



Lord Baker of Dorking
Lord Blunkett of Brightside and Hillsborough
Baroness Garden of Frognal
Lord Johnson of Marylebone
Lord Watson of Invergowrie
Lord Willetts
House of Lords
SW1A 0PW

Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
SW1P 3BT
Sent by email to: Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk

25th January 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Defunding of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications

We are writing to express our deep concerns about your Department's plan to remove funding for most applied general qualifications, and to register our disappointment that commitments made to Peers about this policy do not appear to have been met.

In April 2022, we were assured that only a "*small proportion of the total Level 3 BTEC and other applied general style qualification offer – significantly less than half*" would be removed through the government's qualification reform process.

This welcome commitment was made in a letter sent to Peers on 7th April 2022 by the then Secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi and was repeated at the Despatch Box by your colleague Baroness Barran on the same day (and earlier during a series of constructive, behind the scenes conversations). We were reassured to hear that only a small proportion of applied general qualifications would be removed, and in return were happy to lend our support to the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.

However, it now appears that many more than a small proportion of these qualifications will be defunded. Your Department's guide to the qualification approval process published on 10th January 2023 tells us that ministers have made a "*conscious choice*" not to fund academic qualifications in certain subjects from 2025. The guide contains a list of subjects that are acceptable to ministers.

When the Protect Student Choice campaign mapped this list against the 134 applied general qualifications that are currently available to young people, it found that just 59 are eligible to begin the qualification approval process. That means 75 will not be funded from 2025 as they have been deemed ineligible for approval.

House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW



When the campaign modelled the impact of this decision on the sixth form college sector, it found that 62% of applied general students are currently enrolled on qualifications that will be scrapped before the approval process even begins. That figure is certain to rise even higher by the time the process concludes.

These qualifications are popular with students, respected by employers and valued by universities. Removing them will have a disastrous impact on social mobility, economic growth and our public services. For example, it is difficult to think of a worse time to scrap the Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care. Given their importance to the healthcare workforce, it would be very damaging to the NHS to remove funding for these qualifications.

Extended Diplomas in Applied Science, Information Technology, and Business will also be scrapped. These qualifications play a vital role in developing the skilled workforce of the future and provide a well-established pathway to higher education. Smaller applied general qualifications in subjects such as Applied Law play a similar role when studied alongside 2 A levels.

There is no need to remove these qualifications in order to “*streamline the qualifications landscape*”. Of the 5,200 qualifications in scope of your Department’s review, just 134 are Level 3 applied general qualifications. These qualifications were reformed more recently than A levels and are smaller in number. While some are available in similar subjects to A levels or T levels, they are a different type of qualification that provide a different type of educational experience.

We understand that you are not planning to introduce a binary system of A levels and T levels, and we welcome that. But we also understand that far more than a small proportion of applied general qualifications will be removed following your reforms. This does not align with the assurances that were made to us in April 2022, but more importantly, this does not align with the future needs of students, employers, the economy and our public services.

We urge you to withdraw the 134 applied general qualifications from the scope of your review. Retaining these recently reformed and approved qualifications would enable your Department to focus on areas where there are genuine concerns about duplication or quality. In doing so you would retain a vital pathway to higher education and employment for tens of thousands of young people and provide schools, colleges and universities with the much-needed certainty they require to plan for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Baker of Dorking

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Frognal**

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