.

2. Forensic and Criminal Investigation learners will have no options if the BTEC is discontinued due to no directly comparable provision via A Levels or T Levels.

- I currently have 52 first year and 32 second year BTEC L3 Forensic and Criminal Investigation learners at Kendal College, which is classed as a small college. That is 84 learners in total and this is an average year, with some years being higher.
- The BTEC L3 Forensic and Criminal Investigation course offers learners the ability to study a combination of criminology, psychology/forensic psychology, policing, crime scene investigation, forensic anthropology and science/scientific techniques.
- The vast majority of learners progress to university to study criminology, forensic psychology, policing, criminal investigation, forensic science and forensic anthropology, or to a higher policing apprenticeship.
- If the BTEC L3 Forensic and Criminal Investigation was discontinued, there would be no comparable option in A Levels or T Levels. The combination of units on the BTEC ensure that the learners study policing, criminology, psychology and science to prepare them for a career in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) which is vital section of society.
- These 80+ learners would have no option to study at L3 to prepare them for a career in the CJS.

3. Progression routes taken by former BTEC Forensic Science (QCF) / Forensic and Criminal Investigation (RQF) learners in the past ten years.

- I have been teaching the BTEC QCF Level 3 in Forensic Science and the BTEC RQF Level 3 in Forensic and Criminal Investigation for twelve years and in that time, I have taught approximately 500 learners, many of whom have progressed onto careers in the CJS or other fields. The following are a few of these roles/careers:
 - Police Officers
 - Forensic Scientists
 - Criminologists
 - Crime Scene Investigators
 - Forensic Psychologists working with young offenders / people with mental health problems / violent offenders.
 - Trauma psychologists.

- o Vulnerable Person Support Workers (at the police station).
- o Fraud Investigators.
- o Appropriate Adults within the CJS.
- o Counsellors.
- If the BTEC L3 Forensic Science / Forensic and Criminal Investigation course was not available, and the learners could only choose between A Levels and T Levels, the vast majority of the learners above would not have had the correct and appropriate education at Level 3, to progress to the career of their choice.
- The careers above are directly contributing to society, including the reduction of crime and the fear of crime within society.

4. Testimonials from previous BTEC Forensic Science (QCF) / Forensic and Criminal Investigation (RQF) on the impact if their programme was unavailable.

- *“Studying BTEC forensic science was revolutionary for me! Without it I never would have been able to find my true career path. BTEC Forensic science allowed me to explore all different areas of the subject, and really taught me that I can go into whichever area of forensic I enjoyed the most. It was the only course available to me that was structured so professionally (it is so similar to university it really did prepare me to the fullest). In fact, I wanted to study this course so bad that I would commute around 2 hours each day by bus in order to be able to study this course*

Currently I am in my final year of university studying forensic psychology, a course which I received an unconditional offer for due to studying BTEC forensic science at Kendal college. I am soon to be starting my master’s in counselling psychology in order to become a fully chartered trauma psychologist.

All of this progression in my education and employment goals would have been unimaginable without Kendal College and its Forensic Science BTEC programmes. I fear that by stopping them, the government is stopping that flow of educational progression for those who do not want to be stuck in your average 9-5 job. It is stopping the academic availability for those who dream bigger than your average A Levels. And finally, it is stopping the closest thing to university without actually going; ultimately stopping the preparation required for those to excel in their further studies.” (Courtney Winder).

- *“During my time at Kendal College, I studied BTEC Forensic Science which has given me many skills and helped me progress to where I am today. Whilst completing my BTEC in Forensic Science I was taught in further detail about some of the basic science knowledge which you are taught in school which when doing a Forensic Science course is necessary. As well as that it gives a great insight into what a Forensic Scientist does as a job such as fire investigation, lab work and traffic investigation. However, as it goes into further detail this helps you prepare for what the work is like at your first year in university as the transition from BTEC to degree level was smooth due to the way BTECs are taught. The BTEC Forensic Science course taught me the correct procedures to follow whilst in a lab and made me prepared for lab work during university. BTEC Forensic Science is necessary because at university level most work especially due to covid is all assessment based like in college. Doing the assessments in college helped me with time planning and getting used to writing 2000+ words in the correct style and format.*

As of leaving Kendal College I am currently in my final year of university at the University of Cumbria, Carlisle. I am studying Forensic and Investigative Science (BSc Hons) and aiming for a 2:1 at the end of the year. After this I hope to progress to a detective academy in Penrith. Without my BTEC Forensic Science course at college I would never have known that this was a career path I could go down coming from a small town.” (Charlotte Witter)

