



# Pathways For All: Commission on Post-16 Education and Training

Chaired by:

**Laura-Jane Rawlings MBE**

CEO of Youth Employment UK

Sponsored by:



# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Table of Contents

<b>Foreword from the Commission Chair</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
A Young Person's Entitlement	8
<b>The problem</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Government policy</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What does the future look like?</b>	<b>12</b>
The Advanced British Standard	12
Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc)	13
Qualifications	14
Apprenticeships	17
English and maths	18
Work experience and industry placements	20
Careers education and guidance	21
<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>22</b>
Kettering	22
Darlington	24
<b>Local concerns</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Values</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Recommendations for the short term</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Recommendations for the longer term</b>	<b>29</b>
A Young Person's Entitlement	29
<b>Annex</b>	<b>31</b>
Youth Employment UK	31
The Young Person's Entitlement: a framework for post-16 education reform	32
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>38</b>
Appendix i: Skills	38
Appendix ii: Pathways	40
Appendix iii: Oracy & Numeracy	45
Appendix iv: Beyond Education	48
<b>The Commissioners</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Sponsors</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>With thanks</b>	<b>53</b>

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Foreword from the Commission Chair

I am delighted to present the Commission's Pathways for All Report. Over the last 12 months we have explored the impact of the Government's post-16 qualification reform. Our intention was to test the hypothesis that the reforms would likely lead to more young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) due to a lack of available and suitable pathways for them where they live.

Our Commissioners have worked hard to explore the risks of the current policy, but also to find solutions that bring together the ambition of the Government alongside the real experiences and needs of young people and providers. Commissioners agree that we should have high aspirations for young people and for the education and skills system that supports them. We agree that this ambition needs further exploration; it cannot be that the cost of this reform is a narrowing of pathways and aspiration. Young people without a pathway are not acceptable 'collateral damage' of fast paced, non-evidence led education reform.

This Commission has sought the voices and experiences of all actors in the education and skills systems, but importantly it has sought out evidence that should be centre stage when designing system change.

Through this evidence we have made a number of recommendations that we believe will support policy development and also protect young people from becoming NEET.

During the Commission, the plans for an Advanced British Standard were announced and so the Commission used the evidence gathered to also look at long term education and skills reform. I am delighted to bring to this report the Young Person's Entitlement, a new framework for post-16 education. The Entitlement puts young people back at the heart of the education and skills system and sets a bold and ambitious plan for realising a system that will meet the needs of the learner, employer and the future world, whatever that may look like in 10 or 20 years time.

I hope that our work here can begin the start of a conversation about not only a bold ambition, but a bold ambition for everyone, everywhere.

Laura-Jane Rawlings

Chair of the Commission on Level 2 & Level 3 Education Reform : Pathways for All  
CEO of Youth Employment UK

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Introduction

In July 2021, Gillian Keegan, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, issued the Government response to the consultation on the review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3<sup>1</sup>. In her foreword, she set out the vision *'to transform the qualifications landscape and expand opportunity right across the country, so that more people can get the skills they need to get good jobs.'*

Alongside A levels and T Levels (which are equivalent in size to 3 A levels), the Government is 'streamlining' the Level 3 qualifications on offer. This includes removing funding from qualifications which 'overlap' with T Levels, and providing funding for a range of technical qualifications for occupations not served by T Levels and specialist qualifications that are more specialised than the T Levels. Qualifications that fit these categories will have to be submitted for approval.

According to the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign, at least half of the current 134 Applied General Qualifications will not be funded from 2025, as ministers deem them ineligible for approval<sup>2</sup>. Since May 2020, the Government has also removed funding from over 3,700 Level 2 qualifications.

There are a number of concerns about the impact of these changes:

- T levels are not yet established qualifications and therefore, there is not yet evidence that they are a better qualification or that they will lead to better outcomes for young people
- Due to industry placement demands, not all providers are confident that they can offer T Levels at the same volume as other VTQs, leading to gaps in provision
- Not all places (hyperlocal) will be able to provide T Levels in all subjects to meet the needs of young people and local employers
- Young people value a blended approach to learning, mixing academic, examination and coursework based curriculums. The option to mix study styles and qualification types will be significantly reduced.
- Not all young people receive good quality careers guidance and work experience or have experience of vocational education in Key Stage 4, meaning that they have limited knowledge and experience ahead of choosing large vocational subjects that limit future career pathways

---

1

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/100382/1/Review\\_of\\_post-16\\_qualifications\\_at\\_level\\_3\\_in\\_England\\_policy\\_statement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100382/1/Review_of_post-16_qualifications_at_level_3_in_England_policy_statement.pdf)

2

<https://sfcacampaign.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/0223-AGQ-letter-from-heads-and-principals-to-SoS-FINAL.pdf?t=1677610223>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

- The reform will reduce a well respected pathway that has proven to support more marginalised young people, particularly young people with SEND, who have then been able to access higher education or employment.

This inquiry has brought together the voices of young people, employers and sector experts with the aim of producing a report that will offer some recommendations to protect young people and provide suggestions for a future education and skills system that allows all young people to flourish.

### Key Inquiry Questions

- What are the opportunities and risks of the current post-16 education reform?
- What could be recommended to minimise risks for young people?
- What could an alternative system look like? (one that utilises the components and investment within the system but also meets the needs of all learners)

### Key Findings

Throughout the Commission, evidence was gathered and heard from a range of expert organisations, providers and young people.

All stakeholders believe in the power of education to level up for young people, recognising the transformative power of education on social mobility, skill building, personal development and career preparation. Experts recognised the intent of the Department for Education and the Secretary of State to raise attainment levels for young people and there is clear evidence that the higher the education level acquired, the stronger the life prospects are for young people.

It was also recognised throughout the evidence sessions that raising the esteem in which vocational and technical qualifications are held was important. The world of work is rapidly changing and the education and skills system needs to ensure it is delivering qualifications that meet the demands of employers and the future world of work.

Level 3+ qualifications are not attainable by all young people and personal circumstances and protected characteristics such as SEND can greatly affect educational experiences. It is important to value those who cannot achieve at this level and those who require adjustments equally within the system. Education reform should aim to provide high ambitions for their futures at the most appropriate level, along with the best possible support to meet those high

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

ambitions, and success should be measured by the progress made, rather than the level of achievement.

Throughout the inquiry, Commissioners sought to understand how the reforms might impact different groups of young people in different local areas, in different ways. It was not possible to find this data at a national level, which led to the Commission investigating 2 hyperlocal areas: Kettering and Darlington. Through these case studies we saw that making national policy decisions that affect very different local areas comes with significant risk and local areas lack the access to data held by national government that can help them to target specific cohorts and measure progress. This means that it cannot be guaranteed that all young people in their local area will be able to access an appropriate pathway based on their needs, ambitions and access requirements.

Throughout the inquiry other parts of the education and skills system were looked at. Evidence was presented on the current issues of English and maths GCSE attainment and what the increasing rates of attainment below Level 4 mean for young people and their post-16 pathway. It was clear to see through the evidence that the English and maths GCSE and resit policy is not working and puts many young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Careers education and work experience were explored as opportunities or barriers to progress for young people. Through evidence it is clear to see that not all young people are receiving appropriate guidance and experiences of work before they have to make significant post-16 choices, which can lead to selecting the wrong pathway and result in increased dropout rates.

As part of its work, Commissioners explored what values should be at the heart of education and skills system-change policy. We recognise that it is right to be ambitious, but that ambition for one person is different to the ambitions of another. Within this report we have shared the fundamental values that we agreed upon and our recommendations are made with these values in mind.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendations for the short term**

The Commission agrees that the post-16 qualifications landscape is overly complex and needs to be streamlined. We also agree with the Government intention to develop T Levels as a high quality technical qualification with a status equivalent to A level. However, too many young people could fall through the gaps as this policy is rolled out across England.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

In order to meet the needs of young people immediately, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

### ***Pause and review current plans to defund qualifications***

Pause defunding in order to carry out and publish a social mobility impact assessment of defunding qualifications.

Carry out and publish a place-based review of the availability of pathways. Do not defund qualifications until there is a quality alternative that is available in all locations.

### ***Review current qualifications***

As part of the review of technical qualifications, consider how to ensure that high quality vocational qualifications, including smaller technical qualifications, are available as an alternative to T Levels.

Continue to work towards simplifying the landscape, removing 'duplicate' technical qualifications of the same size and subject content.

### ***Change requirements for English and maths***

Review the policy of compulsory retakes and allow young people to move onto qualifications with suitable support. Remove the need for an EHCP or formal diagnosis in order to access maths and English qualifications at a lower level and develop and monitor a route for colleges and schools to identify young people who should qualify for this support.

Work with employers to make English and maths an exit requirement, rather than entry requirement, particularly for apprenticeships, and provide resources and funding to enable young people to achieve that.

### ***Improve apprenticeship support***

Review the Apprenticeship Levy to provide extra support for employers (particularly SMEs) to take on younger apprentices, those at L2 and L3, and those who need additional support, for example by ring fencing funding or offering full or partial funding depending on age or level. Remove the need for an EHCP or diagnosis in order to receive differentiated support.

Provide administrative and financial support for smaller employers to engage apprentices.

### ***Increase meaningful work experience***

Review industry placements in T Levels to enable flexibility of engagement for employers and build evidence of what makes work experience meaningful.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## ***Improve careers education and guidance***

Ensure all young people have timely and high quality guidance and experience of vocational education to enable them to make informed choices about their pathways.

Empower all teachers to deliver careers education by incorporating it into teacher training and offering teacher externships in industries aligned with their subject areas as part of teacher CPD.

## ***Increase local collaboration***

Support local partnerships between schools, colleges, independent training providers, and specialist partners such as Supported Employment, along with local councils to review provision and student need, and to collaborate so that learners can access the provision best suited to them.

## **Recommendations for the longer term**

### A Young Person's Entitlement

Every young person should be able to access a pathway to employment that meets their needs. The Commission recommends developing a coherent framework, based on robust evidence, of curriculum, qualifications and pathways to form a Young Person's Entitlement. Our recommendations are for post-16 education and skills, but we believe that the Young Person's Entitlement should also underpin a review of the KS4 curriculum.

