



House of Commons
Education Committee

The future of post-16 qualifications

Third Report of Session 2022–23

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to the report*

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Summary

Early experiences of T Levels

1. The Government has introduced significant and ambitious post-16 education reforms, aimed at streamlining and improving qualifications at level 3 and below. At the centrepiece of its reforms is the new T Level qualification, which creates a prestigious technical route for post-16 learners to study towards an occupational specialism and acquire the skills needed by employers and the economy.
2. T Levels are, rightly, rigorous and challenging qualifications. However, we do not believe there is yet the right balance between rigour and accessibility. Early evidence indicates that colleges and schools are setting high entry requirements for T Levels, and around one-fifth of the first T Level cohort are estimated to have dropped out. We heard that T Levels are likely to be less accessible, and less manageable for some groups, including lower attaining students, and students with special educational needs and disabilities. As a result, this qualification could be restricted to a small pool of academically gifted students, who have a specific employment goal in mind by age 16. This is a concern, particularly for a programme that has attracted over £1 billion in public funding. We heard that some universities are requiring an A level alongside a T Level for entry onto certain courses, but there is a lack of consistency in Department guidance as to whether a T Level could be feasibly studied alongside an A level.
3. The T Level Transition Programme is intended to offer a high-quality preparatory route for students who require this additional year of support and preparation. However, Transition Programme progression rates are exceptionally low, with only 14% of the first cohort successfully moving to a T Level, and just under half (49%) progressing to a level 3 qualification.
4. The success of the wider T Level rollout will rest on the availability of high-quality placements, as every student must complete an industry placement that lasts a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days). We heard that up to 250,000 placements could be needed once T Levels are fully rolled out. Although T Levels were developed with the input of 250 leading employers, 2021 Department research found that almost two-thirds (63%) of employers were not interested in offering a T Level placement, and employer interest in providing placements appears to have declined. 30% of employers expressed interest in providing a placement in 2021, compared to 36% in 2019.
5. Regional disparities in economic activity present an obstacle to equitable access to placements. T Levels were described to us as a “city-centric initiative”, and as “the urban qualification”. There is a risk that young people living in or near urban areas, with access to a range of different sectors and industries, will be the main beneficiaries of T Levels, while those from rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas will have fewer placement opportunities.

The future of Applied General Qualifications

6. A further key strand of the Department’s reforms is to consolidate and streamline post-16 qualifications. As a result of these reforms, it is likely that a substantial number

of Applied General Qualifications (AGQs), including those deemed by the Department to ‘overlap’ with T levels, will no longer be funded. Instead, T Levels are intended to become one of the main programmes of choice for students at post-16, alongside A levels and apprenticeships. AGQs, which combine practical skills with academic learning, allow students to develop skills and knowledge in a vocational area. These important qualifications are taken by substantial numbers of learners, and serve a distinct and different purpose to T Levels. In 2021, 132,635 students aged 16–18 were taking an AGQ, and a further 141,196 were taking an AGQ alongside an A or AS level.

7. Given the concerns we have heard about accessibility, potential T Level placement shortfall, and unequal regional access to placements, post-16 students may be at risk of having neither a T Level option, nor an AGQ option in future. The ability of businesses to offer sufficient, high-quality industry placements, and a clear track record of T Level success, should be prerequisites to scrapping AGQs. There are also concerns that T Levels will not fully replace the withdrawn AGQ offer, which may result in skills gaps in certain key industries. For example, a January 2023 letter from a cross-party group of Peers to the Secretary of State for Education, warned that “it is difficult to think of a worse time to scrap the Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care”.

8. While we welcome the Department’s ambition to simplify and improve the post-16 landscape, the speed and scope of the Department’s reforms risk constricting student choice, and narrowing opportunities for young people to progress. Although we heard much praise for T Levels, and strong sector will for them to succeed, the vast majority of written and oral evidence provided to this inquiry expressed concern about the impacts of withdrawing funding for AGQs. Indeed, it is rare for an inquiry to receive such a significant degree of consensus on a particular issue. We note that 86% of those responding to the Department’s consultation disagreed with its proposal to remove funding for qualifications that overlap with T Levels. A concern for further education colleges and sixth forms whose funding has been particularly squeezed in recent years with larger cuts than other areas of education after 2010. The Government should conduct a review of the sufficiency of further education funding.

9. The Department’s timeline for removing funding from AGQs does not allow sufficient time for the evaluation of T Levels. As a result, the Department is basing major reforms on untried and untested qualifications which are not yet established, and for which there is as yet no robust evidence. There is currently no data showing that T Levels are accessible, scalable nationally, and are more effective than the qualifications they replace at promoting social mobility. The Department must place a moratorium on defunding AGQs. Tried and tested AGQs should only be withdrawn as and when there is a robust evidence base proving that T Levels are demonstrably more effective in preparing students for progression, meeting industry needs and promoting social mobility.

Apprenticeships

10. As part of our inquiry, we took evidence on post-16 apprenticeships. Whilst there has been some welcome growth in higher level apprenticeships, there has been a long-term decline in apprenticeship starts among 16–18 year olds and at level 2. The number of apprenticeship starts among under-19s has declined by 41% between

2015/16 and 2021/22. The number of starts on intermediate (level 2, GCSE equivalent) apprenticeships, has fallen by 69% in the same period. All too often it is older, more highly qualified workers who are prioritised for apprenticeships at the expense of young people trying to get their foot on the first rung of the career ladder. The Department must set out how it will address the long-term decline in apprenticeship starts among young people, and ensure apprenticeships are the gold-standard ‘earn and learn’ option for school and college leavers.

Maths to 18

11. In January 2023, the Government set out plans to make studying a maths qualification compulsory up to age 18. There is a strong case for improving young people’s mathematical and problem-solving skills. England is an international outlier in not requiring the study of maths up to 18. There is rising demand from employers for mathematical and quantitative skills at all levels of the labour market, but consistent undersupply of these skills. Jobs are likely to become ever more data-driven, meaning that those with poor mathematical skills are at risk of being left behind. A level maths will evidently not be appropriate for all students, but all young people should be leaving compulsory education equipped with a portfolio of numeracy, data analysis, financial literacy and statistical reasoning skills that they need for the modern world.

12. There are a number of challenges to be addressed prior to the delivery of these reforms. These include tackling recruitment and retention of specialist maths teachers, and building a stronger foundation of numeracy and mathematical skills and knowledge at GCSE and below. Addressing these issues is a pre-requisite to ensuring the success of compulsory study of maths up to 18, and the Department must work with the sector to clearly set out how it will do so.

International Baccalaureate Careers Programme

13. We also considered the merits of a baccalaureate model at post-16 as part of our inquiry, taking evidence on the benefits of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, which offers both depth and breadth. We noted that the International Baccalaureate Careers Programme (IBCP) is a broad, flexible post-16 qualification that enables students to acquire a valuable blend of academic, vocational and employability skills. A destinations survey for the 2019 IBCP cohort showed that 56% of students had progressed to higher education, 19% to employment and 11% to an apprenticeship. We heard that the IBCP has been particularly successful in Kent, where it has been adopted by 24 schools to support local aspirations of economic regeneration and employability. Despite these successes, the Department does not plan to continue funding the IBCP. The Department must revisit its decision to withdraw funding for the IBCP. It should continue to fund this rigorous and accessible qualification, or provide evidence that any replacement will generate improved outcomes.

1 Our inquiry

14. We launched our inquiry into the future of post-16 qualifications in November 2021. We received 121 written submissions, and held seven oral evidence sessions, taking evidence from a wide range of witnesses including school and college leaders, sector associations, and representatives from business. In our final oral evidence session, we took evidence from the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, under whose Chairmanship the Select Committee had started the inquiry. The Select Committee Engagement Team supported this inquiry by gathering evidence on the experiences of 276 T Level students across 19 providers. We are grateful for their contributions, and their views have helped inform our thinking.¹ We would also like to extend our thanks to Tonbridge Grammar School, which we visited to learn more about the benefits of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme model at post-16.

1 Select Committee Engagement Team ([FPQ0118](#))

2 The post-16 landscape

Overview

15. Up to age 16, pupils in England study a relatively broad curriculum, with students taking an average of eight GCSE subjects at the end of Key Stage 4 (years 10 and 11).² 39% of Key Stage 4 pupils entered for the Ebacc—a suite of GCSE subjects covering English literature and language, maths, sciences, humanities, and a foreign language.³ From age 16, education becomes more specialised, with students able to choose from a range of academic, technical, and vocational options.

16. 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. The breakdown of what level 3 qualifications were studied is shown below.⁴

Table 1: 16–18 participation in education and training at level 3, 2021

Level 3 Qualification	Total	Percentage
A/AS levels	486,964	50%
A/AS levels also doing Applied General	141,196	15%
T levels	6,235	1%
Tech level	55,314	6%
Applied General	132,635	14%
Other level 3	143,955	15%

The Department's reforms

17. The Department's written evidence notes it has been “clear for a number of years that the quality of vocational education has not always matched the quality of A levels”.⁵ The 2011 *Wolf Review* identified an estimated 350,000 16–19 year olds who received little to no benefit from post-16 education. Five years on, the 2016 Independent Panel on Technical Education (the *Sainsbury Review*) concluded there were “serious problems with the existing system”, arguing that it is overcomplex, and fails to provide the skills most needed for the 21st century.⁶

18. To address these issues, the Department has embarked on a series of significant and ambitious reforms aimed at streamlining and improving the quality of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below. These include redesigning occupational standards, introducing T Levels—a new level 3 technical qualification—and reviewing and consolidating existing level 3 qualifications. Between 2015–2018, a series of A level reforms were introduced,

2 Ofqual, [Guidance: Infographics for GCSE results](#), August 2022

3 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2020/21: Key stage 4 performance](#), November 2021

4 Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18](#), June 2022

5 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

6 Department for Education, [Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#), March 2011; Independent Panel on Technical Education, [Report of the Panel](#), April 2016

including a move to linear exams, reducing coursework in some subjects, and decoupling AS qualifications from A levels. The Department has made it clear that it currently has no further plans for wholesale reform of A level qualifications.⁷

Skills gaps and challenges

19. The Department’s reforms to post-16 education are intended to help build a world-class technical route, which delivers the skills needed by the labour market. There are significant skills challenges to overcome. Indeed, the Gatsby Foundation warned that post-16 education “fails the UK economy by failing to tackle long-term skills gaps and our low level of productivity growth”.⁸ Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair of QA and Be the Business, told us around half of young people were not ready for work, which he described as having “very serious consequences” for the nation’s competitiveness and productivity.⁹ Skill-shortage vacancies have increased by eight per cent compared with 2015. Over four-fifths (84%) of skill-shortage vacancies were at least partially caused by a lack of technical or practical skills; two-thirds (66%) were at least partially caused by a lack of people and personal skills; and around one-third (30%) involved a lack of digital skills.¹⁰

20. We heard concerns about low skill levels among young people. Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, highlighted that young people entering the UK workforce are no longer better skilled than their counterparts leaving for retirement.¹¹ The Learning and Work Institute told us that the proportion of young people gaining a level 3 qualification is lower in England than in other comparable countries such as Denmark, Netherlands and Australia.¹² In 2021, 62% of young people in England had gained a level 3 qualification by age 19.¹³ While this is the highest proportion on record, the CBI warned that with almost 40% of young people not qualified to this level, the nation’s ability to tackle key skills shortages is hindered.¹⁴ The Learning & Work Institute has called for “a higher ambition” for 70% of young people to be qualified to level 3 by 2030.¹⁵

Future skills needed for the changing world of work

21. There is not yet enough understanding of what skills might be needed for future jobs, particularly in light of labour market changes arising from increasing automation of jobs,¹⁶ and the potential for over 1.18 million new green jobs by 2050.¹⁷ Lord Blunkett told us that the world of work is changing so rapidly “that not to think about what we will need in 20 years’ time and the different approach that will be required would be ridiculous.”¹⁸ Our skills system will need to address key global challenges, including reaching net zero targets, and biodiversity net gain.

7 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

8 Gatsby Charitable Foundation ([FPQ0076](#))

9 [Q42](#)

10 Department for Education, [Employer skills survey 2019](#), October 2020

11 [Q4](#)

12 Learning and Work Institute ([FPQ0107](#))

13 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2020/21: Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25](#), April 2022

14 Institute of Directors ([FPQ0087](#)); Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#)); CBI ([FPQ0109](#))

15 Learning and Work Institute ([FPQ0107](#))

16 National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#)); Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))

17 Local Government Association, [Local green jobs – accelerating a sustainable economic recovery](#), June 2020

18 [Q42](#)

22. It is welcome that the Department has responded to these gaps in understanding by establishing the unit for future skills (UFS). As the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education explained, the UFS is an analytical and research unit which “looks at skills deficits and where there are holes [...] that will help us a lot.”¹⁹ A recent report produced by the UFS identified digital skills and STEM as being “critical to the future of most jobs”, further concluding that education will need to impart skills such as communication, networking, and problem-solving.²⁰ This mirrors the strong consensus in evidence provided to our inquiry which highlighted that employability skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, creativity, and communication will become increasingly important. However, these skills are often currently lacking among young people.²¹

23. In 2021, 62% of young people in England had gained a level 3 qualification by age 19, the highest proportion on record. However, with almost 40% of young people not qualified to this level, the nation’s ability to tackle skills shortages and address productivity challenges is impeded.

24. The Department must set an ambitious target for at least three-quarters of young people to be qualified to level 3 by 2030. Within this target there should be a concentrated effort to ensure that skills for the future economy and the skillsets required to meet the net zero and nature gain challenges are prioritised.