- *“With my BTEC I learned more about a topic that I love and really enjoyed, those two years at college was one of the best choices I ever made. I now am in my 3rd year at university (LJMU) studying a BSc Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice and thoroughly enjoying myself. Without this BTEC I would’ve have not been able to do most of the things I have done in the past 4/5 years and met some of the people I have along the way.” (Jamie Howell)*

5. The impact on society if the Forensic and Criminal Investigation BTEC was discontinued.

- The majority of my learners enrol on the Forensic and Criminal Investigation course with the aim to either progress to university to study a CJS related course or to progress to the policing apprenticeship.
- People applying to be a police officer must achieve a degree via either university or a higher policing apprenticeship. *“The College of Policing wants all recruits to gain a degree before joining the force – or to gain one on the job.” (Police Federation, 2021).*
- The government are currently recruiting 20,000 more police officers to fill the large gap in policing and the Forensic and Criminal Investigation BTEC is ideal for preparation for the policing degree apprenticeship. If the BTEC was discontinued, the learners would not have a comparable course available on A Level or T Levels and they would be greatly underprepared for the policing degree apprenticeship.
- Mental Health disorders have dramatically increased during the pandemic and this will have a direct impact on increasing crime in the future years, which in turn will require more professionals within the CJS, police, criminal investigation, forensic psychology, counselling and criminology. The BTEC in Forensic and Criminal Investigation is an ideal course to prepare the learners for progressing to university or higher apprenticeships in the aforementioned fields, but if it was discontinued, there would be a negative impact on future CJS professionals. This could in turn lead to a lack of services for vulnerable people involved in the CJS.

6. The limited options of progression routes from the T Level Science and the impact this would have on the Biomedical Science learners.

- The three specialisms on the T Level Science programme are laboratory sciences, food sciences or metrology sciences.
- These are very narrow in scope and will eliminate the vast majority of learners who have previously studied BTEC Applied Science / Biomedical Science programmes. Previous learners have progressed mainly to degrees to study:
 - Radiotherapy
 - Biomedical Science
 - Biological Sciences
 - Pharmacy
 - Biochemistry

- o Physiotherapy
- The learners who enrol on the Applied Science / Biomedical Science BTEC do so because they want to study a broader, but in-depth, range of topics than A Levels in Chemistry, Biology, Physics or Maths. They have stated that they want to study Disease and Infection, Genetics and Genetic Engineering, Medical Physics Techniques and Biomedical Science, alongside practical science techniques, biology and chemistry. The BTEC allows the learners to develop the scientific knowledge, skills and behaviour required to progress to university and into their chosen career.
- The A Levels are not always the right choice for learners, but if they chose the T Levels as the alternative, they would be restricted with pathways in laboratory sciences, food sciences or metrology sciences, which our learners do not progress to.

7. Recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the APPG to consider.

- To add the BTEC Level 3 Diplomas in Forensic and Criminal Investigation to the list of protected BTECs (joining music, drama, arts) because there are no directly comparable A Level or T Level programmes and learners would be significantly disadvantaged and excluded from studying at Level 3.
- To add a Biomedical pathway to the T Level in Science, or to protect the BTEC Level 3 Diplomas in Applied Science (Biomedical Science).

I appreciate your time in reading and considering this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information or to discuss previous learner testimonials.

Sarah Spibey

Head of Faculty: Science, Health and Animal Care

Kendal College

t. 01539 814767

e. sarah.spibey@kendal.ac.uk

w. kendal.ac.uk

Appendix xiv: UCAS

Written evidence submitted by UCAS

Introduction

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for post-secondary education. This service spans undergraduate, postgraduate, technical, and apprenticeship pathways, with the undergraduate service alone supporting over 700,000 students a year from over 200

countries and territories, with more than 400 different verified qualifications to access UK higher education (HE). UCAS acts as a bridge from school or college into further and higher education and stands ready to support the renewed push for skills reform. With 30 million visits to UCAS.com each year and a network of c.4,000 UCAS teachers and advisers in schools and colleges across the UK, UCAS has significant reach with students and their advisers. As a trusted, independent charity, UCAS provides comprehensive careers information, advice and guidance to students on the full range of post-secondary choices.

UCAS is investing significantly in making sure its services for would-be apprentices are as strong as they are for prospective undergraduates and is already established in the apprenticeships market, which has seen record growth. Our apprenticeship tool - [Career Finder](#) - received a record 2.13 million searches in the last 12 months, up 32% from last year, despite the impact of the pandemic. These searches have resulted in 243,000 applications, an increase from 171,000 last year (+42%).