This should include:

- A flexible framework of high quality qualifications in a range of sizes that enable progression into further learning or work, including for those learners who need more agile or shorter duration qualifications and those young people at Entry Level through to Level 3
- Clear pathways for young people who want to move into apprenticeships and supported apprenticeships for those who require them
- A meaningful programme of work experience at different ages and stages of the learner journey, from the earliest ages possible, and a clear understanding of what makes for good work/industry placements
- A progressive careers programme that is embedded in school and college provision, supporting pupils from an early age to make the best choices
- English and maths qualifications that are proportionate to pupils' level of study and course content, and properly embedded in all pathways including apprenticeships
- The Young Person's Entitlement must be designed collaboratively, through partnerships that bring together all parts of the system, including employers,



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

schools, colleges, local councils, and specialist support organisations to meet the needs of particular learners, along with young people, with financial incentives in place where needed.

### The problem

In February 2024, the ONS Labour Market Analysis showed the youth unemployment rate at 11.6% compared to 3.8% of the all age range. In addition the the economic inactivity rate for young people sits at 42.1%, almost double the rate of the all working age group of 21.9%, and long term unemployment of over 12 months or more on the rise for young people too<sup>3</sup>. The impact of being unemployed and not in education is significant for young people, and has an impact on the economy and for society as a whole. There are many reasons why a young person might fall into this category including low educational attainment.

Learning pathways at 16-18 in England are complex. Young people can study for qualifications at school, FE college, or with an employer. They can choose between academic qualifications at Level 3 such as A levels, technical qualifications that lead to a specific occupation (T levels), and applied general qualifications including BTECs, combining practical skills with academic learning. Some young people may study Level 2 qualifications such as GCSEs or Functional Skills Qualifications, or technical or vocational qualifications at Level 2 or below. They can also take up an apprenticeship at Level 2 or Level 3.

Following the introduction of T Levels, the Department for Education proposed to 'streamline' the qualifications landscape, removing funding and support for some Level 2 apprenticeships and for many Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. Many in the sector have set out their concerns about the impact of these decisions.

While the academic route from GCSE to A level and into university is well understood, only 37% of young people take that path in their final years at school or college<sup>4</sup>. The routes for the majority are much less clear cut, both for young people and for employers. While there have been changes to the pathway from A level to degree, other pathways at Level 2 and Level 3 are changing much more fundamentally. The concern is that these changes will remove a well-respected pathway to higher education and skilled employment from a significant number of young people, particularly those who are most marginalised, and lead some to disengage from education altogether. It is also not necessarily clear to employers

---

<sup>3</sup> [UK Labour Market: February 2024 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/labour-market-analysis)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EDSK-Broken-ladders.pdf>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

what these new qualifications signify, or what skills and knowledge young people will have acquired through a T Level, AGQ or apprenticeship for example.

For young people, the routes to employment are narrowing. Only 1 in 3 young people think employers are supportive of hiring them and just under half are not confident that they will progress into a good job. The closer young people get to working age, the more likely that they will answer these questions negatively<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, the risk to the current education reform policy is that some young people could become NEET as they struggle to access a pathway that suits their aspirations and personal circumstances. Avoiding an increase in young people becoming NEET was central to this Commission, and should be central to the Government, as the long term economic and social cost is grave.

A report from EDSK quotes estimates that 'put the lifetime costs to the public finances of every young person who is NEET at £76,800 and the total costs to the economy and wider community at £142,300'<sup>6</sup>.

Being NEET is also detrimental to a young person's health, wellbeing and life satisfaction and increases the likelihood of 'unhealthy behaviours' such as drug taking and crime. Being NEET for six months before the age of 21 increases the risk of unemployment or low pay in later life. The impact of youth unemployment can endure for years, damaging individuals' life chances and work prospects. According to evidence given to the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee in 2021, 'it could potentially cost the economy £10 billion in 2022 in lost productivity, tax revenue, and additional welfare costs'<sup>7</sup>.

## Government policy

The post-16 qualifications landscape is acknowledged to be complex, making it difficult for young people to navigate. There have been many attempts to simplify it. Following their election in 2010 the Conservatives, including as part of the coalition

---

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/dev/wp-content/themes/yeuk/files/youth-voice-census-2023-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Bob Coles et al., Estimating the Life-Time Cost of NEET: 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training Embargoed until July 21st 2010 (York: University of York, 2010). Figures updated to 2021 prices using the Bank of England inflation calculator. Quoted in EDSK

<https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EDSK-Finding-a-NEET-solution.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Prince's Trust, Learning and Work Institute & HSBC, 'Facing the future: Employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus', (March 2021) quoted in <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7988/documents/82440/default/>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

government, set up the Wolf Review of vocational education in 2011, the Richard Review of apprenticeships in 2012, and the Sainsbury review of technical education in 2016. Following the reviews, they published plans to implement changes to apprenticeships and the post-16 Skills Plan.

Changes to apprenticeships based on the recommendations of the Richard review included the gradual introduction of new apprenticeship standards and end-point assessment, the requirement for apprenticeships to last at least 12 months and to include 20 percent 'off the job' training, and the requirement that all apprentices should achieve a Level 2 maths and English qualification by the end of the apprenticeship. Following further consultation, apprenticeship funding was changed with the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy.

The Government then consulted on plans for T Levels and on post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below (excluding A levels, T Levels and GCSEs), and on post-16 qualifications at Level 2 and below (excluding GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications). In September 2020, they began the implementation of T Levels as a technical alternative to A levels.

In July 2021, Gillian Keegan, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, issued the Government response to the consultation on the review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3<sup>8</sup>. In her foreword she set out the vision *'to transform the qualifications landscape and expand opportunity right across the country, so that more people can get the skills they need to get good jobs.'*

Alongside A levels and T Levels, the Government set out plans to 'streamline' the Level 3 qualifications on offer. This includes removing funding from qualifications which 'overlap' with T Levels, alongside funding technical qualifications for occupations not served by T Levels and specialist qualifications that are more specialised than the T Levels.

The Government plans to remove funding approval for qualifications that overlap with wave 1 and 2 T Levels from academic year 2024/25, and with wave 3 and 4 T Levels from academic year 2025/26. The final phase of reforms consists of a reappraisal process for academic and technical qualifications at Level 3, with new criteria that qualifications must meet in order to be publicly funded from 2025.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

Following consultation on post-16 qualifications at Level 2 and below, the Government set out plans<sup>9</sup> to fund Level 2 qualifications for young people that will support progress to Level 3 technical qualifications or into employment at Level 2, specialist qualifications and those that develop cross-sectoral skills, those that support progression to Level 3 academic qualifications, and English qualifications for speakers of other languages. First teaching of reformed qualifications at Level 2 is set to begin from September 2025.

### What does the future look like?

#### The Advanced British Standard

In October 2023, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak put forward a proposal for an Advanced British Standard (ABS). The aim of the ABS is to bring together technical and academic routes into a single framework, taking the best of A levels and T Levels. Students would study a minimum of five subjects in a combination of ‘majors’ and ‘minors’. All subjects will be ‘rigorous, high-quality and rich in the knowledge that builds skills relevant to next steps’<sup>10</sup>. Alongside the ‘majors’ and ‘minors’, the ABS will include employability, enrichment and pastoral (EEP) activities, and industry placements. Every student will study some form of English and maths up to age 18; this could be as a major or a minor.

There would be two kinds of ABS: the Advanced British Standard and the Advanced British Standard (occupational), aimed at those who choose to specialise. Those who pursue the ABS (occupational) will take one ‘major’ directly focused on a core subject related to their chosen occupation and a double major in a specialism ‘related to the core subject that will support progression into skilled employment or further specialist study at Level 4’. They will also take minors in English and maths, usually at Level 3 although there will be some flexibility for those who need to achieve or ‘consolidate’ skills at Level 2.

Those studying at Level 2 will take English and maths and then ‘an appropriate breadth and depth of subjects to enable onward progression’. There are two routes proposed that will support students to access Level 3 and above study,

---

9

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/111151/2/Review\\_of\\_post\\_16\\_Qualifications\\_at\\_L2\\_and\\_below\\_-\\_Government\\_Consultation\\_Response\\_-\\_Oct\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111151/2/Review_of_post_16_Qualifications_at_L2_and_below_-_Government_Consultation_Response_-_Oct_2022.pdf)

10

[https://consult.education.gov.uk/advanced-british-standards-directorate/the-advanced-british-standard/supporting\\_documents/A%20worldclass%20education%20system%20%20The%20Advanced%20British%20Standard%20consultation.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/advanced-british-standards-directorate/the-advanced-british-standard/supporting_documents/A%20worldclass%20education%20system%20%20The%20Advanced%20British%20Standard%20consultation.pdf)

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

apprenticeships or employment. The Level 2 occupational programme, based on employer-led standards, would include maths and English, EEP and possibly some work experience. Alternatively, students could access a one-year transition programme, including English, maths and EEP, and subjects to support transition to a Level 3 ABS programme.

The ABS, and the Level 2 offer, will require more time in the classroom, with taught time increased to a minimum of 1,475 hours over two years (almost 200 more taught hours than a typical A level student in England receives). The government expects that it will take up to 10 years to roll out the new ABS. In the meantime, A levels and T Levels will continue to be studied by the majority and T Levels will continue to be rolled out.

### Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc)

A different pathway is being developed in Greater Manchester<sup>11</sup>. At the moment, there is a clear pathway for young people through the EBacc at age 14; a set of subjects opening up opportunities to A Levels, university and employment. But there is no comparable pathway for young people whose interests, goals and passions might lead to employment via a different route. The MBacc is designed to plug that gap. The MBacc is 'an ambitious pathway for young people from the age of 14 who want to take high quality technical qualifications and pursue a work-related route that meets their aspirations, feeds their passions, and leads them to the job roles the GM [Greater Manchester] economy needs'<sup>12</sup>.

The proposed MBacc is developed around seven gateways: education and early years; digital and technology; construction and green economy; health and social care; manufacturing and engineering; financial and professional; creative, cultural and sport. Young people on the MBacc route could take subjects such as Engineering and creative subjects alongside the core of maths, English and Computer Science (or an ICT equivalent). Post-16 pathways would include BTECs, T Levels and apprenticeships.

According to Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester:

*'In the Autumn [2024], we will introduce the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate – or MBacc – to sit alongside the EBacc and give all our young people two clear equal*

---

<sup>11</sup>

<https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/work-and-skills/technical-education-city-region/the-greater-manchester-baccalaureate/>

<sup>12</sup>

<https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/work-and-skills/technical-education-city-region/the-greater-manchester-baccalaureate/>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

*paths at 14: one academic and one technical, but importantly with the opportunity to move between them in the future. The MBacc will steer them towards GCSEs and other qualifications most favoured by employers and then on to post-16 opportunities and the many great jobs we have in the GM economy. We will build the MBacc through the academic years of the rest of this decade so that, by 2030, our city-region will boast the country's first employer-driven, integrated technical education system. It will offer young people an equal and clear technical pathway in life, help employers fill workforce shortages and give investors another reason to come here.*<sup>13</sup>

### Qualifications

In 2021, there were 1.2 million 16–18 year olds participating in further education. Of these, 966,299 (78%) were studying at Level 3, 189,715 (15%) at Level 2, and 34,235 (3%) at Level 1. A further 90,921 young people were participating in apprenticeships or work-based learning<sup>14</sup>. 7% of 16-18 year olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET), increasing to 8.4% in 2022<sup>15</sup>.