19 [Q257](#)

20 Department for Education, Labour market and skills demand horizon scanning and future scenarios, May 2022

21 Chartered Management Institute ([FPQ0034](#)); Institute of Directors ([FPQ0087](#)); British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#)); [Q4](#) [Andreas Schleicher]; [Q42](#) [Sir Charlie Mayfield]; [Q80](#) [Jane Gratten]

3 T Levels

About T Levels

25. T Levels are a new, high-quality technical qualification, and have been developed alongside 250 leading employers. A T Level is a 2-year post-16 course, broadly equivalent in size to 3 A Levels. Once fully rolled out, T Levels will be available in over 20 courses, covering 11 vocational areas, including agriculture, business and management, craft and design, and legal services. The Department describes T Levels as “world-class programmes” and “the centrepiece” of its level 3 reforms, and we heard that they offer a prestigious technical alternative to A levels.²²

26. A response to a written Parliamentary question shows that between financial years 2017/18 and 2022/23, £918.5 million is due to be spent on T Levels.²³ A further £150 million of capital funding has since been announced, taking T Level expenditure to over one billion pounds.²⁴ In February 2023, the Department announced that a £12 million fund would be available to support employers offering placements in 2023/24, while all T Level providers will receive a one-off grant of up to £10,000 for additional careers guidance for students.²⁵

27. The first three T Level courses launched in 2020, with 43 providers delivering these courses to a cohort of 1,300 students.²⁶ Of this first cohort, 1,029 students were awarded a T Level result in 2022. 92% achieved at least a Pass in their overall grade, and 94% completed their industry placement.²⁷ As at 2022, there were 16 T Levels on offer, delivered by 164 providers, with around 10,200 students enrolled.²⁸ In March 2023, the Department announced the delivery of four T Levels would be deferred due to concerns about quality.²⁹

28. Dr Morrison Coulthard, Research Director at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), told us that while there were issues to be resolved, “generally they are going very well [...] providers are highly engaged, students comment about high levels of satisfaction”.³⁰ We heard from a number of early adopters of T Levels who praised the new qualification. Cirencester College explained it had found T Levels “to be excellent qualifications in terms of experience for students and liberating for teachers. The ability to tweak to address local economic issues is fantastic [...] Far superior to BTECs/Applied Generals.”³¹ Oldham College agreed that “based on our early experience of teaching T Levels, it is our view that the new qualification is an improvement, both in terms of academic content and technical learning.”³² Yiannis Koursis, Principal and Chief Executive of Barnsley College, outlined that the T Level qualification “has rigour. It is for a different route [to A levels] into a position of high-level skills, high technical qualifications

22 Department for Education (FPQ0105)

23 UK Parliament, [T Levels: Expenditure](#) (UIN 59062), October 2022

24 Department for Education, [Guide to the T Level Capital Fund \(TLCF\) Wave 5](#), November 2022

25 Department for Education, [Guidance: Employer Support Fund](#), February 2023

26 Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2022 to 2023](#), March 2023

27 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2021/22: Provisional T Level results](#), August 2022

28 Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2022 to 2023](#), March 2023

29 Department for Education, [T Levels Update: Statement by the Secretary of State for Education](#), March 2023

30 [Q128](#)

31 Cirencester College (FPQ0001)

32 Oldham College (FPQ0104)

or going to higher education.”³³ We remain strongly concerned about the relatively small proportion of employers willing to offer T Level placements, and discuss this in detail in Chapter 3.

T Level progression outcomes

29. So far, little data is available on progression outcomes for T Level students, as the first cohort to complete the qualification did so at the end of the 2021/22 academic year. Departmental statistics for the education, employment and training destinations of the first cohort are not expected to be published until autumn 2024.³⁴ As a result, there is not yet evidence to demonstrate how effective T Levels are at supporting student progression into destinations such as skilled employment, apprenticeships, and higher education.³⁵

Higher Education

30. Initially, T Levels were intended to have a primary outcome of progression onto skilled employment; however, a decision was made to award them UCAS points equivalent to 3 A levels, ensuring they could also provide a pathway to higher education.³⁶ While the Department describes T Levels as “a springboard to higher education”,³⁷ we heard that “universities are now coming on board; they are just being a bit slow about it”.³⁸ Some uncertainty remains over the extent to which T Levels will be recognised by higher education providers for entry onto degree courses.³⁹

31. It is encouraging that as at January 2023, 134 higher education providers had confirmed T Levels will be suitable for entry onto a minimum of one course.⁴⁰ However, due to the specialised nature of their qualification, T Level students who choose to apply to university may only be eligible for a very limited range of courses that are closely related to the T Level subject.⁴¹ We heard that some universities are also setting additional entry requirements—for example requiring a maths A Level alongside a T Level for entry onto an engineering degree.⁴² Limitations on higher education eligibility and options may not be obvious for T Level learners or parents until too late, and clear and early information, advice and guidance will be crucial.

33 [Q192](#)

34 House of Commons Library, [Technical education in England: T Levels](#), November 2022

35 AELP ([FPQ0008](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); UCU ([FPQ0026](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); Energy & Utility Skills ([FPQ0036](#)); NCFE ([FPQ0050](#)); NFER ([FPQ0068](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#))

36 UCAS, [UCAS Tariff Points allocated to T Levels](#), August 2019

37 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

38 [Q151](#) [Kirsti Lord]

39 Linking London ([FPQ0007](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); UCU ([FPQ0026](#)); NFER ([FPQ0068](#)); The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#)); [Q141](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

40 Department for Education, [Guidance: Providers that have confirmed T Levels suitable for entry on one course](#), January 2023

41 Universities UK ([FPQ0027](#))

42 British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#))

32. The Department’s guidance on whether it is feasible to study an A Level alongside a T Level appears to be inconsistent. On the one hand, the Department has stated that the size of a T Level programme (around 1,800 hours over two years) precludes it from being part of a mixed study programme.⁴³ However, its guidance relating to large programme funding suggests that A or AS levels could be taken alongside a T Level programme.⁴⁴

33. 490 of the first T Level cohort had applied to higher education by June 2022, of whom 370 gained a place.⁴⁵ By August, following the Clearing process, the number of applications from the first cohort had risen to 510, of which 410 were successful.⁴⁶ A total of 40 per cent of the 1,029 students awarded T Level results in 2022 had therefore gained a place in higher education, although there is not yet data on how many chose to take up their place.

34. Some submissions thought that these dual progression options onto skilled employment and higher education added complexity. City and Guilds described it as “very challenging to articulate to our stakeholders [...] for them to understand and accept the T Level as entry to skilled work and for higher education institutions to accept T Levels as a direct entry onto an undergraduate programme.”⁴⁷ Tom Bewick, CEO of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, told us that

The challenge around T Levels is just how, in a short space of time, the narrative has changed [...] It does not have to be a binary choice—either/or—but the lack of any clear vision statement with metrics attached, [...] is a concern for a programme that is attracting, quite rightly, tens of millions of pounds of public money.⁴⁸

Higher Technical Qualifications and Apprenticeships

35. Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are qualifications at level 4 and 5. HTQs are currently being offered across 30 digital options, and by 2025 they will be available across a wide range of sectors.⁴⁹ Yiannis Koursis told us that he did not think an undergraduate degree was the right route for a T Level student, and a T Level should instead lead to an HTQ. However, as he explained, “the challenge is that the development of HTQs has lagged behind the development of T Levels so the route is not fully defined as yet.”⁵⁰

36. T Levels are based on the same occupational standards as apprenticeships and are approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). It is welcome that the Department has introduced an ‘accelerated’ apprenticeship option at level 3, where the apprenticeship duration is reduced by at least 3 months in recognition of the learner’s prior knowledge or skills.⁵¹ This will likely help support progression from a T Level onto an apprenticeship.

43 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: impact assessment](#), July 2022

44 Department for Education, [Guidance: 16 to 19 funding: large programme uplift](#), January 2023

45 Department for Education, [University admissions and A Level, T Level and VTQ results](#), August 2022

46 UCAS, [First exam year since pandemic sees record numbers entering higher education](#), September 2022

47 City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#))

48 [Q151](#)

49 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

50 [Q202](#)

51 Department for Education, [Guidance: How can apprenticeships be delivered for your business?](#), June 2022

37. However, we heard that there is no alignment between a T Level and a level 4 apprenticeship. T Level students may be unable to progress directly onto a level 4 apprenticeship, as a T Level course would be unlikely to provide the learner with the level of on-the-job training, knowledge and occupational competency required for entry onto a level 4 apprenticeship.⁵² The Association of Employers and Learning Providers warned that T Levels only offer the skills required to start work, not those required to be occupationally competent, which is what an apprenticeship requires. As a result, “the learning gained from completing a T Level falls short of the starting point for a level 4 apprenticeship”.⁵³ UK Hospitality similarly stated that moving from a T Level onto a level 4 apprenticeship “would not be possible” without significant prior industry experience.⁵⁴ This is a concern, particularly given that the Department aims for T Level students to be “confident that the qualifications they take will get them where they want to go, whether to further study or into skilled employment.”⁵⁵

38. **We strongly welcome the aspiration for T Levels to be a rigorous and ambitious new qualification which will level up our technical education system. T Levels have been developed alongside 250 employers and offer a prestigious, high-quality route for students to gain the skills needed by employers and the economy.**

39. **The Department’s narrative around T Levels has shifted from early emphasis on skilled employment as the qualification’s primary outcome. We have heard that this has added complexity for stakeholders. However, we fully support the Department’s decision to award T Levels UCAS points, which will enable students to keep their progression options open.**

40. **There remains some uncertainty around progression options for T Level students. For example, we heard that T Level students are unlikely to have acquired the occupational competency and experience needed to begin a level 4 apprenticeship. While Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) will offer an important progression route for T Level students, their development has lagged behind T Levels, and will not be fully rolled out until 2025. It is encouraging that 134 higher education providers have indicated T Levels will be suitable for entry onto a minimum of one course. However, T Level students may find they are eligible for a very limited range of higher education courses due to the specialised nature of their qualification. This may not be obvious to the student until it is too late.**

41. ***We have heard that some universities are requiring an A level alongside a T Level for entry onto degree programmes. Department guidance on whether an A level can feasibly be studied alongside a T Level appears inconsistent, and the Department must clearly set out its position on this. The Department must work with universities to ensure they fully appreciate the value of, and commitment required by T Levels and do not therefore specify unreasonable entry requirements such as specific A levels on top of a T level course.***

52 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#)); NOCN ([FPQ0009](#)); City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#)); West Suffolk College, Suffolk One, Abbeygate Sixth Form ([FPQ0102](#))

53 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#))

54 UK Hospitality ([FPQ0117](#))

55 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

42. *The Department must work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to clearly map and publish progression opportunities for T Level students. This will help reduce uncertainty among students, parents and employers, and will demonstrate how T Levels can provide a springboard to further study, training and work.*

43. *The Department must work with the sector to align T Levels with level 4 apprenticeships, for example, developing a bridging course that enables T Level learners to move onto a level 4 apprenticeship.*

44. *The Department must set out how it will incentivise progression from T Levels onto Higher Technical Qualifications, particularly given the key strategic role qualifications at level 4 and 5 play in meeting the nation's skills needs.*

45. *The Department must publish data on the education, apprenticeship, and employment destinations for the first cohort of T Level students at the earliest opportunity. While Department destination measures are usually published two years following the completion of 16–18 study, we recommend the Department fast-track this data, providing an interim picture ahead of the expected official publication in 2024.*

Accessibility of T Levels

46. The Department told us that “T Levels are challenging qualifications, and we are unapologetic about this”.⁵⁶ There was widespread consensus that T Levels will be best suited to students with a strong academic background, who can cope with the demands of a large qualification, and who have a clear employment goal in mind by age 16.⁵⁷

47. A 2021 Department survey of T Level students found that, while the workload was manageable for most, it was less manageable for learners with lower prior academic attainment, those who were eligible for Free School Meals, and those with special educational needs.⁵⁸

48. Dr Morrison Coulthard described T Levels as “not so much level 3 but level 3.5, and that can be seen as particularly off-putting for some students that may be not academically flying”.⁵⁹ We heard that entry requirements are high, with some providers setting requirements that are at least as high as for an A Level program.⁶⁰ One submission described T Levels as “restricted to only those who are academically gifted.”⁶¹ The National Foundation for Education Research further noted that the evidence so far suggests most providers are requiring GCSE English and maths passes at least at grade 4 for entry onto the T Level.⁶² As Capital City College Group explained

We want T Levels to be a game-changer, particularly for less advantaged young people [...] However, as they currently stand, T Levels are not accessible for all students and there appears to be no alternative for these

56 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

57 Linking London ([FPQ0007](#)); Weston College of Further and Higher Education ([FPQ0016](#)); NFER ([FPQ0068](#)); The Joint Council for Qualifications ([FPQ0074](#)); [Q217](#) [Yiannis Kouris]

58 Department for Education, [Technical education learner survey](#), May 2022

59 [Q148](#)

60 Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#)); Capital City College Group ([FPQ0078](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#))

61 St Edmunds Society ([FPQ0005](#))

62 National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#))

young people. We have concerns about the entry requirements for T Levels and the impact of this on disadvantaged students—creating in effect a ‘glass ceiling’ and blocking progression for many⁶³

Accessibility for students with SEND

49. We heard that students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may face particular challenges in accessing and completing T Levels.⁶⁴ Ruth Perry, Senior Policy Manager at Natspec and representative of the Special Educational Consortium, told us that its members perceived T Levels as “too large and too inflexible, with too little relationship to lower levels”.⁶⁵ The Council for Disabled Children warned that “there is no conclusive evidence as of yet that T Levels are able to provide a pathway to employment for learners with SEND that is as effective as BTECs”.⁶⁶ The Association of School and College Leaders similarly outlined that present enrolment patterns demonstrate that T Levels do not currently offer a viable option for many students with learning difficulties or education, health and care plans.⁶⁷

50. The Minister told us that the Department has introduced flexibilities to support learners with special educational needs to access T Levels, and has spent around £550 million to support and retain disadvantaged groups and students with special educational needs.⁶⁸

The waiving of GCSE English and maths requirements

51. Originally, the Department required T Level students to have passed GCSE English and Maths at grade 4 as an exit requirement for completing their T Level.⁶⁹ However, in November 2021, this requirement was waived, with the then Secretary of State for Education outlining that the Department did not want to “unnecessarily inhibit talented students from accessing T Levels simply because of the additional hurdle that reaching level 2 in English and maths represents”.⁷⁰ GCSE English and maths are important qualifications needed to thrive in many parts of the jobs market, and it is unclear how the waiving of these as a T Level exit requirement aligns with the Department’s emphasis on the rigour of this new qualification.⁷¹

52. Views on the waiving of this requirement were mixed. Students who do not reach grade 4 in these key subjects by age 19 could face highly limited progression options across further education, apprenticeships, and employment.⁷² For example, analysis by the National Foundation for Education Research identified that 84% of level 3 vacancies advertised on the Government’s ‘Find An Apprenticeship’ website between August 2018

63 Capital City College Group ([FPQ0078](#))

64 ASCL ([FPQ0056](#)); National Deaf Children’s Society ([FPQ0070](#)); Landex ([FPQ0089](#)); Baker Dearing Educational Trust ([FPQ0108](#)); Council for Disabled Children ([FPQ0110](#))

65 [Q134](#), see also [Q177](#)

66 Council for Disabled Children ([FPQ0110](#))

67 ASCL ([FPQ0056](#))

68 [Qq281–284](#)

69 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

70 Nadhim Zahawi, [Oral statement to Parliament](#), November 2021

71 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

72 The University of Sheffield ([FPQ0014](#)); Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#)); National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) ([FPQ0058](#)); National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#)); [Q135](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

and October 2021 mentioned English or maths GCSE as a requirement. The Council of Deans of Health argued that T Levels are “devalued” without this GCSE requirement, which is “not in the interests of learners who need these qualifications to progress to higher level program”.⁷³ On the other hand, others suggested that this was an appropriate reform that would help widen access to T Levels,⁷⁴ with the Northern Powerhouse Partnership suggesting that “cliff-edge’ requirements in English and mathematics are unhelpful in driving forward social mobility”.⁷⁵ In chapter 6, we discuss the relatively small proportion of young people who successfully reach a passing grade in their level 2 maths and English resits by age 19.