Executive summary

It is UCAS' view, and its ultimate goal, that all young people should have an equal opportunity to access high-quality, personalised, timely support to navigate their journey. That support should cover all options on an equal footing, and not only at the key decision points identified in this report, but right from the start – at primary school and all the way through to graduation. At each stage, students should be aware of the impact of their choices, and how it may influence their future pathway.

This inquiry aims to establish what impacts the choices available to young people and what that means for their prospects and outcomes. This submission will focus on research UCAS has published in 2021 focussed on student choice. As part of its [Where next? series](#) UCAS has concentrated on identifying what motivates students to pick a particular path after school or college. This response will focus on answering the inquiry question: “Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes [to technical and vocational education]?”

Our research highlights the impact of qualification and subject choice at school on students' future pathways, and recommends ways students can be better supported to make fully informed choices at every stage:

- **Future CIAG needs:** One in five students report they could not study the course they wanted to at university or college because they did not have the relevant subjects for entry. Two in five students said more information and advice would have led to them making better choices, and almost one in three students reported not receiving any information about apprenticeships from their school.
- **Qualification type and HE entry rate:** There is a distinct link between the type of qualification taken in school and the type of university or college the student attends. The type of post-16 qualification chosen can also impact on HE entry and more students go straight into employment.
- **Disadvantage gap:** One in three students start considering higher education as an option for them at primary school, with more advantaged students 1.4 times more likely to do so than their disadvantaged peers.

- **Other influencing factors:** Curriculum provision, parents, teachers and friends can all impact on what choices students make or those that are available.

Improving access to earlier, broader, and personalised CIAG about the full range of options available will help tackle some of these barriers identified in the research.

Future CIAG needs

Young people continually make decisions, often earlier than they realise, about their next steps through education, all of which influence and shape the options available to them at every phase of their journey into education and employment:

- Decisions taken about GCSE/National 5 subjects at 13 or 14 years old can have a major impact when it comes to post-18 options.
- There are over 50 GCSE and A level subjects available, and 12,000 funded vocational qualifications at 16-19, not to mention the thousands of undergraduate higher education courses, technical and apprenticeship routes into employment.
- Students may be inadvertently shutting doors on their future options through this early decision-making around subject choice and qualification type if they are not fully aware of the options available and where they may lead.

Our landmark report [Where next? What influences the choices school leavers make?](#) highlighted:

- One in five students report they could not study an HE subject that interested them because they did not have the relevant subjects for entry – with medicine the most cited example. – Two in five students believe more information and advice would have led to them making better choices.

Many students were already mindful of these factors when they made their GCSE/National 5 choices:

- 80% report choosing some or all their subjects with their post-16 choices in mind. – 78% were considering future HE entry more generally.
- 64% were thinking of a specific degree subject area.

There is a need for earlier, broader, and personalised CIAG about the full range of options available as the landscape is set to get more competitive and complicated:

- Almost one in three students still report not receiving any information about apprenticeships from their school, despite the Baker Clause placing a legal requirement on schools and colleges to do so.
- The number of 18-year-olds is set to increase each year for the rest of the decade, with the largest increases up to 2025. UCAS forecasts that by 2025 there could be one million applications to UK HE.
- More students mean increased competition and therefore the decision-making process is even more critical.
- The post-16 review, the implementation of T levels and reforms to higher technical education will mean a more diverse landscape for students to navigate. UCAS has a

key role to play in the information and advice space to help students understand their options.

With 30 million visits to ucas.com each year and a network of around 4,000 UCAS advisers in schools and colleges across the country, our reach is unparalleled:

- As well as effective enforcement of the current Baker Clause, UCAS has a role to play as a 'digital Baker Clause,' ensuring that if someone looking at university, college, or apprenticeships options on ucas.com, they get balanced and comprehensive information on all their choices.
- UCAS content is a freely available tool for schools and colleges across the country to draw on, to act as a digital equaliser to support those with lower-quality provision and help ensure all students get access to the information they need for each stage of their journey into education or employment.
- The new Careers Quiz tool is one example of innovation in this space through [the UCAS Hub](https://ucas.com) the go-to place for students to explore their options after school or college. It helps students understand what areas of work might interest them and suggests paths to get there. The tool has been used more than 350,000 people since it launched in September 2021.