Reforms to qualifications at Level 3 and below began in 2021, with the DfE withdrawing funding approval for over 5,000 qualifications which received no or low enrolments. In 2021, 132,635 students aged 16–18 were taking an Applied General Qualification (AGQ) at Level 3, and a further 141,196 were taking an AGQ alongside an A or AS level<sup>16</sup>.

According to the Association of Colleges in June 2023, in the first two rounds of defunding 220 qualifications still offered by colleges were proposed to be defunded, accounting for 86,139 enrolments. 15% of 16-18 year olds currently on Level 3 non-academic provision are studying for a qualification which is amongst those to be defunded<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.publicsectorexecutive.com/articles/new-greater-manchester-education-path-launches-year>

<sup>14</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39333/documents/193104/default/>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/c87d9e23-e93e-4fd5-d6ff-08db513a05d2>

<sup>16</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39333/documents/193104/default/>

<sup>17</sup>

[https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/L3-Defunding-briefing-June-2023.pdf?dm\\_i=26BG.8BE7G.T2TDAH.Y82UR.1](https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/L3-Defunding-briefing-June-2023.pdf?dm_i=26BG.8BE7G.T2TDAH.Y82UR.1)

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

According to the Protect Student Choice coalition of 30 sector organisations, half of the current 134 Applied General Qualifications will not be funded from 2025<sup>18</sup>. The remaining qualifications can be considered for reapproval, but it is not yet clear how many will remain available.

T levels are intended to become the Level 3 qualification of choice alongside A levels. In 2020, the first year of the T Levels, 1,300 students enrolled across 3 pathways: 991 completed in 2022 and received results, with 97.2% of those achieving a pass. Just over 98% of those who enrolled had achieved Grade 4 or higher in English, while nearly 98% had achieved a Grade 4 or higher in maths. 2.4% of students enrolled were recorded as having an EHCP<sup>19</sup>.

In 2021, 5,210 new students started a T Level across 10 pathways. 3,448 (66%) of those received results in 2023, with 90.5% achieving a pass<sup>20</sup>. Just under 98% of those who enrolled had achieved Grade 4 or above in English, while nearly 97% had achieved Grade 4 or higher in maths. 2.7% of those who enrolled were recorded as having an EHCP<sup>21</sup>.

In 2022, there were 10,200 new T Level starts across 16 pathways<sup>22</sup>.

Respondents to the 2023 Youth Voice Census were less likely to apply for a T Level than they were any other pathway, with 56.2% indicating they were 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to apply<sup>23</sup>. 56.9% of respondents had never had T Levels discussed with them. According to Ofsted's thematic review of T Levels,<sup>24</sup> many students who were taking T Levels said they had not been well advised about or adequately prepared for the demands of the course, noting that the complexity and the academic nature of some courses (e.g. health and science) had surprised them. Several students said

---

<sup>18</sup>

<https://sfcacampaign.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/0223-AGQ-letter-from-heads-and-principals-to-SoS-FINAL.pdf?t=1677610223>

<sup>19</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/114140/5/T\\_Level\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2022-2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114140/5/T_Level_Action_Plan_2022-2023.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/provisional-t-level-results>

<sup>21</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/114140/05/T\\_Level\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2022-2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114140/05/T_Level_Action_Plan_2022-2023.pdf)

<sup>22</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/114140/5/T\\_Level\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2022-2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114140/5/T_Level_Action_Plan_2022-2023.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census/>

<sup>24</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-thematic-review-final-report/t-level-thematic-review-final-report>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

that other similar courses they had intended to enrol on were discontinued at short notice and the T Level was the only option available to them.

T levels are not growing quickly enough to replace the Level 3 qualifications which are being defunded. Even in the most optimistic scenario, the Sixth Form Colleges Association predicts that 155,000 students (13% of all sixth form students in England) could be left without learning pathways from 2026<sup>25</sup>.

Since May 2020, the Government has also removed funding from over 3,700 Level 2 qualifications. The defunding of Level 2 qualifications means fewer pathways for those young people who are unable to access qualifications at Level 3, particularly T Levels.

The T Level transition programme (a one year programme intended to provide additional study time and preparation for those who are not ready to access a T Level) also began in 2020. According to a Freedom of Information request by FE Week<sup>26</sup>, of the 847 students who undertook the transition programme, 118 (14%) progressed onto a full T Level, while 277 progressed onto other Level 3 courses including BTECs or an advanced or higher level apprenticeship.

Narrowing learning pathways has the greatest impact on young people in lower socio-economic groups, those with special needs and disabilities and those with protected characteristics. The Government's impact assessment<sup>27</sup> points out that 'ensuring the qualifications offer at Level 3 is consistently high quality and leads to positive outcomes for all students who take them will inevitably mean that some students may find it more challenging to achieve Level 3 in the future.' (p8)

The same document concludes that 'students from SEND (special educational needs and disability) backgrounds, Black and Asian ethnic groups, and males could be particularly impacted by the proposals.' (p13) '...students from disadvantaged backgrounds could also be particularly affected'. While it acknowledges that these students are more likely to be taking qualifications that will no longer be available, it concludes that this is a positive impact because those qualifications were deemed poor quality or did not support young people into employment. But it is also clear that Level 3 'may not be accessible' to a small (but unquantified) number of pupils.

---

<sup>25</sup>

<https://sfcacampaign.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/120923-Desperate-Measures-PSC-campaign-report-FINAL.pdf?t=1694604115>

<sup>26</sup> <https://feweek.co.uk/pre-t-level-course-flops-in-its-first-year/>

<sup>27</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62d587f7e90e071e7488391e/Revised\\_Review\\_of\\_post-16\\_qualifications\\_at\\_level\\_3\\_in\\_England\\_impact\\_assessment.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62d587f7e90e071e7488391e/Revised_Review_of_post-16_qualifications_at_level_3_in_England_impact_assessment.pdf)



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

***Recommendation: Pause defunding in order to carry out and publish a social mobility impact assessment of defunding qualifications.***

***Recommendation: As part of the review of technical qualifications, consider how to ensure that high quality vocational qualifications, including smaller technical qualifications, are available as an alternative to T Levels.***

***Recommendation: Continue to work towards simplifying the landscape, removing 'duplicate' technical qualifications of the same size and subject content.***

### Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship starts are dropping more quickly for younger people and those at Levels 2 and 3.

Apprenticeship starts had already started to drop before the pandemic. According to NFER<sup>28</sup> they had fallen by a fifth between 2015/16 and 2018/19, largely driven by a fall in apprenticeships in SMEs. The biggest decline was seen in apprenticeships at Level 2 and Level 3. Apprenticeship starts for under 19s declined from 131,400 to 97,700, a fall of 23 percent. This dropped further, to 77,720 in 2022/23<sup>29</sup>. Apprenticeship starts declined most for the most disadvantaged apprentices and while London saw an increase in apprenticeship starts, all other regions saw a fall, with rural areas affected most. The pandemic itself had a substantial impact on apprenticeship starts, with the biggest decline amongst SMEs, and in Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships.

Although apprenticeships are taken by a relatively small proportion of 16-19 year olds, they make up 29% of the qualifications for those taking Level 2 qualifications. These are generally lower attaining students.

According to the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee, there are not enough apprenticeships available for young people who want to take them. 'Data from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) shows that in the year to mid July 2021, a total of 142,124 candidates under 25 years old submitted at least one application using the Find an Apprenticeship service, of whom just 9,587 had an application marked as 'successful'.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/putting-apprenticeships-to-work-for-young-people/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships>

<sup>30</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7988/documents/82440/default/> p24

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

Changes to funding have led employers to offer more apprenticeships at higher levels and to current employees. According to AELP, before the levy was introduced, 'SMEs [Small and Medium Sized Employers] made up 54% of apprenticeship starts, this has reduced significantly since the introduction of the levy to 38% in 2019/20 with a small increase in 2020/21 to 41% of market share. Smaller employers face a range of significant barriers in terms of accessibility, and cost and are more likely to be time poor<sup>31</sup>. The administrative burden for SMEs to manage the complexities of funding, for example, can make offering apprenticeships unmanageable. Younger apprentices, and particularly those at level 2, are likely to need more support in employment, which smaller employers find difficult to manage.

AELP also note that apprenticeships are the only part of the education system where 16-18 year olds are not fully funded by the state, and that returning to a fully funded model would help to reverse the decline in apprenticeships for this age group.

Research by Steve McIntosh at Sheffield University, noted by Edge<sup>32</sup>, suggests that rebalancing apprenticeship programmes towards younger and newer workers (rather than 'topping up' existing skills) will add more value to the economy. The report goes on to recommend that the English system should consider setting priorities for apprenticeship training as they do in Northern Ireland for example, and fully fund apprenticeships only for those aged 16-24 or proven to be new to the sector and occupation.

***Recommendation: Review the Apprenticeship Levy, to provide extra support for employers, particularly SMEs, to take on younger apprentices, those at L2 and L3 and those who need additional support, for example by ring fencing funding or offering full or partial funding depending on age or level. Remove the need for an EHCP or diagnosis in order to receive differentiated support.***

***Recommendation: Provide administrative and financial support for smaller employers to engage apprentices.***

### English and maths

According to EDSK, young people without any A\*-C grades [now Grade 4 and above] in their GCSEs account for two-thirds of the NEET population.<sup>33</sup> (p6) Achieving a Level 2 qualification in maths and English is vital for all pathways. For most, this means achieving a grade 4 or above at GCSE. But the numbers of young people not

---

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.aelp.org.uk/media/4szbdhva/118-aelp-spring-budget-submission.pdf> p3

<sup>32</sup>

[https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/87/edge20e2809320apprenticeships20report2028final20-20web29\\_41nXjVp.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/87/edge20e2809320apprenticeships20report2028final20-20web29_41nXjVp.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EDSK-Finding-a-NEET-solution.pdf>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

achieving grade 4 and above in maths and English is increasing, meaning that increasing numbers of young people are not able to access, or complete, qualifications.