53. T Levels are a rigorous qualification, and this is key to ensuring they equip students with the gold-standard technical skills required by employers and the economy. Nonetheless, we do not think that there is yet the right balance of rigour and accessibility. Early evidence indicates that schools and colleges are setting high entry requirements for T Levels, and we heard that as a result, T Levels could be restricted to a small pool of academically gifted students, who have a specific employment goal in mind by age 16. This is a concern, particularly for a programme that has, rightly, attracted over £1 billion of public funding.

The T Level drop-out rate

54. It is estimated that around one-fifth of the first cohort of T Level students dropped out.⁷⁶ Lord Baker told us that in the experience of the Baker Dearing Trust, T Levels do not suit students who get a level 6 or below at GCSE, “they drop out, I am afraid.”⁷⁷ When we questioned the Minister on the drop-out rate, he told us that the T Level “is very prestigious, and it is tough. That is not a bad thing [...] It is inevitable, in the early years, that there will be drop-outs.”⁷⁸

55. We heard concerns that T Levels offer no pathway to a lower level of qualification for students who might otherwise drop out completely.⁷⁹ A student who does not pass all elements of their T Level, or who withdraws, is given a statement of achievement.⁸⁰ However, it is unclear whether this statement will hold any currency with employers or learning providers. In contrast, a student taking 3 A levels can drop one or two courses, or a student studying the largest BTEC qualification can change to a smaller programme, and still achieve an accredited, internationally recognised qualification.⁸¹ David Gallagher, Chief Executive of NCFE, told us that

a concern that is shared by all stakeholders is a safe off-ramp for learners [...] One of the recommendations that we would make is around consideration for recognition or some form of credentialling for learners who do not for whatever reason complete that programme of study.⁸²

73 Council of Deans of Health (FPQ0018)

74 MillionPlus (FPQ0039); Northern Powerhouse Partnership (FPQ0042); Pearson (FPQ0079)

75 Northern Powerhouse Partnership (FPQ0042)

76 FE Week, [T Level results 2022: 6 key findings](#), August 2022

77 [Q15](#)

78 [Q267](#)

79 Pearson (FPQ0079); Institute of Directors (FPQ0087); Landex (FPQ0089)

80 Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2022 to 2023](#), March 2023

81 Pearson (FPQ0079)

82 [Q129](#)

56. T Levels offer no pathway to a lower level of qualification for students who might otherwise drop out completely. This makes it a high-risk option for students, particularly in comparison to existing post-16 options such as A levels or Applied General Qualifications, where a learner can drop a subject, or move to a smaller programme, and still gain an accredited, internationally recognised qualification.

57. *The Department must consider the case for micro-accreditation for T Level learners who for whatever reason do not complete their full programme of study. Allowing some form of credentialling for partially completed T Levels would encourage more learners to take them up and allow those who do drop out to gain recognised value from their experience.*

The T Level Transition Programme

58. The T Level Transition Programme is a one-year course for level 2 students described by the Department as a “high-quality preparatory programme”.⁸³ It is targeted at students who have the potential to progress on to a full T Level, but who need this additional year of support and preparation. Thirty-two of the first wave of T Level providers also delivered the Transition Programme, to a cohort of 950 students,⁸⁴ and as at 2021, a further 3,550 students were enrolled on the Transition Programme.⁸⁵ Completion of the Transition Programme does not lead to automatic enrolment onto a T Level, as providers will still make the final decisions on who to accept.⁸⁶

59. A letter from the Department states that Transition Programme students will typically be on this programme because they do not already have a GCSE grade 4 in one or both of English and maths. However, there is not yet data on the proportion of T Level transition learners who have been able to gain these important qualifications by the end of the Transition Programme.⁸⁷

60. There are doubts over how effectively the Transition Programme is fulfilling its purpose as a high-quality preparatory route on to the full T Level. Dr Morrison Coulthard told us that NFER’s early evaluation indicated the Transition Programme is “seen as very positive and in terms of the satisfaction of students it is rated highly”, but identified the conversion rate onto the full T Level as a key problem.⁸⁸

61. Tom Richmond, Founder and Director of EDSK think tank, described the Transition Programme as an “education version of some kind of holding pattern at an airport, where you just go around and around for a year in the hope that you might then be able to go on to a T Level, with no guarantee you would ever be able to get on to that course.”⁸⁹ EDSK’s written evidence further warned that future options for these students could be highly limited as “the DfE’s own qualification reforms may decimate the number of alternative level 2 and 3 courses available”.⁹⁰ We discuss the Department’s level 3 qualification reforms in depth in chapter 4.

83 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

84 Department for Education, [T Level Transition Programme](#), December 2021

85 Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2022 to 2023](#), March 2023

86 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#))

87 Department for Education ([FPQ0122](#))

88 [Q148](#)

89 [Q229](#)

90 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#))

62. We questioned the Minister on the effectiveness of the Transition Programme. The Minister told us that 49% of those who did the transition year successfully progressed to a level 3 qualification.⁹¹ A subsequent letter from the Department indicates that just 14% of the first Transition Programme cohort progressed to a T Level, an exceptionally low progression rate.⁹²

63. Too many learners on the T Level Transition Programme do not progress on to a T Level. The reasons for this are unclear. Only 14% of the first Transition Programme cohort actually progressed to a T Level, and just under half (49%) were able to progress to a level 3 qualification. This is an entirely inadequate rate for a programme whose purpose is to provide a high-quality preparatory route into T Levels. This raises questions as to whether the Transition Programme is fit for purpose, and whether suitable students, who could realistically meet the demands of the full T Level, are being placed on it.

64. The Department must work with providers to review the Transition Programme to determine why so few learners progress onto the full T Level. We would expect an effectively functioning Transition Programme to support at least half of learners to progress to the full T Level, with virtually all Transition Programme learners able to move onto a level 3 qualification by the end of the year.

65. The Department must publish annual statistics on the conversion rate from the Transition Programme onto the full T Level, providing a breakdown of what level of study learners move onto, and whether any drop out of education altogether.

66. The Department must publish data on the Transition Programme and T Level drop-out rate, broken down by key student characteristics. This should track whether students who took the Transition Programme have increased likelihood of dropping out of the T Level.

Awareness of T Levels

67. Sue Lovelock, the Department’s Director of Professional and Technical Education, told us that the Department has invested in communications and marketing to highlight T Levels, describing these as “a really key part of our implementation plan to build awareness.”⁹³

68. There was, however, scepticism from the sector about the effectiveness of the Department’s awareness strategy, with widespread consensus that far stronger information, advice and guidance is needed.⁹⁴ Describing a “lack of national awareness of T Levels”, City and Guilds told us that a “targeted and joined-up specific T Level campaign” is needed.⁹⁵ David Gallagher, NCFE Chief Executive, highlighted that “the odd lapel badge aside, there has been very little done in terms of sector-specific, employer-backed campaigns that

91 [Q267](#)

92 Department for Education ([FPQ0122](#))

93 [Q263](#)

94 City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#)); Weston College of Further and Higher Education ([FPQ0016](#)); Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#)); West Yorkshire Learning Providers ([FPQ0023](#)); University and College Union ([FPQ0026](#)); Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([FPQ0042](#)); EngineeringUK ([FPQ0049](#)); NCFE ([FPQ0050](#)); Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#)); The Local Government Association ([FPQ0073](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#)); City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); [Q135](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

95 City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#))

will raise its profile.”⁹⁶ We also heard from the Northern Skills Network that employer feedback indicated that the Department’s T Level marketing and website are “not helpful in making their choice to engage.”⁹⁷

69. Submissions highlighted that T Levels are competing for recognition alongside pre-existing level 3 qualifications, in particular A levels, which are a prestigious, well-respected, and well-established global brand.⁹⁸ We heard that not enough has been done to address parental and student awareness and understanding of T Levels.⁹⁹

70. EngineeringUK’s 2021 Brand Monitor survey identified that almost two-thirds (63%) of young people did not know what T Levels are. Concerning regional variations in awareness were also reported—young people in London were most likely to know what they are (49%) whereas just 29% of young people in Yorkshire and the Humber had heard of them.¹⁰⁰ The reason for these regional variations is unclear, but, if unchecked, represents a risk to the levelling up agenda.

71. Employers were given a prominent role in helping design T Levels, with over 250 leading employers assisting in their development from the very beginning.¹⁰¹ However, employer awareness of the qualification remains surprisingly low. Just 12% of employers responding to a 2021 British Chambers of Commerce survey reported some awareness of T Levels, although the proportion of employers in the Department’s 2021 Employer Pulse Survey who had heard of T Levels was twice as high (24%).¹⁰² Chris Pont, Founder and Chair of IJYI Ltd, told us that the Department’s T Level awareness outreach work “really needs to improve” suggesting that the Department should proactively go out to small businesses to spread awareness.¹⁰³

72. Although the Department has invested in communications and marketing to promote T Levels, we heard that its efforts fall short of what is needed to effectively raise local and national awareness of T Levels among employers, students and parents. Indeed, the Chief Executive of NCFE told us that “the odd lapel badge aside, there has been very little done in terms of sector-specific, employer-backed campaigns that will raise its profile.”

73. Recognition of T Levels remains low. If unaddressed, this will impede the success of T Levels. A 2021 Department survey showed that just under a quarter (24%) of employers were aware of T Levels. Other research indicates that 63% of young people had not heard of T Levels. Within this, there was significant and concerning regional variation—49% of young people in London had heard of T Levels, compared to 29% of young people in Yorkshire and the Humber. This is a potential risk to the levelling up agenda.

96 [Q129](#)

97 Northern Skills Network ([FPQ0063](#))

98 AQA ([FPQ0033](#)); The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#)); Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))

99 City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#)); Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#))

100 EngineeringUK ([FPQ0049](#))

101 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

102 British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#)); Department for Education, [Employer Pulse Survey: Research Report](#), April 2022

103 [Q101](#)

74. *The Department must improve recognition of T Levels among students, parents and employers through a T Level awareness campaign that raises the profile of the new qualification at both a national and local level.*

75. *The Department must monitor the success of its T Level marketing and communications strategy through the publication of annual statistics—at both national and regional level—on T Level awareness among young people and employers.*

76. *The Department must work with small and medium-sized businesses as well as with the network of careers hubs supported by the Careers and Enterprise Company to promote T Levels to a wider audience.*

The T Level industry work placement

77. The T Level industry work placement is a compulsory 9-week placement that is at least 315 hours (20%) of the programme, providing the learner with significant real-life work experience. The Department’s evidence describes the placement as a feature that sets this qualification apart from other vocational options.¹⁰⁴ However, submissions to this inquiry expressed a substantial range of concerns about placement access and scalability, which, if unaddressed, have the potential to significantly undermine the success and growth of T Levels.

Regional inequalities in T Level opportunities

78. Regional variations in economic activity are limiting factors in students’ access to T Level courses and placements, as many industries, such as engineering or media and creative arts, are concentrated in larger cities.¹⁰⁵ Submissions further highlighted challenges recruiting specialist staff in some parts of the country, and insufficient placement capacity in some sectors.¹⁰⁶ The Joint Council for Qualifications warned that “regional inequality remains an obstacle to the success of T Levels”.¹⁰⁷ Other submissions described T Levels as “a city-centric initiative”,¹⁰⁸ and “the ‘urban qualification’”.¹⁰⁹

79. Poor transport availability in rural and coastal areas was described by Cirencester College, a current T Level provider, as a “major impediment” to the programme, and this concern was echoed in a number of other submissions.¹¹⁰ Tina Götschi, Sixth Form Principal, at Ada, National College for Digital Skills, highlighted that sourcing placements “is a lot easier in London”, pointing out that in rural and coastal areas “there is just not enough industry around and you cannot be sending a 16 or 17-year-old on

104 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

105 Linking London, hosted by Birkbeck, University of London ([FPQ0007](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); London South Bank University (LSBU Group) ([FPQ0022](#)); University and College Union ([FPQ0026](#)); University of the Arts London Awarding Body ([FPQ0029](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); Association for Project Management ([FPQ0035](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); MillionPlus ([FPQ0039](#)); Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([FPQ0042](#)); Nottingham Trent University ([FPQ0067](#)); Royal Society of Biology, Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry ([FPQ0069](#)); [Q128](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

106 Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#)); Royal Society of Biology, Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry ([FPQ0069](#)); Institute of Physics ([FPQ0088](#)); [Q129](#) [Kirsti Lord]

107 The Joint Council for Qualifications ([FPQ0074](#))

108 Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#))

109 Linking London, hosted by Birkbeck, University of London ([FPQ0007](#))

110 Cirencester College ([FPQ0001](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); London South Bank University (LSBU Group) ([FPQ0022](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); Engineering Professors’ Council ([FPQ0044](#)); Nottingham Trent University ([FPQ0067](#))

a two-hour train journey.”¹¹¹ The prevalence of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses—which have limited organisational capacity to offer placements—in some regions and sectors was referred to as a further challenge to the supply of T Levels.¹¹² The Tees Valley Combined Authority, for example, noted that 99.5% of Tees Valley businesses are SMEs.¹¹³

80. The Department has published advice on providing industry placements in rural and remote areas,¹¹⁴ although its approach was criticised in one submission which stated that “Government policy appears to suggest it is up to employers to solve this issue [...] this issue needs to be shared between Government, schools and employers.”¹¹⁵

81. Regional disparities in access to placements were seen as having the potential to undermine the Government’s levelling up agenda, as well as being deeply unfair for the students themselves.¹¹⁶ As the Association of Colleges emphasised, “a young person’s chance to study a flagship qualification should not be dependent upon the presence of employers in a particular sector in the area where they happen to live.”¹¹⁷

Placement inclusivity

82. There were doubts over the extent to which industry placements will be inclusive of students who already face disadvantage, such as students with SEND,¹¹⁸ students with caring responsibilities,¹¹⁹ and students who depend on other employment for income.¹²⁰ Department guidance outlines that there is no legal requirement that students should be paid during their placement, but employers can pay students if they choose.¹²¹

83. We welcome the flexibilities the Department has recently introduced to support the participation of learners with SEND on T Levels, including allowing up to one-third of their placement to be undertaken at the college’s on-site facilities.¹²²

84. Vocational qualifications such as Applied Generals will offer an alternative for those young people whose location or personal circumstances preclude them from accessing the T Level of their choice.¹²³ However, as we examine in the following chapter, the Department’s level 3 reforms are likely to significantly reduce the availability of such alternatives.