Qualification type and HE entry rate

Post-16 qualification choice can impact on students next steps into higher education:

- In England, certain vocational qualifications, such as the Level 3 Extended Diploma, can offer narrower progression opportunities as they typically lead to just one or two specific degree subjects and these students typically only sit one qualification post-16.
- For example, two in five English 18-year-olds with a Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Sport and Exercise Science are accepted to study sport and exercise science at degree level – these qualifications do not typically lead to any other subject at university or college, and the remaining pupils generally do not apply to HE.

Students' options may be narrower if they take certain vocational qualifications:

- 26% of BTEC students report being unable to study a subject that interested them at degree level because they did not have the relevant subject, compared to 18% of A level students. When viewing this, it is important to understand that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are three times as likely to hold only BTEC qualifications than those from a more advantaged background.

There is also a distinct link between the type of qualification taken in school and the type of university or college a student attends:

- In England, students with post-16 vocational qualifications have a high likelihood of entering HE (overall entry rate of 49%), but they are significantly less likely to attend a higher tariff provider than those with general qualifications (e.g. A levels or IB) – this also holds true within specific degree subjects.

- This is demonstrated through the overall HE entry rate. The percentage of 18-year-olds in England with a post-16 general qualification (A level or IB) in 2019 was 70%.
- For those with a post-16 vocational qualification (any vocational qualification equivalent in size and level to an A level) this fell to 49%.
- For those with a general qualification the higher tariff provider entry rate was 27% compared to those with a vocational qualification which stood at 3%.

Population	Overall HE Entry Rate	Higher Tariff Provider Entry Rate
Overall entry rates for 18-year-olds in England taken from the National Pupil Database:		
All 18 year olds in England in 2019, including those without a post-16 qualification	35%	11%
Entry rate for 18 year olds in England with post-16 qualifications:		
18 year olds in England with a post-16 general qualification (A level or IB)	70%	27%
18 year olds in England with a post-16 vocational qualification (any vocational qualification equivalent in size and level to an A level)	49%	3%

Disadvantage gap

The point at which young people start to consider HE varies widely between individuals, and our research shows socioeconomic background can play a role:

- More than three quarters of students first realised HE was an option for them before they started post-16 education.
- One in three students started considering higher education as an option for them at primary school, with more advantaged students were 1.4 times more likely to do so than their disadvantaged peers.

- Disadvantaged students tend to consider the prospect of HE later than their more advantaged peers, with 27% from POLAR4 Q1 (the most disadvantaged group) realising this in primary school, compared to 39% of those from Q5 (the most advantaged group).

As recommended in our Where next? report, to deliver the ambition set out by UK governments in their careers strategies and support the wider levelling-up agenda, CIAG should be embedded within the curriculum in primary schools and early secondary years:

- To include statutory requirements for CIAG within primary education to include the full range of pathways and careers.
- Age-appropriate Gatsby Benchmarks to raise aspirations from an early age. – The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) to extend their Primary Platform initiative.
- Universities and colleges, working with UCAS and partners, to undertake more targeted outreach work within primary schools and early secondary years with a focus on ‘fixed’ yet lesser-known subject areas.

What else impacts choice

As well as being an important factor in degree subject choice, future employment prospects are also at the forefront of students’ minds when they make their post-16 decisions:

- Almost all (94%) cite this as a key motivation.
- 84% chose their subjects based on what they wanted to study at university or college. – 93% report their choices were made to keep their employment and/or future study options open.

UCAS research found that 16% of students were unable to study all the post-16 options they wanted:

- Of these, 49% said their school or college did not offer that qualification or subject, and 21% were constrained by timetabling.
- In fact, restricted choice leads to more than 10% of students moving school specifically to study their chosen post-16 qualifications.

Parents and carers play an important part in influencing their child’s subject choice at school:

- One in two students report having chosen a subject at either GCSE/National 5 (49%) or post 16 (50%) because their parents or carers had wanted them to. But, as seen above, by the time students are ready to make their degree choice, their influence has diminished – this is supported by Ofqual research which suggests young people perceive advice from their parents and carers to be based on outdated or biased experiences and misconceptions.
- A parent’s own experience has some influence on the desired pathway they seek for their children. Our [polling of parents](#) shows those who had taken an apprenticeship

themselves are twice as likely to encourage their son or daughter to follow in their footsteps rather than choose a traditional undergraduate degree. Of the parents who had been to university, 12% would advocate a university degree exclusively over considering an apprenticeship – this falls to 5% when parents had not been to university.