In August 2023, 72% of pupils achieved grades 9-4 in maths (meaning that around 28% of the cohort did not)<sup>34</sup>. According to DfE data<sup>35</sup>, entries for GCSE English language increased by 29% from 46,900 in November 2022 to 60,365 in November 2023; November entries are mainly for resits. This was larger than the 53,540 in November 2019 before the pandemic. Entries in maths rose by 18% from 55,500 in 2022 to 65,250 in 2023, again higher than 55,955 in 2019.

In November 2023, 56,147 students resat their maths GCSE, with 22.9% achieving a grade 4 or above<sup>36</sup> (more students will take resits in the summer.) In 2022, 24.9% achieved grade 4 or above, while before the pandemic in 2019 it was 26.9%.

The proportion of students achieving a grade 4 in English grew in November 2023, with 40.3% of those who resat their GCSE achieving the grade. This is still fewer than half of all those who resat.

While it is not a requirement for young people to have English and maths prior to starting an apprenticeship, it is an exit requirement, meaning that a young person cannot achieve the apprenticeship if they cannot achieve a GCSE grade 4 or a Functional Skills Qualification. It is costly and time-consuming for employers to support a young person to achieve the standards, meaning that many will demand it as a condition of employment. This is likely to restrict social mobility and learning choice<sup>37</sup>.

***Recommendation: Review the policy of compulsory retakes, allow young people to move onto qualifications with suitable support. Remove the need for an EHCP or formal diagnosis in order to access maths and English qualifications at a lower level, and develop and monitor a route for colleges and schools to identify young people who should qualify for this support.***

---

<sup>34</sup>

<https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/08/gcse-results-2023-the-main-trends-in-grades-and-entries/#:~:text=Grades%20in%20English%20and%20maths.compared%20to%2021.2%25%20in%202019>

<sup>35</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-november-2023-exam-entries-gcse-english-language-and-mathematics/provisional-november-2023-exam-entries-gcse-english-language-and-mathematics#november-gcse-entries-by-subject>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/gcse-exams-resits-november-results-maths-fail>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.aelp.org.uk/media/hfwien1r/spelling-it-out-final.pdf>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

***Recommendation: Work with employers to make English and maths an exit requirement, rather than entry requirement, particularly for apprenticeships, and provide resources and funding to enable young people to achieve that.***

### Work experience and industry placements

According to the 2023 Youth Voice Census<sup>38</sup>, only 29.2% of young people in secondary school had access to work experience in the last 12 months and only 52.3% of those who were offered work experience were able to complete it. Of those who had work experience, 65% had one placement, while 20% had two. Male respondents were most likely to have received work experience, while Black and transgender respondents were 10% less likely to have had work experience than their peers. Only just over half (51.6%) had someone to support them to find a work placement, and those who had no support were mostly likely to have protected characteristics, including having been eligible for free school meals.

Young people are clear that work experience is good both for their CV and work skills, and for their motivation and confidence too. Longer placements are often harder for both young people and employers to manage, and there are calls for shorter, more varied placements in order to experience different types of jobs and working environments. The Education Select Committee<sup>39</sup> noted concerns about gaps in access to high-quality work experience, 'especially for pupils living outside major cities and the south-east of England'. Young people in rural areas have particularly limited access to work experience. Schools and employers report that the administrative requirements around arranging work placements, particularly safeguarding, can be a barrier<sup>40</sup>.

While virtual work experience can offer interesting variety and some good insight into the world of work and the pathways available, the Youth Voice Census<sup>41</sup> notes that it was also often too general and not personalised.

---

<sup>38</sup><https://www.speakersforschools.org/news/what-role-does-work-experience-play-in-the-success-of-young-people/>

<sup>39</sup><https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40610/documents/198034/default>

<sup>40</sup><https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40610/documents/198034/default> p5

<sup>41</sup>

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/dev/wp-content/themes/yeuk/files/youth-voice-census-2023-report.pdf> p57

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

Students who take T Levels are expected to complete a 45 day industry placement as part of the course. According to the Ofsted thematic review of T Levels<sup>42</sup>, the quality of placements varies considerably, and many providers struggle to find suitable placements. While this was initially assumed to be an impact of the pandemic, it has continued to be a concern. Employers are often not well-informed about the content of the T Level meaning that activities are not well-aligned and there is little opportunity to make progress. In some sectors, particularly health, there is competition for placements from other providers including universities, while many employers, especially in digital and computing, operate remote working arrangements which can make finding placements difficult. Providing industry placements for students on the T Level Transition Pathways was even more difficult, and often given lower priority.

There are often competing demands on employers for long industry placements, shorter work experience opportunities and increasing engagement with schools and colleges. This can be overwhelming for a small employer and can leave the most marginalised young people with SEND with no access to any experience at all.

***Recommendation: Review industry placements in T levels to enable flexibility of engagement for employers and build evidence of what makes work experience meaningful.***

### Careers education and guidance

Effective careers guidance can make a big difference to pupils' choices and their employment outcomes. The 2023 Youth Voice Census showed an increase in careers education in secondary schools, particularly careers fairs, access to mentors and employers visiting schools. Young people said they were hearing more frequently about apprenticeship opportunities. The opposite was true in colleges and sixth forms, with careers engagement down on last year. Black, African, Black British and Caribbean respondents were least likely to have received face to face careers advice or accessed online careers and job information.

The Education Select Committee<sup>43</sup> also noted that those least likely to receive high quality careers education included disadvantaged pupils, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those known to the care system, young carers, those with SEND and those on free school meals. Schools in deprived areas are less likely to have access to

---

<sup>42</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-thematic-review-final-report/t-level-thematic-review-final-report>

<sup>43</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40610/documents/198034/default> p5, 6

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

specialist careers advisers, and there is a need for greater careers expertise among special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) as well as accessible work/industry placements for pupils with SEND.

Schools are expected to link careers guidance to subject teaching in order to expose young people to a range of jobs and to demonstrate the relevance of the subjects they study. While the Education Committee report into CEIAG<sup>44</sup> notes a welcome increase in schools which successfully embed careers within the curriculum, it also points to the need to upskill teachers in careers provision. According to evidence presented to the committee, 88% of teachers reported that their training did not prepare them to deliver careers information and guidance to students, and many teachers may not have experience of the world of work outside of teaching. The curriculum itself also does not contain explicit links to relevant careers and this has not been included in the Department's recent work to develop model curricula.

***Recommendation: Ensure all young people have timely and high quality guidance and experience of vocational education to enable them to make informed choices about their pathways.***

***Recommendation: Empower all teachers to deliver careers education by incorporating it into teacher training and offering teacher externships in industries aligned with their subject areas as part of teacher CPD.***

## Case Studies

The Commission was concerned that national data hides the large differences between different areas of the country. We spent some time looking for the data in two different parts of the country: Kettering and Darlington.

### Kettering

Kettering sits within North Northamptonshire. There are 6 sixth forms in Kettering itself, while Tresham FE College has a Kettering campus. In North Northamptonshire as a whole there were 3,979 16 year olds (at the end of Key Stage 4) in 2022/23<sup>45</sup>, up from 3,800 the previous year. In 2021/22, 93.2% of 16-18 year olds were in sustained education, apprenticeships or employment<sup>46</sup>. 61% achieved Level 4 or above in

---

<sup>44</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40610/documents/198034/default>

<sup>45</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/9282?text=number+of+pupils>

<sup>46</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/4686?text=number+of+pupils>

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

English and maths, meaning that 39% (approximately 1,550 young people) did not. 2.6% of 16 and 17 year olds were NEET, or their activity was unknown, in 2023<sup>47</sup>.

Tresham College will offer 465 T Level places across 12 pathways, along with 109 apprenticeship places. According to the AELP apprenticeship database, in 2021/22 in North Northamptonshire as a whole, there were 432 Apprenticeship starts under 19, with 192 at Level 2 and 235 at Level 3. Across the South East Midlands region, 7 colleges and schools are providing 21 T Levels from September 2023, rising to 29 from 9 organisations in 2024. There were 9,000 apprenticeship starts and 4010 achievements in 2021/22 (from the LSIP).

North Northamptonshire sits within the South East Midlands Local Skills Improvement Plan. According to the LSIP<sup>48</sup>:

- The percentage of students achieving grade 4 or above in English maths and science is below national averages
- Many applicants are not able to meet the essential criteria for maths and English stated on apprenticeship vacancies
- The proportion of students achieving apprenticeship, FE qualifications and A levels is currently less than is required for jobs across a range of areas
- Apprenticeship starts increased by 11% from 2020/21 to 2021/22, but apprenticeship completions compared to starts are at around 45-50%
- Post-16 unemployment is above the national average in North Northamptonshire at 4.7%, and has been growing since 2020.

There are challenges in filling occupational shortages because of a range of factors, including: inadequate basic skills levels from pre-16 education, particularly in literacy and numeracy; a lack of appropriate level content and/or paced pathways to some occupations with need; and a lack of knowledge of the pathways available for individuals or employers. Soft skills are identified as a key need, along with leadership and management, digital, and environmental and net zero skills. Consultation with stakeholders identified the need for development, application and evidencing of core transferable skills, digital skills, attitudes and behaviours within both pre- and post-16 education, and for increased engagement of employers with education.

The plan identified occupation shortages in construction, digital and creative, care, retail, public, logistics, hospitality, health, manufacturing, education and the Green

---

<sup>47</sup>

[https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=9612&mod-area=E06000061&mod-group=AllUnitaryLainCountry\\_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup&mod-period=2](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=9612&mod-area=E06000061&mod-group=AllUnitaryLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup&mod-period=2)

<sup>48</sup>

[https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/1piytiaz4koq498rs8ht3/LSIP\\_-\\_Parts\\_1\\_and\\_2-31\\_July\\_2023\\_-002-2.pdf?rlkey=749nu3ua9aaxevv7ialml3o91&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/1piytiaz4koq498rs8ht3/LSIP_-_Parts_1_and_2-31_July_2023_-002-2.pdf?rlkey=749nu3ua9aaxevv7ialml3o91&dl=0)

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

Economy. It also set as a priority working with employers and others to identify how 'readiness for work and essential skills for work' can be developed and evidenced within the academic, technical and vocational provision on offer.