111 [Q201](#)

112 [EDSK \(FPQ0030\)](#); [Northern Powerhouse Partnership \(FPQ0042\)](#); [Construction Industry Training Board \(FPQ0057\)](#); [The St Martins Group \(FPQ0066\)](#)

113 [Tees Valley Combined Authority \(FPQ0097\)](#)

114 Department for Education, [Providing industry placements in rural and remote areas](#), June 2022

115 [Association for Project Management \(FPQ0035\)](#)

116 [University of the Arts London Awarding Body \(FPQ0029\)](#); [MillionPlus \(FPQ0039\)](#); [Engineering Professors’ Council \(FPQ0044\)](#); [The Joint Council for Qualifications \(FPQ0074\)](#)

117 [Association of Colleges \(FPQ0080\)](#)

118 [IHAV \(FPQ0015\)](#); [ASCL \(FPQ0056\)](#); [National Deaf Children’s Society \(FPQ0070\)](#); [Baker Dearing Educational Trust \(FPQ0108\)](#)

119 [Edge Foundation \(FPQ0021\)](#); [Nottingham Trent University \(FPQ0067\)](#)

120 [Capital City College Group \(FPQ0078\)](#)

121 Department for Education, [Guidance: T Level industry placements: delivery guidance](#), June 2022

122 Department for Education, [Industry placement delivery approaches: Guidance for T Level providers](#), January 2023

123 [The Joint Council for Qualifications \(FPQ0074\)](#); [Learning and Work Institute \(FPQ0107\)](#)

85. **Regional variation in economic activity remains a significant obstacle to the success of T Levels. Evidence to our inquiry described T Levels as “a city-centric initiative”, and “the ‘urban qualification’ “. There is a risk that young people living in or near more affluent urban areas with access to a range of different sectors and industries will be the main beneficiaries of T Levels, while those from rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas will be left behind. If unaddressed, the lack of equitable access to placements will undermine the Government’s levelling up ambitions, and hinder its ability to tackle regional and national skills shortages.**

Scaling up industry placements

86. The scalability of T Level industry placements in line with the anticipated future rise in the numbers of courses and students was viewed as a significant challenge. There are significant logistical issues involved in sourcing and providing placements for young, unqualified learners, including safeguarding, support, and industry-specific health and safety requirements.¹²⁴ Tina Götschi emphasised that the industry placement has a “high overhead in terms of the organisation, making sure that that is high-quality work experience.”¹²⁵ Kirsti Lord, Deputy Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges, told us that an average college has connections with around 700 employers, but warned “that is not going to be enough.”¹²⁶ Indeed, we heard that providers are already experiencing difficulties sourcing sufficient placements.¹²⁷

87. Tom Bewick, CEO of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, warned of the potential for 200–250,000 placements to be required, particularly when Applied General programmes that compete with T Levels are removed.¹²⁸ Research by EngineeringUK has estimated that by 2025, up to 43,500 placements will be needed in the engineering and manufacturing sector alone.¹²⁹ The Department has not published its own forecast for the number of industry placements that might be required, and has stated it does not publish estimates or set targets for the number of T Level students in each academic year.¹³⁰

88. We heard that scaling up T Level placements could have inadvertent negative consequences for other parts of the skills agenda by reducing employers’ willingness to continue with existing programmes such as apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships which also require placements.¹³¹

89. The Department has not published its own forecast of the number of industry placements that might be required once T Levels are fully rolled out. A clear acknowledgement of the scale of the challenge is needed, particularly as we have heard that the numbers of T Level placements required could reach 250,000, with up to 43,500 placements needed in the engineering and manufacturing sector alone by 2025. The sheer scale of this undertaking poses a threat to the success of T Levels, which rests on the availability of sufficient high-quality placements.

124 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); EngineeringUK ([FPQ0049](#)); [Q49](#) [Jane Gratton]

125 [Q199](#)

126 [Q145](#)

127 Linking London, hosted by Birkbeck, University of London ([FPQ0007](#)); Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#))

128 [Q171](#)

129 EngineeringUK, [Unlocking talent: ensuring T Levels deliver the workforce of the future](#), October 2022

130 UK Parliament, [T Levels](#) (UIN 35939), July 2022

131 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); [Q145](#) [Ruth Perry]

90. *The Department must publish forecasts on potential industry placement demands and shortfalls as soon as possible, at both national and regional level.*

91. *Scaling up T Level placements could have inadvertent negative consequences for other parts of the skills agenda by reducing employers' willingness to continue with existing programmes such as apprenticeships, and supported internships which also require placements. The Department must convene an employer-led industry placement taskforce, with particular emphasis on incorporating the views of small and medium-sized enterprises and careers hubs, to draw up a strategic plan for tackling this issue.*

92. In light of the placement challenges that have already emerged, it is particularly concerning that almost two-thirds (63%) of employers were not interested in offering placements, and employer interest in providing placements appears to have declined. The Department's 2021 Employer Pulse Survey found that fewer employers were interested in providing T Level placements in 2021 than in 2019 (30% vs. 36%).¹³² This may be a temporary dip in interest arising from the pressures employers faced during the pandemic. It will be essential to closely monitor these figures as an important barometer of employer interest in the T Level agenda, without which T Levels will not succeed.

Employer and provider incentives

93. Up until July 2022, employers could claim £1,000 for every T Level student they host, subject to certain criteria.¹³³

94. Views on whether this incentive should continue were mixed, with Yiannis Koursis, Principal and CEO of Barnsley College, warning that “£1,000 will drive perverse behaviours and I do not think that these are the behaviours we would want to associate with any new qualification or the support of a young person.”¹³⁴ Lord Willetts told us that “the amount of money that is having to be spent as an incentive to employers to get them to offer the 45 days is a very interesting market measure of what employers require in order to engage in this way.”¹³⁵ On the other hand, Jane Gratton, Head of People Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, told us that the incentive “will help to reduce some of the cost [...] someone in a T Level placement who is just over 16 will need a lot of support and mentoring in the workplace setting.”¹³⁶

95. Available data from the Department's 2021 Employer Pulse Survey suggests that financial incentives may not be effective in stimulating employer interest in T Levels. As part of the Department's research, employers who said they were not interested in offering T Levels were informed of the incentive payments, and asked again whether they would be willing to offer placements. However, only seven per cent of employers changed their mind once informed of the cash incentive.¹³⁷

132 Department for Education, [Employer Pulse Survey](#), April 2022

133 Department for Education, [Guidance: T Level employer incentive scheme: employer conditions of payment](#), September 2021

134 [Q202](#)

135 [Q58](#)

136 [Q91](#); see also [Q130](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

137 Department for Education, [Employer Pulse Survey: Research report](#), April 2022

96. In February 2023, the Department announced a £12 million one-year support package to incentivise employers to offer T Level placements in 2023/24. This can be used by employers to cover costs including set-up, equipment and staff training.¹³⁸

97. In addition, all providers delivering T Levels in 2023/24 will now receive a one-off grant of up to £10,000 for additional careers guidance to ensure all students have a good understanding about T Levels and the transition programme.¹³⁹

Industry placement flexibilities

98. In January 2023, the Department announced further flexibilities for the industry placement, including allowing up to one-fifth of hours to be delivered remotely in certain subjects. Its guidance outlines that the location of the remote hours must take place in a “suitable environment”, such as a dedicated office space at the student’s college. However, “in exceptional cases”, students are able to undertake placement hours from home. This is in addition to a previously introduced flexibility which allows a placement to be shared between two employers.¹⁴⁰

99. The flexibility to allow hybrid placements is likely to be controversial. The additional flexibility could widen access to T Level placements, and may reflect wider industry working patterns.¹⁴¹ The CBI told us that industry placements must “remain in lockstep” with industry practice, noting that 93% of firms plan to adopt hybrid working models in the long-term.¹⁴²

100. On the other hand, the Association of Employers and Learning Providers pointed out that “we must not forget that the industry placement was supposed to be the unique selling point of T Levels.”¹⁴³ The University of the Arts London Awarding Body similarly argued that “Government should not dilute the workplace component or hybridise the approach of T Levels to boost their popularity.”¹⁴⁴

101. We welcome the Department’s introduction of a hybrid model for T Level placements in certain subjects. This could help reduce the travel burden for students, and widen access to placements. It also reflects the preferences of some employers who called for greater placement flexibility to match the increased uptake of hybrid working patterns. However, the Department must take great care to ensure that this reform does not dilute the workplace component of T Levels, or detract from the overall student experience.

102. The evidence we have so far from the roll out of T Levels reveals major concerns that must be addressed as the programme moves forward. Around one-fifth of the first T Level cohort are estimated to have dropped out. Concerns have been raised that T Levels are less accessible and less manageable for some groups, including lower attaining students, ethnic minority students and students with SEND. On top of this,

138 Department for Education, [Guidance: Employer support fund](#), February 2023

139 Department for Education, [Guidance: T Levels: next steps for providers](#), February 2023

140 Department for Education, [Industry placement delivery approaches: Guidance for T Level providers](#), January 2023

141 Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#))

142 CBI ([FPQ0109](#))

143 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#))

144 University of the Arts London Awarding Body ([FPQ0029](#))

despite T Levels being developed with the input of 250 leading employers, the DfE's own research shows that almost two-thirds of employers are not yet interested in providing a T Level replacement, and that where interest exists it appears to have declined. There are also many areas of the country where there are not yet enough employers near to colleges in regional, rural and left behind areas to accommodate learners on T Level placements. The Department must address these concerns as a matter of urgency to ensure the success of the programme.

103. The Department must closely monitor how learner satisfaction, attainment and progression for those undertaking hybrid T Level placements compares with those undertaking fully in-person placements. Evaluations on this should be published annually.

104. Up until July 2022, employers could claim £1,000 for every T Level industry placement. The Department must reinstate this incentive for small and medium enterprises, and microbusinesses, in order to facilitate their participation with T Levels.

4 Applied General Qualifications

About Applied General Qualifications

105. Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) are level 3 qualifications that combine practical skills with academic learning, allowing students to develop knowledge and skills in a vocational area.¹⁴⁵ AGQs have recently undergone reform to make them more rigorous, and as at 2019 there were 138 AGQs approved for delivery in a wide range of areas including business, science, health and social care and computing.¹⁴⁶ AGQs attract UCAS points, enabling learners to fulfil entry requirements for a range of higher education courses, as well as providing a pathway on to apprenticeships or employment.¹⁴⁷

106. AGQs can be studied as a standalone qualification, or in a mixed programme alongside an A or AS level.¹⁴⁸ In 2021, 132,635 students aged 16–18 were taking an AGQ, and a further 141,196 were taking an AGQ alongside an A or AS level.¹⁴⁹ This allows flexibility for learners who want to keep their options open.¹⁵⁰ This can be important for young people who are not ready to commit to a qualification leading to a specific career at age 16,¹⁵¹ particularly given that these key decisions are being made during the years in which students are concentrating on their GCSEs.¹⁵²

107. There was widespread agreement of the important role that AGQs play in promoting social mobility by widening access to, and participation in, higher education and skilled employment.¹⁵³ 40% of university entrants from the least privileged quintile entered university with BTECs compared with under a tenth from the most privileged quintile.¹⁵⁴ 44% of white working-class students that enter university studied at least one BTEC and 37% of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications.¹⁵⁵

108. There is some evidence that AGQs could be less effective at preparing students for higher education than A levels, with research funded by the Nuffield Foundation identifying higher relative likelihood of students dropping out or repeating their first year.¹⁵⁶ However, this research also emphasises that the “overwhelming majority” of students entering with BTECs or mixed programmes do not drop out or repeat. It credits

145 Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2021 to 2022 academic year\)](#), July 2022

146 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England: the current system and the case for change](#), March 2019

147 Pearson (FPQ0079)

148 Edge Foundation (FPQ0021); AQA (FPQ0033) Sixth Form Colleges Association (FPQ0038); National Foundation for Educational Research (FPQ0068); Ada. National College for Digital Skills (FPQ0083); OCR Examinations Board (FPQ0095); Pearson (FPQ0079)

149 Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18](#), June 2022

150 Universities UK (FPQ0027); Pearson (FPQ0079); University of Oxford (FPQ0091); Baker Dearing Educational Trust (FPQ0108)

151 Sixth Form Colleges Association (FPQ0038); Engineering Professors' Council (FPQ0044); GuildHE (FPQ0059); Baker Dearing Educational Trust (FPQ0108); Q210 [Tina Götschi]

152 Youth Futures Foundation (FPQ0053)

153 Linking London, hosted by Birkbeck, University of London (FPQ0007); London Councils (FPQ0011); The University of Sheffield (FPQ0014); Sixth Form Colleges Association (FPQ0038); MillionPlus (FPQ0039); Engineering Professors' Council (FPQ0044); Federation of Awarding Bodies (FPQ0055); National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) (FPQ0058); National Foundation for Educational Research (FPQ0068); National Deaf Children's Society (FPQ0070); The Joint Council for Qualifications (FPQ0074); Pearson (FPQ0079)

154 Nuffield Foundation, [Summary: Educational choices at 16–19 and university outcomes](#), January 2022

155 Sixth Form Colleges Association (FPQ0038)

156 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

BTECs with “enabling widening participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as they are much more likely to take BTECs than their more privileged peers.”¹⁵⁷ Research indicates that BTECs act as a stepping stone for further study, and expected earnings and employment differentials for a student progressing from a level 3 BTECs to a first degree are positive.¹⁵⁸

Overview of the Department’s qualification reform process

109. In 2019 the Department launched its review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below. As part of this review, it held two consultations, the second of which was open at the time we launched this inquiry.¹⁵⁹ The review’s aims included streamlining and improving post-16 qualifications, creating clearly defined academic and technical routes, and ensuring students are better equipped to progress to further study or skilled employment.¹⁶⁰ As a result of these reforms, a substantial number of Applied General Qualifications will no longer be available, with T Levels instead intended to become one of the main programmes of choice for students at post-16, alongside A levels and apprenticeships.