Teachers are a critical source of support when pupils make their school subject and qualification choices:

- 99% report being influenced by enjoyment or interest in making both their GCSE/National 5 and post-16 choices.
- 88% of students report choosing a subject at GCSE/National 5 because their teachers told them they would be good at it.
- 79% cite the same reason for making their post-16 choices – slightly more (81%) chose a post-16 subject because they would have good teachers.
- In our submission to HM Treasury ahead of the comprehensive spending review, UCAS recommended that when considering improving CIAG in schools, teachers themselves receive up to date information about all the options that are available for their students.

The role of friends is another significant factor:

- 44% of students say their friends' post-16 choices had affected their own, rising to 53% for their GCSE/National 5 subjects, which suggests younger pupils are slightly more swayed by their friends' choices than their parents' advice.
 - The role of peers means that early and sustained CIAG is needed to help dispel myths.
-

Appendix xv: Youth Employment UK

About Youth Employment UK

Youth Employment UK is an independent, not for profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment. As experts on youth employment and unemployment, we are ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people (those aged 14-24), employers and policy makers.

We are actively tackling youth unemployment by:

- [Giving young people](#) a voice on the youth employment issues that affect them
- [Supporting young people](#) with the skills and careers support they need to progress
- [Supporting employers](#) to develop and be recognised for their youth friendly employment practice
- [Connecting young people](#) to Youth Friendly Employers
- [Providing expert insight](#) across all youth employment policy areas

In March 2020 Youth Employment UK co-founded the [Youth Employment Group](#) along with Impetus, Institute for Employment Studies, Prince's Trust and the Youth Futures Foundations. The Youth Employment Group has presented a number of recommendations (Youth

Employment Group, [2020a](#); [2021a](#); [2021b](#)) to the government including the call for an Opportunity Guarantee ([Youth Employment UK, 2020](#)) which the Prime Minister committed to in the summer of 2020. This group is still in operation with 6 active subgroups, with over 300 member organisations.

Our Response

This response is drawn up with evidence from our work with the Youth Employment Group and its Youth Voice Forum, the Youth Voice Census and our wider policy and research work. We believe it is hugely important to ensure that young people are able to have their views and experiences heard on this issue.

Whilst overall Youth Employment UK welcomes ambitious plans for our education and training system we are very concerned about the proposal to narrow student choice. It is clear to us that young people who face multiple barriers will be the most affected by these proposals which will end up creating further inequalities in England rather than closing the gaps we already have in society.

Moving too quickly to a three option system will have multiple unintended consequences for the education and training system for the economy but fundamentally for young people. Without a well evidenced and balanced roll out of T Levels young people will be left without academic options post 16, and there are not enough apprenticeship opportunities to fill that gap, leaving thousands of young people at risk of dropping out of the system and becoming NEET. Young people tell us that the opportunities VTQ provide support their learning styles, needs and ambitions and that they are concerned about defunding the VTQ option.

What impact will the removal of funding for some post-16 vocational qualifications have?

As co-founders and co-chairs of the Youth Employment Group, Youth Employment UK has the privilege of leading the youth voice element of this important work, ensuring the experiences and needs of young people are held at the heart of the Youth Employment Group's policy work. In November 2021, The [Youth Voice Forum](#) (2021) held a meeting looking at young people's experiences and perceptions of VTQs. In this session, young people told us they think:

- Education practitioners suggest education routes based on academic performance, rather than on individual learning styles. This leads some young people into the wrong routes and others to disengage, all whilst reinforcing the stereotype that vocational and technical education is a 'lesser option' than academic route and is for those with lower previous grades.
- VTQs, particularly BTECS mentioned by this group of young people, offer the opportunity to build practical knowledge and skills. Some young people in the session argued that the natural route should be a blend of both academic and VTQs - regardless of academic achievements.
- T Levels requirements for English and Maths would be an additional barrier to finding a suitable post-16 route, especially from those with additional needs attending the session and/or others with lower prior attainment. Many VTQs are more flexible and allow these young people to progress into higher levels of education. They worry T

Levels will be too difficult after hearing they can be just as challenging and more time consuming than A Levels and current VTQs.

67% of respondents [Youth Voice Census](#) in 2020 (Youth Employment UK, 2020) felt that the options available to them at school suited their style of learning. However, it also found a 19 percentage point (ppt) difference between black respondents (49%) and white respondents (68%) - this is especially worrying for participation in higher education given 37% of black students were accepted to university after completing only BTEC qualifications many of which are set to be defunded¹.