### Darlington

Darlington is in the Tees Valley, which has a strong industrial base and several well-established employment sectors. There are four main post-16 providers in Darlington: Carmel Sixth Form college, Darlington College, DBC Learning & Skills; and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form college.<sup>49</sup> There is also a special school, Beaumont Hill, providing education for pupils from 2-19. In 2022/23, there were 1,148 16 year olds (at the end of KS4)<sup>50</sup>. This is likely to rise slightly in the summer of 2024, to 1,169 16 year-olds. Of those, at the end of Year 10, 171 were recorded as SEN Support and 56 had EHCPs. 65.5% of pupils attained a grade 4 or above in English and maths<sup>51</sup>, meaning that 34.5% (approximately 403 pupils) did not. 3.8% of 16-17 year olds were NEET, or their status was not known<sup>52</sup>. In 2021/22, 84.6% of 16-18 year olds were in sustained education, apprenticeships or employment<sup>53</sup>.

According to the 2023 LSIP, the Tees Valley has attainment levels that are below national averages as well as further education funding constraints. There is a particular focus on green energy, with a need for traditional skills in construction and for apprentices. There is also an acute labour shortage in health and social care. The LSIP notes that there are 364 courses available for health and social care in the region, half of which are Level 2 courses. There are 25 active apprenticeship programmes provided by a mix of private and public sector trainers, while the local FE colleges offer Level 3 Health and Social Care courses for both 16-18 year olds and adult learners. It also points out a 'particular concern in the Tees Valley that the new T Level in Health does not have a social care specialism. Until 2025, the legacy qualifications can cover social care. However, beyond this point the only provision will be via apprenticeship routes.'<sup>54</sup> Employers worry that the new T Level Health

---

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/11-19-partnership/careers-and-post-16-options/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/9282?text=number+of+pupils>

<sup>51</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/explorer/9214?category=200023>

<sup>52</sup>

[https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=9612&mod-area=E06000005&mod-group=A||UnitaryLainCountry\\_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup&mod-period=2](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=9612&mod-area=E06000005&mod-group=A||UnitaryLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup&mod-period=2)

<sup>53</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/9282?text=number+of+pupils>

<sup>54</sup>

<https://www.necc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Tees-Valley-Local-Skills-Improvement-Plan-2023.pdf>  
p15



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

qualification has an academic focus in its teaching, while it should have more practical learning<sup>55</sup>.

### Local concerns

While there is a great deal of work happening at local levels to map both the skills need and the learning provision, the data is not easily available to understand whether the provision will meet either the employer requirements or the learner need. It is not possible to know, from available data, whether there are sufficient school, college and employer places in the right areas, as well as sufficient choice of pathways and qualifications at different levels to offer choice to every young person. In Kettering, for example, it is difficult to disentangle data at the level of the town from that of the local authority or county, or the region. The Commission is concerned that the DfE does not have sufficiently fine-grained data to know how qualifications reform is impacting on young people and that it is disadvantaged students who are most likely to find themselves with no, or unsuitable, pathways.

Analysis from the Local Government Association (April 2021) notes that across England, £20 billion was spent on at least 49 nationally contracted or delivered employment and skills related schemes or services managed by 9 Whitehall departments and agencies, multiple providers and over different geographies. No Government strategy sets out how schemes like Levelling Up and Towns Funds, Help to Grow, Restart, Bootcamps, and the National Careers Service should work together. Such a strategy could include empowering local areas to align apprenticeship activity to local skills strategies, enabling local partnerships to address supply and demand and to widen participation for disadvantaged groups and specific cohorts.

It is clear that there are concerns about young people's literacy and numeracy skills. The percentage of young people achieving grade 4 and above at GCSE has decreased following the pandemic, both because of the impact of pupils learning at home and the changes from teacher assessed grades back to exams, and this is likely to have an ongoing impact on young people's trajectories over the next few years. While colleges have planned to meet the projected numbers of students wishing to follow Level 2 and Level 3 pathways, it is possible that more will find the demand of A level, T Level or apprenticeship pathways is too much and will wish to change direction.

---

55

<https://www.necc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Tees-Valley-Local-Skills-Improvement-Plan-2023.pdf>  
p14

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

***Recommendation: Support local partnership between schools, colleges, independent training providers and specialist partners such as Supported Employment, along with the local council, to review provision and student need, and to collaborate so that learners can access the provision best suited to them.***

***Recommendation: Carry out and publish a place-based review of availability of pathways. Do not defund qualifications until there is a quality alternative that is available in all locations.***

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Values

### **What values should underpin the development of young people's learning and qualifications?**

In order to meet the needs of all young people, whatever their background, location, previous experience or particular needs, pathways must be:

#### ***Young person-centred***

*Learning pathways should be focused on the needs and aspirations of young people, and underpinned by high quality careers information, advice and guidance in order to support good decisions. Young people should be involved in conversations about how pathways develop and encouraged to demonstrate their agency.*

#### ***Equitable in access and opportunity***

*Learning pathways should be accessible to every young person, with no-one left behind. This will require a focus on those young people with barriers, with opportunities adaptive to skills needs, and culturally responsive. Pathways should be available across different locations and providers.*

#### ***Broad and coherent***

*Learning pathways should provide access to a full range of knowledge and skills, embracing technical, vocational and academic learning equally. Pathways should support choice, and offer opportunities to move between pathways. They should be easy to navigate, and available across different providers including small and large employers.*

#### ***Focused on meaningful learning for life and work***

*Learning pathways should develop young people's personal, employability and community engagement skills. They should encourage deep and sustainable learning, and celebrate curiosity, creativity and experimentation. They should support young people into adulthood and promote access to meaningful employment.*

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Recommendations for the short term

The Commission agrees that the post-16 qualifications landscape is overly complex and needs to be streamlined. We also agree with the government intention to develop T Levels as a high quality technical qualification, with a status equivalent to A level. However, too many young people could fall through the gaps as this policy is rolled out across England.

In order to meet the needs of young people immediately, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

### ***Pause and review current plans to defund qualifications***

Pause defunding in order to carry out and publish a social mobility impact assessment of defunding qualifications.

Carry out and publish a place-based review of the availability of pathways. Do not defund qualifications until there is a quality alternative that is available in all locations.

### ***Review current qualifications***

As part of the review of technical qualifications, consider how to ensure that high quality vocational qualifications, including smaller technical qualifications, are available as an alternative to T Levels.

Continue to work towards simplifying the landscape, removing 'duplicate' technical qualifications of the same size and subject content.

### ***Change requirements for English and maths***

Review the policy of compulsory retakes and allow young people to move onto qualifications with suitable support. Remove the need for an EHCP or formal diagnosis in order to access maths and English qualifications at a lower level and develop and monitor a route for colleges and schools to identify young people who should qualify for this support.

Work with employers to make English and maths an exit requirement, rather than entry requirement, particularly for apprenticeships, and provide resources and funding to enable young people to achieve that.

### ***Improve Apprenticeship support***

Review the Apprenticeship Levy to provide extra support for employers, particularly SMEs, to take on younger apprentices, those at L2 and L3 and those who need

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

additional support, for example by ring fencing funding or offering full or partial funding depending on age or level. Remove the need for an EHCP or diagnosis in order to receive differentiated support.

Provide administrative support for smaller employers to engage apprentices.

### ***Increase meaningful work experience***

Review industry placements in T Levels to enable flexibility of engagement for employers and build evidence of what makes work experience meaningful.

### ***Improve careers education and guidance***

Ensure all young people have timely and high quality guidance and experience of vocational education to enable them to make informed choices about their pathways.

Empower all teachers to deliver careers education by incorporating it into teacher training and offering teacher externships in industries aligned with their subject areas as part of teacher CPD.

### ***Increase local collaboration***

Support local partnership between schools, colleges, independent training providers and specialist partners such as Supported Employment, along with local councils, to review provision and student needs, and to collaborate so that learners can access the provision best suited to them.

## Recommendations for the longer term

### A Young Person's Entitlement

Every young person should be able to access a pathway to employment that meets their needs. The Commission recommends developing a coherent framework, based on robust evidence, of curriculum, qualifications and pathways to form a Young Person's Entitlement.

This should include:

A flexible framework of high quality qualifications, in a range of sizes, that enable progression into further learning or work, including for those learners who need more agile or shorter duration qualifications and those without a Level 2 or 3 qualification.

Clear pathways for young people who want to move into apprenticeships and support for those who might struggle to access them.

A meaningful programme of work experience at different ages and stages of the learner

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

journey, and a clear understanding of what makes for good work/industry placements.

A progressive careers programme that is embedded in school and college provision, supporting pupils from an early age to make the best choices.

English and maths qualifications that are proportionate to pupils' level of study and course content, and properly embedded in all pathways including apprenticeships.

The Young Person's Entitlement must be designed collaboratively, through partnerships that bring together all parts of the system, including employers, schools, colleges, local councils, and specialist support organisations to meet the needs of particular learners, along with young people, with financial incentives in place where needed.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Annex

### Youth Employment UK

Youth Employment UK is an independent, not for profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment, working in partnership to ensure that youth unemployment remains a government priority. As experts on youth employment and unemployment, we are ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people, employers and policy makers.

Central to our work is Youth Voice and our annual Youth Voice Census provides a crucial data set on how young people aged 11-30 are feeling about their education and employment prospects across the country. We are increasingly hearing that young people are feeling less optimistic about their futures and their pathways to employment with only 41.5% of young people feeling confident that they are prepared to start work. We know that Vocational Technical Qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 provide an important pathway for many young people and their removal is deeply concerning for young people who already feel like they have a lack of options.

Through the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment we have already done a deep dive on this issue, [‘The Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People’s Employability and Labour Market Outcomes’](#), and it is the concerns raised through the inquiry that have led us to create the Commission.

Our relationships with employers, education and training providers, policy-makers, government, and young people provide us with a unique opportunity to bring together a range of stakeholders to review this policy and its impact on youth employment, and to propose viable alternative solutions which ensure all young people have access to suitable post-16 pathways.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## The Young Person's Entitlement: a framework for post-16 education reform

This framework has been designed by Youth Employment UK to support the development of future education and skills reform for young people.

Our design principle is to create an education and skills system that inspires and prepares young people for the future, a system that:

- allows for choice, opportunity and support for personal growth
- develops them for the future, whatever it brings
- prepares them for employment.

This paper aims to set out the reasons that the Secretary of State for the Department for Education and its Ministers should consider adopting the Young Person's Entitlement as its framework for post-16 education reform.

There are ambitious plans to develop post-16 education to ensure its quality and fit for purpose. The opportunity to develop education and skills provision at this stage has never been greater and it comes at a time of significant need. There are clear demands for an education system that prepares young people for the evolving world.

Developing education and skills policy that is future-proofed, can flex to demands of national and local delivery, and works for all young people is significantly challenging and ambitious.