110. The Department has stated that its level 3 reforms will raise the quality bar and result in more rigorous and stretching qualifications.¹⁶¹ However, some submissions refuted the suggestion that AGQs were of lower quality, highlighting that AGQs have recently been reformed to make them more rigorous.¹⁶² The Association of Employers and Learning Providers expressed concern about the inference that AGQs lacked robustness, telling us that “These claims are damaging to past and current learners enrolled on these courses, and they have reduced employer confidence.”¹⁶³

111. The Department began its reform process by withdrawing funding approval for over 5,000 qualifications at level 3 and below which receive no or low enrolments. It has previously referred to a “ridiculously large number” of qualifications which creates “bewildering choice” for students and employers.¹⁶⁴ There was widespread agreement of the need to undertake some consolidation and streamlining of the qualification landscape,¹⁶⁵ with submissions describing it as cluttered, confusing, and needing simplification.¹⁶⁶ However, the Protect Student Choice coalition has argued that “AGQs do not form part of this picture”, as of the 5,200 qualifications in scope for removal, only 134 are the recently

157 Nuffield Foundation and Oxford Brookes University, [Educational Choices at 16–19 and University Outcomes](#), January 2022

158 Centre for Vocational Education Research, [BTECS, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome \(LEO\) dataset: Research discussion paper](#), October 2019

159 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Government consultation response](#), July 2021

160 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#)); Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))

161 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

162 Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#)); West Suffolk College, Suffolk One, Abbeygate Sixth Form ([FPQ0102](#))

163 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#))

164 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Second Stage](#), October 2020

165 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) ([FPQ0086](#)); University of Oxford ([FPQ0091](#)); Tees Valley Combined Authority ([FPQ0097](#)); Oldham College ([FPQ0104](#)); Baker Dearing Educational Trust ([FPQ0108](#)); CBI ([FPQ0109](#)); Council for Disabled Children ([FPQ0110](#)); British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#)); UK Hospitality ([FPQ0117](#))

166 Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) ([FPQ0086](#)); Oldham College ([FPQ0104](#)); UK Hospitality ([FPQ0117](#))

reformed AGQs.¹⁶⁷ Lord Willetts has also warned that “we have to be careful when we say, “There are too many qualifications”. Some of these are niche, but they are a recognised and valuable niche.”¹⁶⁸

112. The Department’s next phase of reforms involves removing funding approval for a number of qualifications that overlap with T Levels.¹⁶⁹ The Department has extended its reform timetable by an additional year, a move which was widely welcomed by the sector.¹⁷⁰ Under the revised timeline, it 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 2025/26.¹⁷¹ The final phase of reforms consists of a reapproval process for academic and technical qualifications at level 3, with new criteria that qualifications must meet in order to be publicly funded from 2025.¹⁷²

How many AGQs might remain?

113. It remains unclear how many AGQs might remain once the Department’s reforms are complete. Since launching this inquiry, we heard from the Department that “a small number of qualifications that overlap with T Levels are being retired”.¹⁷³ The Minister similarly told us in December 2022 that “what we have done is prune, because it is about quality over quantity [...] There are going to be BTECs that will absolutely remain [...] we are keeping a significant number.”¹⁷⁴

114. However, mapping analysis conducted in January 2023 by the Protect Student Choice coalition—a coalition of 30 sector organisations—identified that of the 134 reformed Applied General Qualifications currently available, 75 (56%) would not be funded from 2025. The remaining 59 are eligible to be considered for reapproval, but the number which may ultimately receive approval, and therefore continue to be delivered, will remain unknown until the process is complete.¹⁷⁵

Sector reaction to the reforms

115. It is important to highlight that we did encounter some support for removing funding for AGQs. These submissions noted that T Levels have the potential to raise the bar in terms of quality.¹⁷⁶ The Gatsby Charitable Foundation described defunding AGQs as “a prerequisite for the successful rollout of T Levels”, arguing that providers would otherwise “continue to be incentivised to offer cheaper, easier to deliver qualifications that short change students and fail to provide the skills that employers need.”¹⁷⁷ Capital City College Group noted it would be unhelpful “to retain a competitive qualification market at 16–18

167 Protect Student Choice, [Letter to the Secretary of State for Education](#), November 2022

168 [Q66](#)

169 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England](#), October 2022

170 London South Bank University (LSBU Group) ([FPQ0022](#)); MillionPlus ([FPQ0039](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#)); University Alliance ([FPQ0096](#))

171 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

172 Department for Education, [Education Update: Statement made by Robert Halfon](#), January 2022

173 Department for Education, [Press release: T Level rollout takes next steps](#), May 2022

174 [Q277](#)

175 Protect Student Choice, [Protect Student Choice campaign update](#), January 2023

176 Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education ([FPQ0071](#)); Gatsby Charitable Foundation ([FPQ0076](#)); Capital City College Group ([FPQ0078](#)); Oldham College ([FPQ0104](#))

177 Gatsby Charitable Foundation ([FPQ0076](#))

for any longer that is absolutely necessary”.¹⁷⁸ Oldham College suggested that keeping overlapping AGQs “would mean we had a two-tier system, with one qualification inferior to the other [...] the original commitment to removing predecessor qualifications should be kept as a matter of principle.”¹⁷⁹

116. Overall, however, the Department’s plans to withdraw funding for qualifications that overlap with T Levels have been controversial and largely unpopular with the sector—86% of those responding to the Department’s consultation proposal disagreed with this approach.¹⁸⁰

117. Since launching this inquiry, a Parliamentary petition to retain funding for AGQs attracted over 108,000 signatures, while a letter from the Protect Student Choice coalition to the Secretary of State attracted signatures from 118 cross-party MPs and Peers.¹⁸¹ A January 2023 letter from a cross-party group of former Department Ministers and Peers expressed “deep concerns” about the Department’s plan to withdraw funding for at least 75 out of 134 AGQs. Their letter registered “disappointment that commitments made to Peers about this policy do not appear to have been met”, outlining

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 2025.¹⁸²

118. This withdrawal of funding for certain AGQs may place additional pressure on further education colleges and sixth forms whose funding has been particularly squeezed in recent years with larger cuts than other areas of education since 2010–11.¹⁸³

119. While there was much praise for T Levels and strong sector will for them to succeed, the vast majority of written and oral evidence provided to this inquiry expressed concern about the impacts of withdrawing funding for Applied General Qualifications. Indeed, it is rare for an inquiry to receive evidence expressing such a significant degree of consensus on a particular issue.

178 Capital City College Group ([FPQ0078](#))

179 Oldham College ([FPQ0104](#))

180 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Government consultation response](#), July 2021

181 UK Government and Parliament, [Petition](#): “Protect student choice: do not withdraw funding for BTEC qualifications”, January 2022; Protect Student Choice, [Letter to the Secretary of State](#), October 2021

182 Letter to the Secretary of State, [Defunding of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications](#), January 2023

183 Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2022](#), December 2022

The definition of ‘overlap’

120. A number of submissions queried the Department’s definition of AGQs as qualifications that ‘overlap’ with T Levels, highlighting that AGQs have a distinct and different purpose to T Levels, and are likely to be suitable for different types of student.¹⁸⁴ The Baker Dearing Educational Trust, for example, told us that T Levels are “fundamentally different qualifications”, which should “complement, rather than replace” the existing offer.¹⁸⁵ We similarly heard from Lord Willetts that

The overlap doctrine does not fully recognise that BTECs are a different type of qualification from T Levels. The fact that there is a T Level in some occupational category does not of itself mean that there is no remaining role for BTECs that appear to be in a broadly similar occupation. BTECs are a different type of qualification.¹⁸⁶

121. Yiannis Kouris, Principal and CEO of Barnsley College, warned “there is an issue with the definition of overlap. The overlap [...] has to be the content overlap, not the title.”¹⁸⁷ The Sixth Form Colleges Association explained that

the Government’s definition of overlap is no more sophisticated than qualifications in the same or similar-sounding subjects. It is important not to confuse the purpose of a qualification with its content. T Levels are primarily designed to help young people progress to a specific occupation. BTECs are designed to help young people progress to higher education or the workplace, often in professional careers.¹⁸⁸

Impact on student choice

122. In a written statement, former Skills Minister Andrea Jenkyns outlined that “the removal of overlapping qualifications will give T Levels the space needed to flourish and maximise the number of learners on these important qualifications.”¹⁸⁹ However, we encountered concerns over the implication that the success of T Levels will be dependent on removing AGQs. Instead, we heard that T Levels should win out in fair competition, rather than through artificially narrowing learner choice in order to give T Levels leverage.¹⁹⁰

123. The Federation of Awarding Bodies described the Department’s approach as “knocking out or defunding perfectly good qualifications just because they get in the way or ‘compete’ with the Government’s own qualifications.”¹⁹¹ Similarly, MillionPlus, the association for modern universities, argued that

constricting the choice for students does nothing for the opportunities of young people in England. It would appear that the only real beneficiary

184 NAHT ([FPQ0017](#)); Universities UK ([FPQ0027](#)); University of the Arts London Awarding Body ([FPQ0029](#)); Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([FPQ0042](#)); National Union of Students ([FPQ0043](#)); Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#)); Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#)); Lord Willetts ([FPQ0101](#))

185 Baker Dearing Educational Trust ([FPQ0108](#))

186 [Q68](#)

187 [Q212](#)

188 Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#))

189 HC Deb, 17 October 2022, [col 19WS](#) [Commons written ministerial statement]

190 Lord Willetts ([FPQ0101](#)); [Q217](#) [Andria Singlehurst]

191 Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#))

of the removal of funding for BTEC qualifications is the Government's own agenda on technical education, and its ability to demonstrate its performance in this regard. [...] Such a move may well ensure that demand for T Levels is strong but it would do so by restricting choice.¹⁹²

124. Given the potential for T Level placement demand to reach 250,000,¹⁹³ and an apparent decline in employer interest in providing placements from 2019 to 2021,¹⁹⁴ there was significant concern that an already challenging situation would be exacerbated by the removal of AGQs that compete with T Levels.¹⁹⁵ The CBI emphasised to us that

Funding decisions should avoid narrowing opportunities for young people to progress [...] Switching off funding for existing qualifications before new routes have strong business demand risks disconnecting talent pipelines, hampering prospects for young people to move into skilled work. [...] The ability of businesses to offer industry placements and a clear track record of T Level success should be prerequisites to scrapping other options available.¹⁹⁶

125. Regional variations in economic activity will limit T Level course and placement availability (see paragraph 77 onwards), and, as the University of Oxford told us, it will be “impossible” for students to have access to all sectors, especially those with limited presence in their region. The removal of a large number of AGQs could therefore decrease choice and opportunities for young people, including those with aspirations to work in a sector to which they have no local access, and those who have not yet decided on their future direction.¹⁹⁷

126. There are also expected to be sectors in which T Levels will not fully replace the withdrawn AGQ offer, which may result in skills gaps in certain key industries.¹⁹⁸ For example, a January 2023 letter from a cross-party group of Peers to the Secretary of State for Education, warned that “it is difficult to think of a worse time to scrap the Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care”.¹⁹⁹

Evidence base and timeframe for reforms

127. It may be some years before sufficient and representative data on T Level outcomes and progression is available. This is natural for a new qualification, but is also in part because providers appear to have been risk averse with the first cohorts, setting high entry requirements, and recruiting only high attaining students.²⁰⁰ At the same time, we heard concerns that the available research on AGQs is not based on the recently reformed version of the qualification, and “as a result, the Government's ‘evidence-based’ approach to level 3 reform is based on evidence about qualifications that are largely no longer delivered.”²⁰¹

192 MillionPlus (FPQ0039)

193 Q171 [Tom Bewick]

194 The Department's 2021 Employer Pulse Survey found that fewer employers were interested in providing T Level placements in 2021 than in 2019 (30% vs. 36%).