The Government's post-16 plan² hopes to make apprenticeships a quality offer and one that is as attractive as university for young people. We were pleased to see that 85.8% of students responding to the [Youth Voice Census](#) (2021) had apprenticeships discussed with them, this is the first time this was even across genders in Youth Voice Census findings since 2018. Despite this, only 28.6% are 'likely' or 'very likely' to start an apprenticeship (Graph 2).

University still feels unattainable for disadvantaged young people (eligible for free school meals), 53.2% 'very unlikely' to apply to university ([Youth Voice Census](#), 2021). Concerns have been raised by universities³ that removing funding for BTECS will reduce the participation of disadvantaged groups, such as young people with SEND; living in deprived areas; those eligible for free school meals; and are Asian, Black, or from a Mixed ethnic background.

The Government's impact strategy³ for this post-16 review points out that disadvantaged young people are disproportionately enrolled on courses set for defunding - 11% of total enrolled students are eligible for free school meals and 47% of total enrolled students are in the most and second most deprived categories. With this and [Youth Voice Census](#) (2021) findings in mind, we are concerned that those eligible for free school meals are at considerable risk of losing student choice and being able to achieve level 3 and progress into a quality employment, education or training opportunity.

Can the existing provisions for careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) support the proposed changes?

Young people told us ([Youth Voice Forum](#), 2021) that CIAG they received at school was not consistently good enough, some felt the support could not be tailored to their needs as there some careers advisers did not get to know them deeply enough. This meant they did not know their plans or passions, nor their current learning styles and needs, and therefore could not provide meaningful career pathway advice. Other young people said the guidance from sixth forms and colleges, both teachers and careers advisors, was narrowly focused on university. The transition into post-16 education is challenging for young people but is well supported, however when making choices for post-18 choices young people not choosing university felt a lack of support and guidance.

A key finding from the [Youth Voice Census](#) (2021) was just how much young people had missed out on. Whilst young people have remained adaptable they have missed out on key moments that help them establish who they are, where they are, what skills they have and what their next steps should be.

- 42.7% of young people in secondary school and 43% of those in college had access to a careers advisor.

Explore the [Youth Voice Census](#) (2021) further and it becomes clear that the type of careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) young people receive is skewed by demographic characteristics. We are pleased to have found little variation in CIAG received depending on young people's ethnic background, but gender, eligibility for free school meals and additional needs were prevalent across most choices.

Key to this inquiry is the fact that 72.7% of young people had not heard about T Levels at school. This shows that the Careers Education system is not ready to support the narrowing choices. It also has a bearing on the number of young people feeling confident and applying to T Levels, as the Youth Voice Census shows only 6.6% of young people were likely or very likely to apply for a T Level.

Will the government's proposed ambition for T-Levels, Apprenticeships and A Levels post-16 support the needs of young people in the future economy?

Young people we have spoken to really value VTQs and were not against the introduction of T Levels, but very much felt that plans to streamline options does not meet their current needs, styles of learning, aspirations or local area opportunities. There was a feeling that young people would be left behind in these changes.

We also explored this issue with the youth-friendly employers in our network. Many of which see the benefits of recruiting young people with a blend of academic and vocational qualifications. Employers such as Engie and Coca-Cola told us that they see the value in VTQ's such as BTECs which support both hard and soft skills needed in work.

Employers also shared their concerns on the impact of the proposed changes in their ability to recruit young people from a range of backgrounds, supporting their own Diversity and Inclusion agenda's.

We heard too from employers that they felt they would struggle to offer both apprenticeships and T Level placements, feeling the burden of developing two different intensive programmes. Some employers told us that they would need to choose one or the other or reduce the number of opportunities they create for young people to accommodate these requirements on their business.

What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed changes take place?

Approximately 1 in 7 young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET). It is often young people who face multiple barriers who find themselves NEET for periods of 6 months or more. The impact of being NEET beyond 6 months has proven to have a significant scarring effect on those young people, economically and socially. The scarring effect is felt for their entire lifetime.

We welcome the government's ambitions to level up, and through the work with the Youth Employment Group have supported a number of recommendations and reports that demonstrate the importance of guaranteeing good quality education, training and employment opportunities for young people at every stage of their lives.

The evidence we see that young people who already have barriers to employment will be further disadvantaged by these proposals make us gravely concerned about the future impact on youth employment and the levelling up agenda.

An increase in youth unemployment will be felt not just by young people but the wider economy, employers will not be able to recruit the skills that they need, in-work poverty will likely increase and communities and the welfare state will end up paying that price.