Over the last 7 years, the Department for Education has reformed the apprenticeship system and introduced new T-Level qualifications, both programmes driven by employer demand and insight. During this time there has also been very significant education and skill challenges including: the continuing impacts of Covid-19, reduction of apprenticeship starts in the 16-18 group, reduction of Level 2 apprenticeship programmes, rising numbers of young people not achieving English and maths GCSE at the first take, and now a growing issue around absenteeism in schools.

The Youth Voice Census has been building a picture over the last few years of growing issues facing young people from significant mental health and anxiety issues to fears of safety and a growing sense of disenfranchisement of many young people. It is also clear to see that the gaps between those young people who face areas of disadvantages from race and ethnicity, lower socio-economic, special



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

education needs and disability, and other factors struggle the most to feel confident and engaged through their education experience and feel even less confident about the transition to employment.

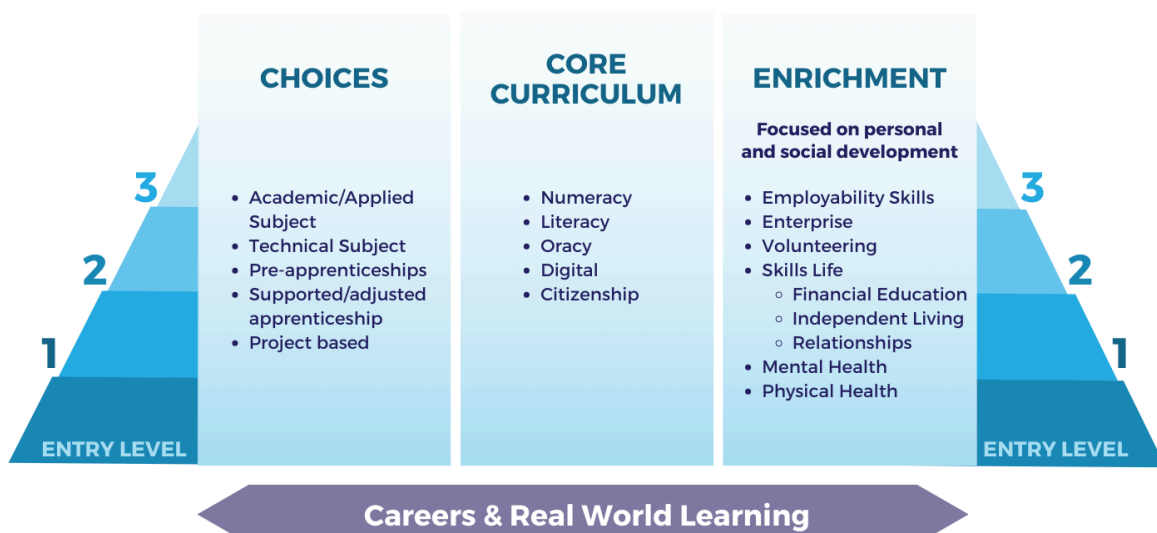
Through this complex lens of challenge it is important that any system change to education is done within the broadest consideration, getting to the root cause of social mobility and disengagement, and ensuring a system is durable for the years ahead.

### **Reimagining post-16 education:**

The Young Person's Entitlement reimagines how the post-16 curriculum supports young people. The framework sets out young people's choice subjects (academic or vocational), a core supporting curriculum, and enrichment activities as three even pillars. These pillars, available at each level from Entry Level to Level 3, can be flexed to support where young people are in their learning for each. The framework ensures that across each pillar careers and work related learning is woven into session design.

The Young Person's Entitlement provides a framework for what it is young people and employers need to see in an education and skills system. The framework allows for flexibility at a local level and guarantees that young people who are not able to achieve higher levels of education at this time, have an equal quality opportunity at the right level for them.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People



All young people should benefit from the Young Person's Entitlement at the stage of post-16 education. The transition into post-16 should begin with individual diagnostics so that young people can be placed on the right level programme. This should include a needs, skills and behaviours assessment and their programme of study should be flexible to allow for studying at different levels based on the diagnostic.

Curriculum, assessment and exams should be appropriate and meet the needs of the learners, including modular learning, certificate building and ensure that there are positive ramp on and off opportunities for young people as their needs and aspirations change. Recognising that one form of assessment will not suit all young people and finding the most suitable and robust way for young people to learn and measure success is key.

### Components of the Young Person's Entitlement

#### Choices

Young people should have a broad set of choices available to them. All choices should be seen as equal in their quality and only differ in the learning styles, teaching and assessment methods that are used.

Practical, vocational, project, applied or academic subjects should offer a quality curriculum that furthers the students knowledge and skills in their chosen area and ensures that the student can complete their choice curriculum and move onto a positive next destination.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## **Core Curriculum**

The core curriculum should prioritise Numeracy, Literacy, Oracy, Digital and Citizenship. All young people should have appropriate levels of education and training that build their knowledge and confidence in these core competencies and build on the needs of business and the world in which we live.

## **Enrichment**

The enrichment offer should be balanced alongside the Choice and Core curriculum, recognising that employers and young people themselves need the skills that are developed through enrichment programmes as much as any other education aspect. Enrichment allows for young people to develop resilience and to measure their worth and success through a different lens, to reflect, learn and develop.

Enrichment should include cultural, social and economic opportunities that enhance social mobility and level up for young people.

The Personal, Social and Employability Qualifications (PSEQ's) have recently been reviewed by an expert panel and cover a range of life and personal skill development standards. These standards have been designed to support a young person in all areas of personal development and build the skills and knowledge that young people need in order to live a positive and fulfilling life.

All students should have access to pastoral and mental health support during their time in post-16 education. For young people with special education needs and disabilities, this may also include supported work placements or job coaching.

## **Careers and Real Work Learning**

Careers and Real Work Learning should be a common thread in all curriculum design. This may include enterprise, careers activity or work experiences.

Workplace learning must meet the needs of the individual learner and be tailored to their aspirations and career ambitions. For young people with special education needs and disabilities, the placements require expert support for both the employer and the learner.

Careers conversations and transition support must be recorded and monitored for all pupils and the flow of information should move with the pupil to their next destination.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## **Considerations**

The Young Person's Entitlement is a long-term ambition for the education and skills system and should be developed in consultation and partnership with key stakeholders.

There should be a full review of the delivery mechanisms and funding to make the Entitlement work for all young people and providers.

Accountability measures will need to be reviewed; current accountability measures on exam results influence provider behaviour which will need to be refocused. A broader accountability measure should be used that recognises the progress made in skill and personal development, and the progress made for the individual pupil. Accountability around destinations should be reviewed and possibly strengthened as a key output.

Whilst the Entitlement focuses on post-16, it potentially could be used as a basis for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 curriculum design. It is important that the Key Stages are connected to make the transition work for young people.

There are currently significant pieces of work being undertaken around reforming assessments and qualifications that will bring an evidenced based approach to the rethinking of the post-16 offer.

Curriculum planning can be designed at both national and local levels to account for regional skills needs and priorities. Embedded within curriculum design should always be considerations for green/sustainability/AI knowledge and skill development.

Any future curriculum design will need to be agile as the impact of AI and geopolitical issues will change the landscape of education and employment. Students and providers of the future will need to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

Key to the success of the Entitlement will be the workforce that supports it. Ensuring that there are skilled staff across the post-16 landscape that can lead, deliver and support the work will be critical. Reviewing the workforce training and development needs, but also the profile, ensuring the skills, knowledge and behaviours of the workforce meet the ambition of the reformed system.

## **Principles of the Young Person's Entitlement:**

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

**Prioritising young people in a holistic way:** Recognising that not all young people start from the same place and will need an adaptive offer that provides them with academic, technical education and personal development opportunities at the level they are at and based on their personal aspirations and needs.

**Prepares young people for the future:** Young people are the future of our society. By providing them with a well-rounded education that includes academic, technical, and personal development opportunities, we can help prepare them for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

**Improves employability:** A holistic education that includes both academic and technical training can help young people develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce. This can lead to better job prospects and improved employability.

**Personal growth:** Personal development opportunities such as leadership training, community service, and extracurricular activities can help young people develop important life skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. These skills are essential for personal growth and can help young people become well-rounded individuals.

**Social mobility:** A holistic education that provides young people with equal access to academic, technical, and personal development opportunities can help promote social mobility. This can help level the playing field and ensure that all young people have an equal chance to succeed.

**Better mental health:** A holistic education that includes personal development opportunities can help young people develop a sense of purpose and belonging. This can lead to better mental health outcomes and improved well-being.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Appendices

### Appendix i: Skills

#### **EDGE Foundation - Skills Shortages in the UK Economy.**

The thirteenth edition of the Skills Shortage Bulletin explores how the low competitiveness of socially and economically essential labour market roles threaten the social infrastructure and quality of life in our society. As per the last bulletin, there are signs that investment might be launched and targeted through our improved capacity to gather labour market data, particularly at a local level.

EDGE Foundation (2023). *Skills Shortages in the UK Economy*. [online] Available at: [https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/472/Skills\\_Shortages\\_Bulletin\\_13.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/472/Skills_Shortages_Bulletin_13.pdf).

#### **Institute for Apprenticeship - A Simpler Skills System**

In 2017, the Government set up the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (ifATE). Their Strategic Plan 2021-2024 commits to building a more integrated skills system that follows the lead of employers and makes it easier for people from all backgrounds to maximise their potential. Their report uses insight gained to set out how they will deliver a simpler skills system.

Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (2023). *A Simpler Skills System A Simpler Skills System*. [online] Available at: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/7390/ifate-a-simpler-skills-system.pdf>.

#### **National Audit Office & DfE - Developing Workforce Skills for a Strong Economy.**

This report focuses on whether government has an effective approach to enhancing workforce skills. This report covers the workforce skills system, the scale of the skills challenge that government faces, government's understanding of workforce skills needs, and lastly, how well government is supporting the development of workforce skills.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

National Audit Office and Department for Education (2022). *Developing Workforce Skills for a Strong Economy*. [online] Available at:  
<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Developing-workforce-skills-for-a-strong-economy.pdf>.

### **EDGE Foundation - The perspectives of learners: How are schools developing employability skills?**

In February 2023, Edge Foundation released Phase 2 of their Joint Dialogue research project. This project aimed to identify which skills employers are looking for in young people and to consider what skills are being developed in different settings, and how this might transfer into a workplace setting.

EDGE Foundation (2023b). *The Perspectives of Learners -How Are Schools Developing Employability skills? Joint Dialogue Phase 2*. [online] Available at:  
[https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/344/Final\\_joint\\_dialogue.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/344/Final_joint_dialogue.pdf).