195 Institute of Directors (FPQ0087)

196 CBI (FPQ0109)

197 University of Oxford (FPQ0091)

198 Pearson (FPQ0079)

199 Letter to the Secretary of State, [Defunding of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications](#), January 2023

200 Q150 [Dr Morrison Coulthard]; Q151 [Ruth Perry]

201 Sixth Form Colleges Association (FPQ0038)

128. We heard that the current timeline for removing funding for AGQs does not allow sufficient time for the evaluation of T Levels. Cautioning against “basing major reforms on evidence which relates to qualifications that are not yet established”, the Association of Colleges told us that “the current defunding plan is too wide ranging and too fast, even with the one-year postponement to 2024–5.”²⁰² The Sixth Form Colleges Association argued that “It would be far better to wait for evidence on both RQF BTECs and T Levels [...] before making potentially irreversible and hugely damaging decisions about Level 3 qualifications.”²⁰³ London Councils similarly warned it would be “unwise” to remove overlapping AGQs before longitudinal data is available that clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of T Levels by tracking progression into employment and higher education.²⁰⁴

129. The education sector was not the only sector to express widespread concern about the evidence base and the timeframe for the reforms. Bodies representing business and employers highlighted the risk of defunding overlapping qualifications given the absence of evidence as to whether T Levels will be an equally effective replacement.²⁰⁵ The Institute of Directors told us there needed to be “a period of evaluation” before funding for AGQs is withdrawn,²⁰⁶ while the Association of Employers and Learning Providers emphasised that T Levels “remain inadequately tested at scale and length [...] caution is required.”²⁰⁷

The Department’s Equalities Impact Assessment

130. The Department’s equalities impact assessment indicates that students with special educational needs and disabilities, students from Asian ethnic groups, males, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds could be “particularly impacted” by the proposals, as these students are disproportionately represented on those qualifications which are likely to be defunded.²⁰⁸

131. The Department has argued that it expects the impact of its reforms to be “generally positive”, as those learners most likely to be affected “will see the biggest improvement in the quality of qualifications they would be studying at level 3, and their outcomes thereafter.”²⁰⁹ However, it is not clear what evidence had been used to arrive at this decision. There is not yet data showing that T Levels fulfil their purpose, are accessible and scalable nationally, and are more effective than the qualifications they replace at contributing social mobility and supporting students to progress.²¹⁰ This is a concern given the exceptionally low (14%) progression rates from the T Level Transition Programme, the high T Level drop-out rates (an estimated one-fifth of the first cohort); and the absence of micro-accreditation for students who do drop out.

202 Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#))

203 Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#))

204 London Councils ([FPQ0011](#))

205 CBI ([FPQ0109](#))

206 Institute of Directors ([FPQ0087](#))

207 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#))

208 Department for Education, [Revised Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022

209 Department for Education, [Revised Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022

210 London Councils ([FPQ0011](#)); NAHT ([FPQ0017](#)); University and College Union ([FPQ0026](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); Coventry University Group ([FPQ0052](#)); Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#)); ASCL ([FPQ0056](#)); Pearson ([FPQ0079](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#)); TUC ([FPQ0085](#)); NASUWT ([FPQ0093](#)); University Alliance ([FPQ0096](#)); Tees Valley Combined Authority ([FPQ0097](#)); CBI ([FPQ0109](#))

132. The Department’s equalities impact assessment acknowledges that “some students with protected characteristics may be disadvantaged by the reforms as they may no longer be able to progress to level 3.” While the Department states that it “expect[s] this number to be relatively small”, it did not provide an estimated number.²¹¹ As a result, it remains unclear how many students may be prevented from progressing on to a level 3 qualification as a result of the reforms.

133. Under this Government, there have been reductions in 16–18 not in education, employment or training (NEET) rates, and in 2021, the 16–18 NEET rate reached one of the lowest recorded at 6.4%. However, we heard that learners who are unable or unwilling to complete T Levels or A levels could be left without an appropriate study programme,²¹² which could result in an inadvertent rise in 16–18 NEET rates.²¹³ Kirsti Lord, Deputy Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges, described this as a “real danger of a lot of young people becoming not in education, employment or training, or dropping out of the system and becoming economically inactive at a very early age.”²¹⁴ Sandwell College similarly told us that

The current plans will lead to reduced progression opportunities and fewer students being able to access level 3 programmes. At Sandwell, the consequence will be increased NEET levels locally with a disproportionate impact on BAME learners.²¹⁵

134. The Department’s equalities impact assessment received widespread sector criticism.²¹⁶ Ruth Perry, Senior Policy Manager at Natspec and representative of the Special Educational Consortium, told us that the Department’s assessment

does not sit very comfortably with the Equality Act. I do not think that we can just write off that group of learners who might not be served by what is being proposed.²¹⁷

The Federation of Awarding Bodies similarly told us that

The adverse impact of these reforms is well documented. The Government’s own impact assessment has admitted that the future qualifications landscape, as currently planned, will result in more inequality for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, not less. The current policy trajectory actively works against the Government’s stated ambition to level-up.²¹⁸

211 Department for Education, [Revised Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022

212 Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#)); Association for Project Management ([FPQ0035](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#)); The Local Government Association ([FPQ0073](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#)); Landex ([FPQ0089](#)); OCR Examinations Board ([FPQ0095](#)); [Q213](#) [Tina Götschi]

213 Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18](#), June 2022

214 [Q173](#)

215 Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#))

216 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); Universities UK ([FPQ0027](#)); University of the Arts London Awarding Body ([FPQ0029](#)); Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#)); The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#)); Engineering Professors’ Council ([FPQ0044](#))

217 [Q127](#)

218 Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#))

135. We welcome the Department’s ambition to simplify and declutter the post-16 landscape by tackling the 5,000 plus qualifications at level 3 and below with low or no enrolments. This will create a system that is clearer and easier to navigate, giving learners and employers confidence that qualifications are rigorous and high-quality. Nonetheless, the speed and scope of the Department’s reforms risks inadvertently narrowing opportunities for young people to progress and succeed.

136. We are disappointed that the Department’s equalities impact assessment identifies that students with special educational needs and disabilities, Asian ethnic groups, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and males are disproportionately likely to be affected by the Department’s qualification reforms. The Department’s ‘expectation’ that its reforms will be “generally positive” for these groups is an insubstantial premise on which to defund a significant number of tried and tested Applied General Qualifications. It does not offer the evidence-based assurance that we would expect for a reform of this magnitude.

137. The Department’s equalities impact assessment identifies that some students with protected characteristics may be disadvantaged by the reforms as they may no longer be able to progress to a level 3 qualification. We heard that this could result in a rise in 16–18 year olds who are NEET (not in education, employment, or training). While the Department outlines it expects this number to be “relatively small”, it remains unclear how many students might be affected.

138. T Levels are a rigorous technical qualification which will offer the ideal pathway for many students, but they will not be the right choice for all learners. Applied General Qualifications serve a distinct and different purpose to T Levels, and play an important role in promoting social mobility by widening access to, and participation in, higher education and skilled employment.

139. We have been told that demand for T level placements could reach up to 250,000 placements. The Department’s own research has concerningly identified that fewer employers were interested in providing T Level placements in 2021 than in 2019 (30% vs. 36%). And almost two-thirds (63%) of employers were currently not interested in offering T Level placements. This puts students at risk of having neither a T Level option, nor an Applied General option, which is a threat to the pipeline of skills needed by employers and the economy.

140. *The ability of businesses to offer sufficient, high-quality industry placements, and a clear track record of T Level success as well as evidenced improvement in equalities outcomes, should be prerequisites to scrapping further Applied General Qualifications on the basis of ‘overlap’.*

141. *The Department must place a moratorium on defunding Applied General Qualifications. Tried and tested Applied General Qualifications should only be withdrawn as and when there is a robust evidence base proving that T Levels are demonstrably more effective in preparing students for progression, meeting industry needs and promoting social mobility.*

5 Post-16 apprenticeships

Overview

142. Apprenticeships are paid jobs of at least twelve-month minimum duration, with both on and off-the-job training, designed to give the learner occupational competence.²¹⁹ They provide an important career pathway for young people to gain the skills and experience they need to enter and flourish in the labour market. Those with an apprenticeship qualification are less likely to be unemployed than their peers, and the National Foundation for Educational Research estimates that disadvantaged young people with an apprenticeship qualification earn, on average, over 10% more by the age of 28 than those holding an equivalent qualification.²²⁰

143. At the 2021 Spending Review, the Government announced apprenticeship funding would rise from £2.5 billion to £2.7 billion by 2024/25, in order to support more starts for people of all ages.²²¹ At the 2022 Autumn Budget, it announced a 9.7% increase in the national minimum apprenticeship wage to £5.28 an hour.²²²

144. We warmly welcome the Department’s January 2023 announcement that it will advertise apprenticeship opportunities on UCAS. This means that, from 2024, young people will be able to use the UCAS portal to search for, and learn about, both degree and apprenticeship options. This is an important step toward ensuring parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes.²²³

Apprenticeship starts among young people

145. Employers and training providers who take on an apprentice aged 16–18, or up to 25 with an education, health, and care plan, may be eligible for an incentive of £1,000 per apprentice.²²⁴ There has, however, been a long-term decline in apprenticeship starts among 16–18 year olds and at level 2.²²⁵ As Lord Willetts told us, “the trends are pretty clear. Apprenticeships are going up the age scale and up the educational levels. Apprentices are becoming older, and they are more and more at levels 3, 4 and above.”²²⁶

146. The number of apprenticeship starts among under-19s has declined from 131,420 in 2015/16 to 77,520 in 2021/22—a fall of 41% (see Table 2 below).²²⁷ It is encouraging that the number of starts among under-19s rose by 19% over the past year, although it is possible this may be a short-term rebound following the pandemic. The number of starts on intermediate (level 2, GCSE equivalent) apprenticeships, has fallen by 69%

219 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

220 The St Martin’s Group ([FPQ0066](#)); National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#))

221 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

222 HM Treasury, [Autumn Statement 2022](#), November 2022

223 Department for Education, [Apprenticeships boosted under plans to broaden UCAS](#), February 2023

224 Department for Education, [Guidance: Payments for hiring a young apprentice](#), May 2022

225 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#)); The St Martin’s Group ([FPQ0066](#)); National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#))

226 [Q70](#)

227 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2021/22: Apprenticeships and traineeships](#), January 2022

between 2015/16 and 2021/22 (from 291,330 to 91,520).²²⁸ This is of particular concern as intermediate apprenticeships provide that crucial first rung of the ladder for many young or disadvantaged learners.

Table 2: Apprenticeship starts by age group

Apprenticeship Starts		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Age	Starts	509,360	494,880	375,760	393,380	322,530	321,440	349,190
Under 19	Number	131,420	122,750	106,570	97,700	76,270	65,150	77,520
	%	26%	25%	28%	25%	24%	20%	22%
19–24	Number	153,860	142,190	113,710	116,000	95,290	94,610	106,330
	%	30%	29%	30%	30%	30%	29%	31%
25+	Number	224,090	229,940	155,480	179,670	150,960	161,690	165,340
	%	44%	47%	41%	46%	47%	50%	47%

147. We heard that unless existing issues relating to apprenticeships are overcome, they will not be an available option for many young people.²²⁹ Witnesses further told us that apprenticeships are not being adequately promoted through information, advice and guidance at school.²³⁰ As part of our ongoing inquiry into the effectiveness of careers advice and guidance, we heard from a panel of young people aged 16–18, most of whom had not been told about apprenticeships at school, but had been informed about them once they were at college.²³¹ Indeed, one young apprentice told us that their secondary school careers advisor “had lots of information on universities but none on apprenticeships”.²³²

148. The Federation of Awarding Bodies explained that since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, “most employers have shunned 16–18-year-olds; and they have increasingly opted in larger volumes to go for degree level apprenticeships instead of hiring apprentices at Level 2.”²³³ The design of the apprenticeship levy has resulted in funds going towards rebadging training as an apprenticeship, for example on management courses to upskill existing employees, rather than supporting provision for under-19s.²³⁴ The CBI described the levy as “a barrier to business investment” noting that levy payers “are encouraged by its design to rebadge training, including into less efficient formats, to use their funds.”²³⁵

149. One mechanism to raise the number of young people starting apprenticeships, could be through reforming the apprenticeship levy to mandate spending a certain proportion of funding on under-19s. This was a recommendation of the Lord’s Youth Unemployment

228 Department for Education, [Annual Headlines - detailed series for Intermediate Apprenticeship in England between 2015/16 and 2021/22](#), January 2022

229 National Foundation for Educational Research (FPQ0068)

230 Q102 [Jane Gratton]; Q103 [Matthew McCarrick]; Q108 [Lisa Silcock]

231 Qq187–210

232 Q168 [Hollie]

233 Federation of Awarding Bodies (FPQ0055)

234 EDSK, [Runaway training: Why the apprenticeship levy is broken and how to fix it](#), January 2020

235 CBI (FPQ0109)

Committee's *Skills for every young person* report.²³⁶ However, any reform that reduced levy flexibility is unlikely to be popular among employers, who have consistently called for greater flexibility on spending levy funds on training and development.

150. Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair at QA and Be the Business, told us he would “caution against thinking that the fact that apprentices have gravitated towards older age groups is a bad thing”, highlighting that “25 million people in this country need some kind of significant reskilling [...] Apprenticeships within the workplace may very well be a good way of doing that”.²³⁷ Jane Gratton, Head of People Policy at the Chamber of Commerce, suggested that “sometimes, employers are unfairly criticised for using their levy money to upskill older adults in the workplace. It is their levy money and they want to use it to upskill their current workforce.”²³⁸

The flexi-job apprenticeship scheme

151. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can face particular challenges in engaging with apprenticeships, and apprenticeship starts for SMEs declined by 57% between 2015/16 and 2019/20.²³⁹

152. In February 2022, the Department announced the introduction of new flexible apprenticeships via its flexi-job apprenticeship scheme. This enables apprentices to complete short placements in industries such as construction and the creative arts where they cannot be placed for the full year due to the short-term nature of projects in these sectors. This is currently a relatively small-scale initiative, with up to 1,500 apprentices expected to be recruited on the flexi scheme by 2023.²⁴⁰ The St Martins Group highlighted that the introduction of the flexi-job apprenticeship scheme could help ease the challenges faced by SMEs.²⁴¹

153. When we questioned the Minister on the 41% decline in under-19 apprenticeship starts since 2015/16, he assured us that he is “far from comfortable” with this fall. The Minister told us that while the Department is not planning to reform the levy, he is examining how the levy can better support disadvantaged students to access apprenticeships, and further emphasised the importance of strengthening careers advice.²⁴²

154. We welcome the Department's recent decision to triple the bursary for apprentices who are in care or are care leavers, from £1,000 to £3,000. This sets an important precedent for further increases in targeted support for apprenticeships for disadvantaged groups.²⁴³

155. *The 19% increase in apprenticeship starts among under-19s between 2020/21 and 2021/22 is a positive step forward. However, all too often older, more highly qualified workers are being prioritised for apprenticeships at the expense of young people trying to get their foot on the first rung of the careers ladder. For apprenticeships to play their full part in the ladder of opportunity, they need to reach both groups.*

236 Youth Unemployment Committee, Report of Session 2021–22, [Skills for every young person](#), HL Paper 98, November 2021

237 [Q72](#)

238 [Q115](#)

239 The St Martin's Group ([FPQ0066](#))

240 Department for Education, [Flexible apprenticeships to boost jobs in key sectors](#), February 2022

241 The St Martin's Group ([FPQ0066](#))

242 [Qq292–296](#)

243 Department for Education, [Apprenticeships care leavers' bursary guidance](#), February 2023

156. *The Department must set out how it will address the long-term decline in apprenticeship starts among young people, and ensure apprenticeships are the gold-standard 'earn and learn' option for school and college leavers. The Department must commission an independent review to examine possible mechanisms to achieve this, for example, considering ways in which levy reform could effectively incentivise an increase in apprenticeship starts among younger and lower-skilled learners.*

157. *Subject to positive evaluation, the Department must expand the flexi-job apprenticeship scheme with an ambition to support 5,000 apprentices on the scheme by 2025. The Department must maintain a particular focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to share apprentices. This will help ease pressure on SMEs by removing the requirement for a full 12-month training commitment. The Department must continue to work closely with trade unions, employers and other stakeholders to ensure fair pay and just terms and conditions for apprenticeships.*

6 A baccalaureate model at post-16?

A baccalaureate education model

158. One of our inquiry's terms of reference was to consider the merits of a baccalaureate model at post-16. We took written and oral evidence on this area, and visited Tonbridge Grammar School, which has chosen to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

159. A baccalaureate refers to a qualification model with a broad and rounded set of required subjects. There is no single model, with a number of countries having post-16 curricula which could be broadly described as 'baccalaureate-style'.²⁴⁴ Benefits of a baccalaureate model can include curriculum breadth, continued study of maths and the native language up to age 18, and emphasis on developing key employability skills such as communication, critical thinking and interdisciplinary thinking.²⁴⁵

160. The International Baccalaureate (IB) is one of the main such qualifications, with IB programmes delivered in over 5,000 schools in over 150 countries. At post-16, there are two programmes, the Diploma Programme (IBDP), and the Careers Programme (IBCP), both of which are two-year post-16 programmes. There are also IB programmes for younger pupils aged 3–16.²⁴⁶ The IB is currently taken by relatively small numbers in England—there were around 3,500 entries for the IBDP in England in summer 2021.²⁴⁷

161. The IBDP is approximately equivalent to a five A level study programme. Students must take range of six subjects, including literature and language, a foreign language, humanities, sciences and mathematics and an elective subject. Students also take a skills developing 'Core' comprising theory of knowledge, a 4,000-word extended essay, and wider out of classroom 'Creativity, Activity and Service' learning which is required but not formally graded. The IB Careers Programme (IBCP) consists of a career-related qualification—typically an Applied General Qualification such as a BTEC—a minimum of two Diploma subjects, and a career-related Core.²⁴⁸

The International Baccalaureate Careers Programme (IBCP)

162. We heard from several IBCP providers who spoke enthusiastically of the programme's combination of rigour and accessibility, and ability to support learners to develop both vocational and academic skills.²⁴⁹ Kate Grieg, Chief Executive of the Coastal Academies Trust, told us that the IBCP "has all the things that we want to talk about in terms of education and politics: skills, knowledge, a flexible curriculum [...] different pathways

244 Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))

245 Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#)); The Royal Harbour Academy ([FPQ0025](#)); IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); Dane Court Grammar School ([FPQ0054](#)); Institute of Directors ([FPQ0087](#)); Ryde School With Upper Chine ([FPQ0090](#)); International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#)); Lord Willetts ([FPQ0101](#))

246 International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

247 Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#)); As a comparison, there were 756,230 A-level [entries](#) in 2021.

248 International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

249 The Royal Harbour Academy ([FPQ0025](#)); [Q228](#) [Kate Grieg]

for the students that they can go through to prepare them for university, work or apprenticeships.”²⁵⁰ A destinations survey for the 2019 IBCP cohort found that 56% of students progressed to higher education, 19% to employment and 11% to an apprenticeship.²⁵¹

163. A group of 24 schools in Kent have chosen to adopt the IBCP.²⁵² We heard that it has “flourished” there,²⁵³ having been introduced to support local aspirations of economic regeneration and employability.²⁵⁴ The IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA), described the IBCP as “a key policy in the attempt to raise performance, aspirations and life prospects of students attending non selective sixth forms.”²⁵⁵ Kate Grieg told us that the IBCP has had “a massive effect on our schools in all the criteria that we want to do something about, in terms of coastal deprivation and low aspiration.”²⁵⁶

164. Despite the local successes of the IBCP, the Department has outlined that as part of its level 3 reforms, it plans to withdraw funding for the IBCP, although it will continue to approve the IB Diploma Programme for funding.²⁵⁷ This attracted strong criticism from those delivering or representing the IBCP.²⁵⁸ The IBSCA further noted “a lack of clarity” regarding the proposed withdrawal of funding, telling us that schools are “in limbo” and there has been “a frustratingly limited amount of information from the Department for Education.”²⁵⁹

165. The IB Careers Programme (IBCP) is a broad and flexible post-16 qualification, enabling students to acquire a valuable blend of academic, vocational and employability skills. The IBCP prepares students effectively for a range of progression opportunities. A destinations survey for the 2019 IBCP cohort showed that 56% of students had progressed to higher education, 19% to employment and 11% to an apprenticeship. The IBCP has been particularly successful in Kent, where it has been adopted by 24 schools to support local aspirations of economic regeneration and employability. Despite these successes, the Department does not plan to continue funding the IBCP.

166. *The Department must revisit its decision to withdraw funding for the IB Careers Programme. It should continue to fund this rigorous and accessible qualification, or provide evidence that any replacement will generate improved outcomes.*

250 [Q221](#)

251 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

252 [Q221](#) [Kate Grieg]; IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#))

253 International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

254 [Q221](#) [Kate Grieg] Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); International baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

255 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#))

256 [Q237](#)

257 Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Government consultation response](#), July 2021

258 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); Dane Court Grammar School ([FPQ0054](#)); Impington International College ([FPQ0065](#)); Ryde School With Upper Chine ([FPQ0090](#)); [Q221](#) [Kate Grieg]; [Q237](#) [Kate Grieg]

259 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#))

A baccalaureate model for England?

167. Recent reports have examined the benefits of introducing a broad, baccalaureate-style education model at post-16 in England.²⁶⁰ The Prime Minister has previously raised the possibility of introducing a ‘British Baccalaureate’.²⁶¹ This was one of the central recommendations of the Times Education Commission, on which Skills Minister Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP served as a voluntary member (prior to his Ministerial appointment).²⁶²

168. The average number of A levels taken by a student is just 2.67,²⁶³ and the practice of completing 4 A levels has increasingly become rare, driven at least in part by 16–19 funding pressures.²⁶⁴ T Levels, the new technical qualification, are an even narrower pathway, as students take a single, large and highly-specialised, qualification.²⁶⁵

169. A baccalaureate model could help address the increasing narrowness of the post-16 curriculum in England. England is an international outlier in the extent to which students are required to specialise post-16,²⁶⁶ and indeed Lord Willets told us that “we are going in the wrong direction” in terms of curriculum breadth.²⁶⁷ Tom Bewick, Chief Executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, highlighted that for some years education policy has been tending in a direction “completely opposite to some of the core underlying principles of the international baccalaureate.” He further argued that the narrowness of the post-16 curriculum has exacerbated the challenge of ensuring young people leave education with a balance of academic and vocational skills.²⁶⁸

170. The evidence we received on the wider introduction of a baccalaureate model at post-16 was mixed. Ofqual emphasised that “it would be essential to be clear that a radical reform to qualifications could actually address whatever problems were perceived in current qualifications, without creating new and unintended problems.”²⁶⁹ The National Education Union similarly told us that that “there needs to be agreement on the definition of the problem that it [the Baccalaureate] is meant to solve [...] determining whether it is the best way of solving that problem [...] wide-ranging reform needs careful and more prolonged consideration.”²⁷⁰ The Edge Foundation suggested that a Royal Commission or other cross-party body could be created to take a considered look across the qualifications landscape.²⁷¹

171. There was, however, notable acknowledgement of, and support for, the benefits of a broader, more holistic post-16 curriculum, in which learners could have greater flexibility to mix academic and vocational qualifications.²⁷² We also heard how an ambitious post-

260 Times Education Commission, [Bringing out the best](#), June 2022; EDSK, [Re-assessing the future \(Part 2\)](#), April 2021

261 The Times, [British baccalaureate among Sunak education policy reforms](#), October 2022. As education is devolved, titling this qualification as a ‘British’ baccalaureate would not strictly be accurate.

262 HC Deb, [Vol 717, Col 896](#), 6 July 2022

263 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))

264 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); [Q189](#) [Martin Said]

265 Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) ([FPQ0058](#)); Ada. National College for Digital Skills ([FPQ0083](#))

266 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); University of Oxford ([FPQ0091](#)); OCR Examinations Board ([FPQ0095](#)); Lord Willetts ([FPQ0101](#))

267 [Q54](#)

268 [Q162](#)

269 Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))

270 National Education Union ([FPQ0082](#))

271 Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#))

272 The University of Sheffield ([FPQ0014](#)); Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#)); The Royal Harbour Academy ([FPQ0025](#)); EDSK ([FPQ0030](#)); The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#)); ASCL ([FPQ0056](#)); Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#)); [Q132](#) [David Gallagher]

16 curriculum offer could integrate valuable opportunities such as civic participation, recognition for sports and arts awards, charity and entrepreneurial work, and could integrate essential employability skills such as communication and critical thinking.²⁷³

“Reform fatigue”

172. Overall, there was little appetite for post-16 curriculum system change in the short-term, with evidence highlighting “reform fatigue”,²⁷⁴ and the need for stability and support for schools and colleges post-covid.²⁷⁵ As one college Principal summarised, post-16 has “just been through huge reforms - linear A Levels, T Levels, Standards etc. [...] please leave 16–19 alone.”²⁷⁶ Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair of QA and Be the Business, spoke of the “formidable challenge” of wholesale education reform, suggesting “it is very sensible to adopt a mindset of seeking accelerated evolution that is sustained over time [...] cross-party support here is so important, because of the need for things to happen and be sustained over a period of time, rather than seeking revolution in any one moment.”²⁷⁷

173. The IB Schools and Colleges Association pointed out that the IB is a tried and tested, internationally recognised qualification that has been offered in the UK for over 50 years. It argued that this gives the qualification “a head start”, over any new baccalaureate, and that “the creation of a ‘UK’ baccalaureate would excessively complicate the educational landscape”.²⁷⁸ Tom Bewick, CEO of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, similarly suggested that it could be possible to “flex up the existing system to potentially achieve the same aims as a baccalaureate”²⁷⁹, arguing that “we do not have to completely reinvent the wheel”.²⁸⁰

Funding a baccalaureate

174. We heard that the IB is a more expensive programme to run than for example, a 3 A level offer, as it requires schools and colleges to provide guided learning hours for six subjects.²⁸¹ The Department’s large programme funding uplift provides additional funding of up to 20% for those taking a ‘large programme’ such as 4 or more A levels, or the IB Diploma.²⁸² However, we heard that the uplift does not fully recognise the increased level of spending by the schools undertaking the IB,²⁸³ which may disincentivise schools from offering it.²⁸⁴ Kate Grieg outlined that “state schools that do not have a massive amount of money” offer the IB “because it is the right thing to do”, but warned that without a further post-16 funding uplift, the IB “is in jeopardy.”²⁸⁵

273 Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#)); Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([FPQ0042](#)); ASCL ([FPQ0056](#))

274 [Q167](#) [Tom Bewick]

275 [Q127](#) [Dr Morrison Coulthard]

276 Cirencester College ([FPQ0001](#))

277 [Q57](#)

278 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#))

279 ([Q152](#))

280 ([Q126](#)); ([Q140](#))

281 International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#)); [Q221](#) [Richard Markham]; [Q221](#) [Kate Grieg]

282 Department for Education, [Guidance: 16 to 19 funding: large programme uplift](#), January 2023

283 Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#)); IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

284 Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#))

285 [Q221](#); [Q254](#)

175. On the other hand, Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, told us that “the UK is quite favourably positioned when it comes to both financial resources [...] Many other countries deliver those IB programmes with a lot less resource. It is really, I think, more a question of effectiveness of resource utilisation”.²⁸⁶

16–19 funding

176. In January 2023, the Department announced an increase to 16–19 funding worth an additional £125 million for the 2023/24 academic year. This is split between £85 million for a 2.2% increase in the 16–19 base rate of funding—taking it up to £4,642 per student—and £40m for subject specific funding, targeted at engineering, construction and digital subjects. This funding is part of the £1.6 billion for further education announced at the 2021 Spending Review: it is in addition to the extra £291m announced for 16–19 education in 2021 to 2022, and the extra £400 million provided in the year prior.²⁸⁷ The sector has welcomed the rate rise, but noted that a 2.2% rise is outstripped by inflation.²⁸⁸

177. The Institute for Fiscal Studies’ (IFS) annual report on education spending described colleges and sixth forms as being “in a particularly difficult position at present”, outlining that while an extra £2.3 billion was provided at recent spending reviews, this “will only partially reverse the large cuts that took place up to 2020.” The IFS highlights that colleges and sixth forms have seen a long-term decline in spending per student relative to schools, and are in a particularly difficult position, having seen larger cuts than other areas of education after 2010.²⁸⁹

178. Whereas many other countries insist on students covering a broad and balanced curriculum up to age 18, England is an international outlier in the narrowness of its upper secondary education. The average number of A levels taken by a student is just 2.67, and T Levels, the new technical qualification, offer an even more narrow and specialised route.

179. A baccalaureate model offers a broad and ambitious curriculum, enabling students to develop skills and knowledge across a wide range of disciplines. It also places important emphasis on holistic, extracurricular learning. Whilst there is little appetite for a major system change in this space, there needs to be proper research into the benefits of a broader approach. The Department must establish an independent expert panel, reflecting a wide range of educational perspectives, to conduct a full and considered review into the possibility of adopting a baccalaureate model in England. To prevent a further narrowing of 16–19 education, the Committee urges the Government to undertake a wholesale review of 16–19 funding, including offering more targeted support for disadvantaged students.