Already there is low confidence in young people of being able to find a good job where they live with only 9.9% of young people believing that there were quality jobs in their local area. 27.2% of young people with additional needs were 'Not Confident At All' or 'Not Very Confident' that they would be able to progress into a good job compared to 11.8% of those without additional needs.

Joshua Adcock
 Youth Employment UK
info@youthemployment.org.uk

Appendix xvi: Key Terms & Glossary

A Level	Advanced level qualifications
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Brexit	Exiting the European Union
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council qualification
CA	Combined Authority
CEC	Careers and Enterprise Company
CIAG	Careers Information, Advice and Guidance
DfE	Department for Education
DfT	Department for Transport
Disadvantaged pupils/young people	Those eligible for Free School Meals, from disadvantaged areas/postcodes or lower socio-economic backgrounds.
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions

EAL	English as an Additional Language.
Economic Inactivity	Those not in employment but do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment because they have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or they are unable to start work in the next two weeks.
EHC plan	Education, Health and Care plan; for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support.
Employment	The number of people in paid work or who had a job that they were temporarily away from (for example, because they were on holiday or off sick).
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
FE	Further Education
Gatsby Benchmarks	A set of eight principles with the aim of providing independent careers information, advice, and guidance to all 12–18-year-olds and those up to 25 with an education, health, and care plan.
GSCE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
LA	Local Authority
Minoritised communities	Those with demographic characteristics of marginalised groups. This includes race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, dis/ability including mental health and neurodiversity, age, criminal record status, immigrant/migrant/refugee status and location.
NCS	National Careers Service
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training.
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SEND	Special Education Needs and/or Disability.
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths.
T Level	Technical Level
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
Unemployed	Those without a job who have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks.
Unemployment Rate	The percentage of the economically active population (those in work plus those seeking and available to work) who are unemployed.

VTQ	Vocational and Technical Qualifications
Young people/person	Those aged 16–24.

Appendix xvii: Letter from ENGIE

Dear APPG for Youth Employment,

Please accept this letter of support for the APPG for Youth Employment Inquiry. Engie is a large UK employer, heavily invested in recruiting and supporting young people into work.

ENGIE's purpose ("raison d'être") is to act to accelerate the transition towards a carbon-neutral economy, through reduced energy consumption and more environmentally-friendly solutions. Through our 4 strategic activities - renewable energies, thermal energy, infrastructure, customer solutions - and the daily commitment of the Group's 173,000 employees, we are proud to be making real, positive and far-reaching changes for society.

ENGIE has 170 professions within its personnel, recruiting young people through internships, apprenticeships and graduate roles into those professions.

BTECs are a fundamental route to many of our vocational early career roles. We know that the majority of our apprentices come to us from BTEC study at college, particularly those from socially deprived areas. Diversity and Inclusion is a very important part of what we do. We anticipate that by Dec 31st 2021, we will have completed our hire of 125 kickstart candidates. We are already seeing those who have completed a BTEC finding more success when entering the workplace. Even for our more privileged young people, completing a BTEC alongside A Levels offers routes to more vocational work for candidates that would typically be pushed into university, rather than more of a hands on learning approach and career. BTEC's typically offer these kinds of candidates more insight into industry, and provide a talent pipeline for us next generation of employees.

We believe the hasty removal of BTECs for us as employer would limit the choices of some young people, and restrict our recruitment of candidates into roles. We are finding young people being increasingly hesitant in choosing to apply for roles and understanding their career journey ahead – the pandemic has accelerated some of the social and mental health challenges they already face. We are strongly committing to be a youth friendly employer, and to us this also means lobbying for government to provide the right qualification support for candidates to feel work ready when they enter an apprenticeship or entry level role. BTECs are something that to us and our people, certainly support young people.

Particularly in our construction area of the business, BTECs are a main route towards Chartered Surveyor status and degree apprenticeships. We have seen fantastic social mobility over the last few years within this progression pathway. We would want to be certain any replacement of BTEC study offers a similar effect for our people and for industry. We are seeing widespread labour shortages on our sites, so it's more important than ever for us to continue to develop our early career pipeline.

Quotes from talent staff from across the business:

“I’m concerned that removing BTECs will have an effect on disadvantaged students. I’m sure the argument will be covered, but I wouldn’t want to see people being put off a career in construction if they felt unable to cope with the demands of the course. Travel costs to a placement would also need to be covered – not sure if they always are.”