### **The St Martin's Group - A manifesto for our future skills system.**

The SMG is a membership organisation created to support the UK economy that is calling for three missions for a future skills system: a system that provides opportunity for all; a skills system that truly works for employers; and a stable system that is quality focused and sustainable.

By focusing on these missions, the UK can build a skills system that is inclusive, effective, and responsive to the needs of learners and employers alike.

The St. Martin's Group (2023). *A Manifesto for Our Future Skills System*. [online] Available at:  
<https://stmartinsgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SMG-Manifesto-June-2023.pdf>.

### **Higher Education Policy Institute - Connecting the Dots: The Need for an Effective Skills System in England.**

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

Our education institutions are forced to compete for learners and funding, which, rather than leading to efficiencies and clarity of choice, creates inefficiencies and lost opportunities.

Higher Education Policy Institute (2023). *Connecting the Dots: The Need for an Effective Skills System in England*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Connecting-the-Dots-The-Need-for-an-Effective-Skills-System-in-England.pdf>.

### **House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee - Skills for Every Young Person.**

**The Select Committee on Youth Unemployment was appointed by the House of Lords on 28 January 2021 to consider youth unemployment, education and skills.**

According to the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee, there are a range of barriers that stop young people from taking on apprenticeships. They heard that systemic faults within the Apprenticeship Levy funding system have led to employers converting existing training programmes to apprenticeships at the expense of young people. Furthermore, there is a lack of incentives geared towards recruiting young people or providing adequate funding of places. This has led to an imbalance in the supply of places relative to demand.

The House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee (2021). *Skills for Every Young Person*. [online] Committees.parliament.uk. Available at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7988/documents/82440/default/>.

## **Appendix ii: Pathways**

### **Ofsted - T-Level thematic review: Final report.**

The DfE commissioned Ofsted to carry out a thematic review following the launch of T Levels and TLPs in September 2020 to assess the early implementation of the new qualifications. Findings of this report include:

- High entry requirements (5 GCSEs at grade 4 or above) resulted in fewer students being able to enrol in T Levels



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

- T-level students felt misled about the components and learning activities in the course and had expected more practical activity
- Public knowledge of T Levels is limited.

Gov.uk (2023). *T-level Thematic review: Final Report*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-thematic-review-final-report/t-level-thematic-review-final-report#recommendations>.

### **Education Policy Institute - A Narrowing Path to Success? 16-19 Curriculum Breadth and Employment Outcomes.**

This report commissioned by the Royal Society aimed to investigate whether the narrowness of subjects from 16-19 has been effective or detrimental to Young People's success in the labour market. When examining the outcomes of graduates, the study found that those who had greater diversity in their A level subjects were likely to see a small boost to their earnings.

Education Policy Institute (2021). *A Narrowing Path to Success? 16-19 Curriculum Breadth and Employment Outcomes*. [online] Available at: [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EPI-Royal\\_Society-16-19-report.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EPI-Royal_Society-16-19-report.pdf).

### **EDGE Foundation- Schools for All? Young People's Experiences of Alienation in the English Secondary School System.**

In recent years, secondary schools in England have been subject to successive rounds of reform. This report highlights and discusses the educational experiences of young people across England, including the potential impact of these reforms on young people's lives. Young people who had left mainstream school for alternative education provision or vocational education and training were mostly thriving in these different educational settings, often for the first time.

EDGE Foundation (2023a). *Schools for All? Young people's experiences of alienation in the English secondary school system*. [online] Available at: [https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/349/DD0940\\_-\\_Young\\_Futures\\_Young\\_Lives\\_FIN\\_AL\\_JVbavJ7.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/349/DD0940_-_Young_Futures_Young_Lives_FIN_AL_JVbavJ7.pdf).

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

### **Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England - Government consultation response: impact assessment.**

The DfE's Conclusions of this assessment found 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 to be impacted. For adults, they found that female students, those from white ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties or disabilities were more likely to be affected.

Department for Education (2022). *Review of post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 in England Government Consultation response: Impact Assessment*. [online] Available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1091841/Revised\\_Review\\_of\\_post-16\\_qualifications\\_at\\_level\\_3\\_in\\_England\\_impact\\_assessment.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091841/Revised_Review_of_post-16_qualifications_at_level_3_in_England_impact_assessment.pdf).

### **FFT Education Datalab - Do disadvantaged students choose different subjects from their peers at Key Stage 5?**

This post demonstrates that overall, disadvantaged students were less likely than their peers to choose an academic route of post-16 study, and less likely to complete a Level 3 qualification. Disadvantaged students were also less likely to choose some subjects than their peers and this is not entirely explained by differences in prior attainment.

Plaister, N. (2022). *Do Disadvantaged Students Choose Different Subjects from Their Peers at Key Stage 5? - FFT Education Datalab*. [online] Fft Education Data Lab.

Available at:

<https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2022/04/do-disadvantaged-students-choose-different-subjects-from-their-peers-at-key-stage-5/>.

### **EDSK - Broken ladders: Why the 'ladder of opportunity' is broken for so many young people, and how to fix it.**

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

This report investigates why the first few rungs on the 'ladder of opportunity' are missing for so many young people who do not follow the academic path.

EDSK (2023). *Broken Ladders: Why the 'ladder of opportunity' Is Broken for so Many Young People, and How to Fix It*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EDSK-Broken-ladders.pdf>.

### **Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee - Requires Improvement: Urgent Change for 11-16 Education.**

This inquiry received evidence from pupils, teachers and academics, trade unions, and subject associations, among others. Conclusions of this report recognise that the 11-16 curriculum must be revised to incorporate a greater emphasis on technical, digital, and creative areas of study.

Witnesses to the inquiry have suggested that increasing the take-up of the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) could enable more students to benefit from the opportunities of non-exam assessment in Key Stage 4.

House Of Lords (2023). *Requires improvement: Urgent Change for 11-16 Education*.

[online] Available at:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5804/ldselect/ldedu1116/17/17.pdf>.

### **Department for Education - T Level Action Plan 2022 to 2023**

Department for Education (2023). *T Level Action Plan 2022 to 2023*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1141405/T\\_Level\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2022-2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1141405/T_Level_Action_Plan_2022-2023.pdf).

### **GOV.UK - Apprenticeships and traineeships Academic Year 2022/23**

Gov.uk (2023a). *Apprenticeships and traineeships, Academic Year 2021/22*. [online] explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk. Available at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships>.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

### **AoC - Briefing Note on the Impact of the Defunding of Level 3 Qualifications.**

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents nearly 93% of the 266 colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992. According to the AoC, in the first two rounds of defunding, 220 qualifications still offered by colleges were proposed to be defunded, accounting for 86,139. This means that 15% of 16-18 year-olds currently on Level 3 non-academic provision are studying for a qualification which is amongst those to be defunded.

Association of Colleges (2023). *Briefing Note on the Impact of the Defunding of Level 3 Qualifications*. [online] Available at:

[https://d4hfhzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/L3-Defunding-briefing-June-2023.pdf?dm\\_i=26BG,8BE7G,T2TDAH,Y82UR,1](https://d4hfhzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/L3-Defunding-briefing-June-2023.pdf?dm_i=26BG,8BE7G,T2TDAH,Y82UR,1).

### **Careers & Enterprise Company - Conditions for Transition: Supporting Young People onto Apprenticeships and Technical Pathways - A Regional Analysis.**

A new legal provision, the Provider Access Legislation, aimed to encourage schools to engage their students in apprenticeships and technical pathways. However, there still remained 'friction' at points of transition. This report aims to shine a light on the supports and barriers to smoother transitions, by addressing factors region by region.

Careers & Enterprise Company (2023). *Conditions for transition: Supporting Young People onto Apprenticeships and Technical Pathways - a Regional Analysis*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/ga5ps5hx/conditions-for-transition.pdf>.

### **House of Commons Education Committee - The Future of Post-16 Qualifications.**

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies. This report found that in 2021, 1.2 million 16-18 year olds were participating in FE. Of these, 966,299 (78%) were studying at Level 3, 189,715 (15%) at level 2, and 34,235 (3%) at level 1. A further 90,921 young people were

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

participating in apprenticeships or work-based learning. 7% of 16-18-year-olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET), increasing to 8.4% in 2022.

House of Commons Education Committee (2023). *The future of post-16*

*qualifications*. [online] Available at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39333/documents/193104/default/>.

### Appendix iii: Oracy & Numeracy

#### **Bill Lucas - Rethinking Assessment in Education: The Case for Change**

This report emphasises that education should focus on developing essential skills such as oracy, creativity, and critical thinking. The report also highlights how damaging 'high-stakes' assessments may be to young people as it can lead them to perceive themselves as failures.

Lucas, B. (2021). *Rethinking Assessment in Education: The Case for Change*. [online]

Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350887830\\_Rethinking\\_assessment\\_in\\_education\\_The\\_case\\_for\\_change\\_CSE\\_LEADING\\_EDUCATION\\_SERIES](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350887830_Rethinking_assessment_in_education_The_case_for_change_CSE_LEADING_EDUCATION_SERIES).

#### **Mark House - Comparative Judgement and the Transformative Power of Holistic Assessment**

This report scrutinises the use of 'absolute judgements' of the current assessment process. In this report, Mark House explores the potential of holistic assessment, which emphasises the value of contextualised judgement allowing assessments to be more flexible, context-aware and of holistic nature. This approach also recognises that performance is more than the sum of its parts.

House, M. (2023). *Comparative Judgement and Transformative Power of Holistic Assessment*. [online] Rethinking Assessment. Available at:

<https://rethinkingassessment.com/rethinking-blogs/comparative-judgement-and-the-transformative-power-of-holistic-assessment/>.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

### **Voice 21: The State of Speaking in Our Schools**

This report shines a light on the current state of oracy in schools across the UK. It synthesises existing research of what oracy is, why they feel it matters, how oracy is supported in classrooms and schools, and the main barriers to oracy. It then sets out recommendations for enhancing the quality and consistency of oracy in schools.

Millard, W., Menzies, L. and Voice 21 (2016). *The State of Speaking in Our Schools*.

[online] Available at:

<https://voice21.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Voice-21-State-of-speaking-in-our-schools.pdf>.

### **City & Guilds - Maths and English Research Report: Priorities and Challenges for Maths and English Teaching and Learning in 2023 and Beyond.**

In March 2023, City & Guilds conducted a research project targeting individuals involved in maths and English teaching and learning in the UK. The three priorities identified for the future were: improving the quality of maths and English programmes, helping people improve their life chances and lastly, raising literacy and numeracy levels regionally and/or nationally.

City & Guilds (2023). *Maths and English Research Report: Priorities and Challenges for Maths and English Teaching and Learning in 2023 and beyond*. [online] Available at:

[https://www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/cityandguilds-site/documents/news/2023/maths-and-english-research-report-pdf.ashx?la=en&hash=5902283643C63105D072DA81827B8EC6B22D43AF&utm\\_campaign=Policy&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsmi=79341496&\\_hsenc=p2ANqztz-8XCkab0V6RB1cajShnqmcUxjgXaufdO\\_vsAZE0N6XQdRJbyxooBvPXyKks45f0rfl19Lz0TwEQje9oTu13jjbcWX4VaBaCvYPDDJfQF-Pr-t\\_cvkg&utm\\_content=79341496&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/cityandguilds-site/documents/news/2023/maths-and-english-research-report-pdf.ashx?la=en&hash=5902283643C63105D072DA81827B8EC6B22D43AF&utm_campaign=Policy&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=79341496&_hsenc=p2ANqztz-8XCkab0V6RB1cajShnqmcUxjgXaufdO_vsAZE0N6XQdRJbyxooBvPXyKks45f0rfl19Lz0TwEQje9oTu13jjbcWX4VaBaCvYPDDJfQF-Pr-t_cvkg&utm_content=79341496&utm_source=hs_email).

### **GOV.UK - Provisional November 2023 exam entries: GCSE English language and mathematics.**

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

These figures show the number of entries for GCSE English language and mathematics for exams sat in November 2023. According to DfE data, entries for GCSE English language increased by 29% from 46,900 in November 2022 to 60,365 in November 2023 (November entries are normally for resits).

Ofqual (2023). *Provisional November 2023 exam entries: GCSE English language and mathematics*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-november-2023-exam-entries-gcse-english-language-and-mathematics/provisional-november-2023-exam-entries-gcse-english-language-and-mathematics#november-gcse-entries-by-subject>.

### **FFT Education Datalab - GCSE Results 2023: The Main Trends in Grades and Entries.**

FFT Education Datalab's analysis of 2023 GCSE results found that results are almost at pre-pandemic level. However, pupils who do not achieve at least a grade 4 in GCSE English and maths are currently required to carry on studying them post-16. 72% of pupils achieved grades 9-4 in maths, meaning that around 28% of pupils did not.

FFT Education Datalab (2023). *GCSE results 2023: The main trends in grades and entries*. [online] FFT Education Datalab. Available at:

<https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/08/gcse-results-2023-the-main-trends-in-grades-and-entries/#:~:text=Grades%20in%20English%20and%20maths>.

### **Association of Schools and College Leaders - The Forgotten Third.**

The ASCL launched an independent Commission inquiry in October 2018 to look into how to improve the prospects of what they have called the 'forgotten third'. These are the students who do not achieve a grade 4 standard pass in GCSE English and maths, and this makes up approximately one-third of 16-year-olds.

Association of Schools and College Leaders (2019). *The Forgotten Third - Final report of the Commission of Inquiry*. [online] Available at:

[https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Campaigns/The-Forgotten-Third\\_full-report.pdf](https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Campaigns/The-Forgotten-Third_full-report.pdf).

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Appendix iv: Beyond Education

### **SOM - Understanding Recent Trends in Ill Health-Driven Fallout From the UK Job Market.**

SOM has released the first in-depth study into the impact of ill-health on the UK's working population. This report highlights the growing mental health crisis that we too have seen in our [Youth Voice Census](#) findings. There are 8.8m people of working age who are inactive; this accounts for 1 in 5 working age people, of which more than 2.5m are economically inactive due to long-term sickness.

Supporting Occupational Health and Wellbeing Professionals (SOM) (2023).

*Understanding Recent Trends in Ill health-driven Fallout from the UK Job Market the Wider Context Causes of Ill health-driven Fallout.* [online] Available at:

[https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/SOM\\_Deep\\_Dive\\_Research-compressed.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/SOM_Deep_Dive_Research-compressed.pdf).

### **EDSK - Finding a NEET solution: How to prevent young people from falling out of our education system.**

There are many reasons why a young person may become detached from education, training and employment. From a policymaking perspective, it is more important to focus on factors that are predictive of future NEET status rather than correlating with it. This report highlights how vocational courses and qualifications have repeatedly shown to have a positive impact on the attainment and self-esteem of those most likely to be NEET. Favouritism from government towards academic subjects is likely to lead to worse outcomes for young people who may already be at risk of becoming NEET.

EDSK (2022). *Finding A NEET Solution: How to prevent young people from falling out of our education system.* [online] Available at:

<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EDSK-Finding-a-NEET-solution.pdf>.



## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

### **The University of York - Estimating the life-time cost of NEET- 16-18-year-olds not in Education, Employment, or Training.**

This research aimed to provide estimates of the life-time costs of young people not in any form of education, employment, or training (NEET) between 16 and 18 years of age. This report confirms the most conservative estimate of the cost to public finance of young people being NEET between the ages of 16 and 18 is nearly £12 billion (In 2010). This is largely due to benefit payments and tax losses as people are unemployed. An ever larger amount of £21 billion is estimated to be 'resource cost', reflecting the lost productivity to the economy and welfare to individuals and families.

The University of York (2010). *Estimating the life-time Cost of NEET: 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training Research Undertaken for the Audit Commission* . [online] Available at:  
<https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/NEET.pdf>.

### **Adolescent Disability, Post-16 Destinations, and Early Socioeconomic Attainment: Initial Evidence from Next Steps.**

This paper addresses the lack of evidence surrounding school-to-work transitions for disabled young people in England. This analysis examined the whole range of post-16 destinations and explored variation between different disability categories wherever possible. This report also examined whether disability differentials in post-16 destinations and economic activity in early adulthood vary by social class, ethnicity, and gender, highlighting opportunities for intersectional analyses.

Velthuis, S. and Chatzitheochari, S. (2021). Adolescent Disability, Post-16 Destinations, and Early Socioeconomic Attainment: Initial Evidence from Next Steps.  
doi:<https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/vwcmt>.

### **#ProtectStudentChoice - Desperate measures: data and the reform of Level 3 qualifications.**

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

This report scrutinises the data used by the Government to justify the reform of Level 3 qualifications. It contrasts how ministers describe the performance of students who take T Levels. The report also examines how realistic the Government's plans are for T Level growth and the implications of its plan to scrap the majority of BTECs. An analysis done by the Protect Student Choice Campaign indicates that at least 155,000 young people (13% of all sixth-form students in England) could be left without a suitable study programme from 2026.

#ProtectStudentChoice (2023). Desperate measures: Data and the Reform of Level 3 Qualifications. [online] doi:<https://doi.org/10.21428/74d826b1.b1ae638e>.

### **NHS Employers : Letter to the education secretary.**

NHS Employers, which is part of the NHS Confederation, on behalf of healthcare leaders, have penned a letter to the education secretary, warning that abandoning BTEC qualifications in health and social care will put an important health staffing pipeline at risk. This pipeline allows for thousands of potential nursing and midwifery recruits to join degree courses each year.

NHS Employers (2022). *Letter to the Secretary of State for Education: Pause the Policy to Scrap Health and Social Care BTEC*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhsconfed.org/system/files/2022-07/20220711%20-%20NHS%20Confederation%20letter%20to%20Secretary%20of%20State%20for%20Education.pdf>.

### **City & Guilds - Levying up: Delivering Sustainable Skills**

Only 4% of employers are spending their full Apprenticeship Levy funding. Developing worker skills must form part of businesses' long-term plans or they risk missing out on opportunities and thus, struggling with their goals.

This report highlights the importance of employer engagement with the Apprenticeship Levy, and furthermore, how important it is to not reduce the number of Level 2 apprenticeships, as doing so will exclude a number of young people from less advantaged backgrounds from workplace training and opportunities to upskill.

## Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

City & Guilds (2023a). *Levying Up: Delivering Sustainable Skills*. [online]

Cityandguilds.com. Available at:

<https://www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/cityandguilds-site/documents/news/2022/aprenticeship-research-report-pdf.ashx?la=en&hash=10866BF9B962D4CC63384B7CD C1D83D95E0D8559>.

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## The Commissioners

Laura-Jane Rawlings MBE - Chair of Commission and CEO, Youth Employment UK  
Councillor Robert Alden, Birmingham City Council  
Nick Bailey, research fellow in responsible leadership, Birmingham Business School  
Rob Brooks, Senior Programme Manager - NHS apprenticeships, NHS Education  
Laura Davis, CEO, BASE-UK  
James Kewin, Deputy CEO, Sixth Form Colleges Association  
Councillor Louise McKinlay, Essex County Council  
Lauren Mistry, Deputy CEO, Youth Employment UK  
Olly Newton, Director, Edge Foundation  
Corrienne Peasgood OBE, President, Association of Colleges  
Paul Warner, Director of Strategy and Business Development, Association of Education and Learning Providers

## Contributors

Fiona Aldridge, Head of Insight & Intelligence, WMCA  
Clare Boden-Hatton, Director of Employment and Skills, WMCA  
Patrick Craven, Director of Policy, City & Guilds  
Claire Cookson, CEO, DFN Foundation  
David Gallagher, CEO, NCFE  
Sorah Gluck, Edge Foundation  
Jane Hadfield, National Lead for Talent and Care, NHS England  
Nicola Hall, Director of Education, Careers & Enterprise Company  
Nikki Hay, Chair, Association of Education and Learning Providers  
Jonathan Hopkins, Director, Citadel Policy & Communications Ltd  
Fraser Ingham, Sales Director, VTCT Group  
Bushra Jamil, Policy Adviser, Local Government Association  
Simon Parkinson, CEO, WEA  
Eddie Playfair, Association of Colleges  
Eleanor Regan, Researcher, EDSK  
Stewart Segal, Chair, Youth Employment UK  
Jillian Simpson, Head of Curriculum, WEA  
Louise Timperley, Apprenticeship Manager, Co-op Group  
Carl Ward, CEO, Federation Education Development  
Robin Webber-Jones, Principal Northamptonshire, Bedford College Group  
Peter Wilson, Senior Researcher, Policy Connect  
John Yarham, Deputy CEO, Careers & Enterprise Company

# Commission on L2 & L3 Pathways for Young People

## Sponsors

The Commission is grateful to the support of City & Guilds, The Edge Foundation and NHS Education England for their support of The Commission.



## With thanks to

**Commission Secretariat**, Nansi Ellis

**Supported by** Jonathan Hopkins