“I believe the removal of Btecs could impact the route to higher education, with some of our trainees who haven’t performed well in 6th form/A Levels, a Btec is the first step to accessing a higher level qualification. I do think that T Levels are a good idea and will definitely fill that gap of “employment skills” that some young people lack and the added work placement element will be vital. As with all changes in education it will take time for people to adjust and understand what T Levels are and the marketing of this will be really important, especially getting employers involved and on board.”

“I would just add in that in order for T Levels to work and become the viable alternative or in essence replace BTEC vocational learning there needs to be that integrated approach where both are on offer. It is all well and good implementing the T Levels however this isn’t going to be the right pathway for some and also there will be an initial resistance in uptake given change mentality. I agree in terms of increasing that gap for hard to reach or those who aren’t at that level academically, any such roll out needs to be phased and alongside existing courses otherwise there will be a lot who fall between the gaps.”

ANASTASIA WOMACK (SHE/HER)
Talent, Development and Early Careers Lead
UK & Ireland
ENGIE

Appendix xviii: Letter from Creative & Cultural Skills

2nd December 2021

Dear the APPG for Youth Employment

Creative & Cultural Skills (CCSkills) is delighted to see that you have launched an inquiry into the impact of vocational qualifications on young people’s employability and labour market outcomes.

CCSkills is the Sector Skills Council for the cultural industries and a UK wide charity that shapes skills, education, and employment best practice for the sector. We provoke action and enable learning opportunities that drive change and help to build an inclusive skilled workforce.

We are the body that introduced the very first apprenticeships to the industry and still work closely on the development of vocational and technical training routes that prepare young people for jobs in the visual and performing arts, museums, galleries, craft, and heritage sectors. For us, the availability of high quality, relevant, and industry informed post-16 technical and vocational training is vital to the future survival of our sector.

Whilst CCSkills openly supports the Government's reforms to Apprenticeships and the introduction of the new T Levels, we have some concern about the proposed approach with regards to disinvesting in level 2 and level 3 Applied Generals. We fear said disinvestment fails to take full account of the different pedagogical needs, interests, and learning styles that help ensure no learner is left behind.

Applied Generals are a vital stepping stone for many learners who:

1. may not have performed as hoped in the mainstream school system
2. need more time to consider and explore the specific (training) direction they wish to go in
3. wish to study applied arts subjects such as Art & Design, Performing Arts, Music, Music Technology, Craft etc more holistically. Applied Generals are a recognised springboard into higher level study within the arts and a vital tool in attracting a more diverse pool of talent into university art schools.

In addition, level 2 Applied Generals also provide a crucial bridge to learners who need additional support post-16 before progressing onto level 3 study (including T levels). Level 1 and 2 vocational study may also be, for some learners, a sufficient level of achievement to progress some into entry level work, particularly (but not solely) for those with additional educational needs. Where an equivalent T level is made available, but in this instance, we believe it should be an option for learners to earn the standalone technical qualification without the need to complete the remainder of the T level (the industry placement, Functional Skills, and professional certification where applicable) where it is not realistic (practically or pedagogically) for them to do so. This approach could also mean training providers could streamline their offers but create different achievement points for learners depending on their needs, abilities, and circumstances.

A strong technical education offer is crucial to ensuring we are training future workers to do the jobs we need them to do. For many occupations it makes sense for training to be specifically focused through apprenticeships and T levels. However, there are some parts of the economy, particularly in the cultural industries (or those that are dominated by small and micro businesses) that have an increased reliance on individuals with interdisciplinary skills. To this end, level 3 Applied Generals provide a helpful first foundation into this way of thinking/operating.

Overall, we believe there should be a broader choice for post-16 learners so they can choose a route that feels right for them. Failure to offer choice means a proportion of young people will be left behind, as no one size fits all. We fear reducing choice will adversely impact those from specific socio-economic backgrounds, particularly where the need to train for a specific occupation (via a T Level or Apprenticeship) is only available in locations that are simply out of reach. In turn, this risks perpetuating even greater divisions between who can and cannot make the step into employment, driving social and educational inequalities, compounding skills shortages, and reducing creative exploration and the subsequent development of entrepreneurial spirit, which risks diminishing the growth potential that comes from the development of new business start-ups.

The above needs to be firmly supported by stronger careers provision that ensures there is equal promotion of, and equal value placed on, each training route. This should include closer engagement and encounters with *all* industries from a young age (including at

primary school) and education about the true breadth of careers that exists, not just those that are most easily identifiable.

We hope our concerns and proposed approaches are closely considered as part of your inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Sara Whybrew
Director, Policy and Development