286 [Q37](#)

287 Department for Education, [Press release: Funding boost to support more young people to progress in education](#), January 2023

288 FE Week, [16–19 base rate to rise by just 2.2% from August 2023](#), January 2023

289 Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2022](#), December 2022

Compulsory maths—does it add up?

180. In January 2023, the Government set out plans to make studying a maths qualification compulsory up to age 18. It highlighted that just half of all 16–19 year olds study maths, despite the growing importance of analytical, data and statistical skills in the modern world.²⁹⁰

181. There are good reasons for promoting the study of maths beyond age 16, and Lord Willetts described the lack of compulsory maths at post-16 as a “real weakness” of the current system.²⁹¹ Higher levels of achievement in mathematics are associated with higher earnings for individuals and increased productivity. The Royal Society highlights increasingly strong demand from employers for mathematical and quantitative skills at all levels of the labour market, but consistent under-supply of these skills.²⁹²

182. England is unusual among comparative economies in not requiring the study of maths beyond 16. An international comparison of 24 countries identified that England, Wales and Northern Ireland had the lowest levels of participation in upper secondary mathematics, and were the only countries in which fewer than 20% of upper secondary students study maths (excluding those resitting GCSE maths).²⁹³

183. A level maths is nonetheless the most popular A level subject in England, with over 88,000 entries in 2022.²⁹⁴ Students can also take a level 3 core maths qualification which offers valuable real-world, applied maths, including financial topics. However, a relatively limited number of schools and colleges currently offer core maths, and there were just 11,791 entries in 2020.²⁹⁵ The Royal Society has argued that all students should have the opportunity to study core maths, although it outlined that this would need to be underpinned by additional funding, and professional development to enable teachers to deliver it with confidence.²⁹⁶

184. In 2021, 69% of students achieved a level 2 (GCSE equivalent) maths qualification by age 16. With retakes compulsory for those not achieving a GCSE pass grade, this rises to 79% of students achieving level 2 maths by age 19. However, of those students who did not achieve level 2 maths by age 16, just under one in three (31%) had managed to achieve it by age 19.²⁹⁷ In our evidence session examining the Government’s proposals for compulsory maths up to 18, we heard that learners are “doing GCSE resits again and again”, which can result in alienation and disengagement.²⁹⁸

185. Making maths compulsory up to age 18 would present significant challenges in recruiting sufficient maths teachers, in what is a longstanding shortage area.²⁹⁹ According to the National Foundation for Educational Research, 45% of schools reported that at least ‘some’ maths lessons were being taught by non-specialist teachers.³⁰⁰ This year’s

290 UK Government, [Press release: Prime Minister sets ambition of maths to 18 in speech](#), January 2023

291 [Q54](#)

292 The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#))

293 Nuffield Foundation, [Is the UK an outlier in upper secondary mathematics education?](#), December 2010

294 FFT education datalab, [Which A-Level subjects are the most popular?](#), August 2022

295 Nuffield Foundation and University of Leeds, [The early take-up of Core Maths: successes and challenges](#), September 2020

296 The Royal Society and the British Academy, [Joint statement on Core Maths qualifications](#), January 2022

297 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2020/21: Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25](#), April 2022

298 [Qq1–2](#) [Sir Martin Taylor, Niamh Sweeney]

299 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#)); International Baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))

300 National Foundation for Educational Research, [Teacher supply and shortages](#), November 2022

recruitment target for maths teachers was missed, with the 2022 Initial Teacher Training Census reporting that 90% of its target of 2,040 new secondary maths trainees was achieved (1,844 new entrants).³⁰¹ The National Education Union further notes that the Department has missed its maths recruitment target every year for the last 11 years.³⁰²

186. There is a strong case for improving young people’s mathematical and problem-solving skills. The Government’s proposal to introduce compulsory maths up to 18 is a welcome and ambitious pledge. England is an international outlier in not requiring the study of maths up to 18. There is rising demand from employers for mathematical and quantitative skills at all levels of the labour market, but consistent undersupply of these skills. Society and jobs are likely to become ever more data-driven, meaning that those with poor mathematical skills are at risk of being left behind.

187. Young people should be leaving compulsory education equipped with a portfolio of key mathematical skills such as numeracy, data analysis, financial literacy and statistical reasoning that they will need for the modern world.

188. An A level maths qualification will evidently not be appropriate for all students. A level 3 core maths qualification provides applied, real-world maths skills, including financial skills, and we believe that more students should have the opportunity to study this qualification. The Government should consider a qualification or accreditation in numeracy for those who currently miss out on level 4 grades as an alternative to repeated retakes of GCSE Mathematics.

189. As part of the introduction of compulsory maths up to 18, the Department must convene an independent expert advisory panel to undertake an evidence-based assessment of any changes required to ensure curricula for post-16 maths delivers the practical and applied mathematical skills needed by students, employers and the economy. This needs to take into account a realistic assessment of the proportion of students who might struggle to achieve a grade 4 in GCSE mathematics, and a route for them to continue appropriate studies.

190. There are a number of challenges to be addressed prior to the delivery of this important reform. These include tackling recruitment and retention of specialist maths teachers, and building a stronger foundation of numeracy and mathematical skills and knowledge at GCSE and below. Addressing these issues is a pre-requisite to ensuring the success of compulsory maths up to 18, and the Department must work with the sector to clearly set out how it plans to do so.

191. Consideration should be given to how focused qualifications in practical numeracy and financial skills could be used to broaden the reach of this initiative and ensure that a wide variety of students can benefit from further study of mathematical skills in context.

301 Department for Education, [Academic Year 2022/23: Initial Teacher Training Census](#), December 2022

302 PoliticsHome, [Teachers Facing Staff Crisis Are “Baffled” By Rishi Sunak’s Maths Plans](#), January 2023

Conclusions and recommendations

The post-16 landscape

1. In 2021, 62% of young people in England had gained a level 3 qualification by age 19, the highest proportion on record. However, with almost 40% of young people not qualified to this level, the nation's ability to tackle skills shortages and address productivity challenges is impeded. (Paragraph 23)
2. *The Department must set an ambitious target for at least three-quarters of young people to be qualified to level 3 by 2030. Within this target there should be a concentrated effort to ensure that skills for the future economy and the skillsets required to meet the net zero and nature gain challenges are prioritised.* (Paragraph 24)

T Levels

3. We strongly welcome the aspiration for T Levels to be a rigorous and ambitious new qualification which will level up our technical education system. T Levels have been developed alongside 250 employers and offer a prestigious, high-quality route for students to gain the skills needed by employers and the economy. (Paragraph 38)
4. The Department's narrative around T Levels has shifted from early emphasis on skilled employment as the qualification's primary outcome. We have heard that this has added complexity for stakeholders. However, we fully support the Department's decision to award T Levels UCAS points, which will enable students to keep their progression options open. (Paragraph 39)
5. There remains some uncertainty around progression options for T Level students. For example, we heard that T Level students are unlikely to have acquired the occupational competency and experience needed to begin a level 4 apprenticeship. While Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) will offer an important progression route for T Level students, their development has lagged behind T Levels, and will not be fully rolled out until 2025. It is encouraging that 134 higher education providers have indicated T Levels will be suitable for entry onto a minimum of one course. However, T Level students may find they are eligible for a very limited range of higher education courses due to the specialised nature of their qualification. This may not be obvious to the student until it is too late. (Paragraph 40)
6. *We have heard that some universities are requiring an A level alongside a T Level for entry onto degree programmes. Department guidance on whether an A level can feasibly be studied alongside a T Level appears inconsistent, and the Department must clearly set out its position on this. The Department must work with universities to ensure they fully appreciate the value of, and commitment required by T Levels and do not therefore specify unreasonable entry requirements such as specific A levels on top of a T level course.* (Paragraph 41)
7. *The Department must work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to clearly map and publish progression opportunities for T Level students.*

This will help reduce uncertainty among students, parents and employers, and will demonstrate how T Levels can provide a springboard to further study, training and work. (Paragraph 42)

8. *The Department must work with the sector to align T Levels with level 4 apprenticeships, for example, developing a bridging course that enables T Level learners to move onto a level 4 apprenticeship. (Paragraph 43)*
9. *The Department must set out how it will incentivise progression from T Levels onto Higher Technical Qualifications, particularly given the key strategic role qualifications at level 4 and 5 play in meeting the nation's skills needs. (Paragraph 44)*
10. *The Department must publish data on the education, apprenticeship, and employment destinations for the first cohort of T Level students at the earliest opportunity. While Department destination measures are usually published two years following the completion of 16–18 study, we recommend the Department fast-track this data, providing an interim picture ahead of the expected official publication in 2024. (Paragraph 45)*
11. T Levels are a rigorous qualification, and this is key to ensuring they equip students with the gold-standard technical skills required by employers and the economy. Nonetheless, we do not think that there is yet the right balance of rigour and accessibility. Early evidence indicates that schools and colleges are setting high entry requirements for T Levels, and we heard that as a result, T Levels could be restricted to a small pool of academically gifted students, who have a specific employment goal in mind by age 16. This is a concern, particularly for a programme that has, rightly, attracted over £1 billion of public funding. (Paragraph 53)
12. T Levels offer no pathway to a lower level of qualification for students who might otherwise drop out completely. This makes it a high-risk option for students, particularly in comparison to existing post-16 options such as A levels or Applied General Qualifications, where a learner can drop a subject, or move to a smaller programme, and still gain an accredited, internationally recognised qualification. (Paragraph 56)
13. *The Department must consider the case for micro-accreditation for T Level learners who for whatever reason do not complete their full programme of study. Allowing some form of credentialling for partially completed T Levels would encourage more learners to take them up and allow those who do drop out to gain recognised value from their experience. (Paragraph 57)*
14. Too many learners on the T Level Transition Programme do not progress on to a T Level. The reasons for this are unclear. Only 14% of the first Transition Programme cohort actually progressed to a T Level, and just under half (49%) were able to progress to a level 3 qualification. This is an entirely inadequate rate for a programme whose purpose is to provide a high-quality preparatory route into T Levels. This raises questions as to whether the Transition Programme is fit for purpose, and whether suitable students, who could realistically meet the demands of the full T Level, are being placed on it. (Paragraph 63)

15. *The Department must work with providers to review the Transition Programme to determine why so few learners progress onto the full T Level. We would expect an effectively functioning Transition Programme to support at least half of learners to progress to the full T Level, with virtually all Transition Programme learners able to move onto a level 3 qualification by the end of the year.* (Paragraph 64)
16. *The Department must publish annual statistics on the conversion rate from the Transition Programme onto the full T Level, providing a breakdown of what level of study learners move onto, and whether any drop out of education altogether.* (Paragraph 65)
17. *The Department must publish data on the Transition Programme and T Level drop-out rate, broken down by key student characteristics. This should track whether students who took the Transition Programme have increased likelihood of dropping out of the T Level.* (Paragraph 66)
18. Although the Department has invested in communications and marketing to promote T Levels, we heard that its efforts fall short of what is needed to effectively raise local and national awareness of T Levels among employers, students and parents. Indeed, the Chief Executive of NCFE told us that “the odd lapel badge aside, there has been very little done in terms of sector-specific, employer-backed campaigns that will raise its profile.” (Paragraph 72)
19. Recognition of T Levels remains low. If unaddressed, this will impede the success of T Levels. A 2021 Department survey showed that just under a quarter (24%) of employers were aware of T Levels. Other research indicates that 63% of young people had not heard of T Levels. Within this, there was significant and concerning regional variation—49% of young people in London had heard of T Levels, compared to 29% of young people in Yorkshire and the Humber. This is a potential risk to the levelling up agenda. (Paragraph 73)
20. *The Department must improve recognition of T Levels among students, parents and employers through a T Level awareness campaign that raises the profile of the new qualification at both a national and local level.* (Paragraph 74)
21. *The Department must monitor the success of its T Level marketing and communications strategy through the publication of annual statistics—at both national and regional level—on T Level awareness among young people and employers.* (Paragraph 75)
22. *The Department must work with small and medium-sized businesses as well as with the network of careers hubs supported by the Careers and Enterprise Company to promote T Levels to a wider audience.* (Paragraph 76)
23. Regional variation in economic activity remains a significant obstacle to the success of T Levels. Evidence to our inquiry described T Levels as “a city-centric initiative”, and “the ‘urban qualification’ “. There is a risk that young people living in or near more affluent urban areas with access to a range of different sectors and industries will be the main beneficiaries of T Levels, while those from rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas will be left behind. If unaddressed, the lack of equitable access to placements will undermine the Government’s levelling up ambitions, and hinder its ability to tackle regional and national skills shortages. (Paragraph 85)

24. The Department has not published its own forecast of the number of industry placements that might be required once T Levels are fully rolled out. A clear acknowledgement of the scale of the challenge is needed, particularly as we have heard that the numbers of T Level placements required could reach 250,000, with up to 43,500 placements needed in the engineering and manufacturing sector alone by 2025. The sheer scale of this undertaking poses a threat to the success of T Levels, which rests on the availability of sufficient high-quality placements. (Paragraph 89)
25. *The Department must publish forecasts on potential industry placement demands and shortfalls as soon as possible, at both national and regional level.* (Paragraph 90)
26. *Scaling up T Level placements could have inadvertent negative consequences for other parts of the skills agenda by reducing employers' willingness to continue with existing programmes such as apprenticeships, and supported internships which also require placements. The Department must convene an employer-led industry placement taskforce, with particular emphasis on incorporating the views of small and medium-sized enterprises and careers hubs, to draw up a strategic plan for tackling this issue.* (Paragraph 91)
27. We welcome the Department's introduction of a hybrid model for T Level placements in certain subjects. This could help reduce the travel burden for students, and widen access to placements. It also reflects the preferences of some employers who called for greater placement flexibility to match the increased uptake of hybrid working patterns. However, the Department must take great care to ensure that this reform does not dilute the workplace component of T Levels, or detract from the overall student experience. (Paragraph 101)
28. The evidence we have so far from the roll out of T Levels reveals major concerns that must be addressed as the programme moves forward. Around one-fifth of the first T Level cohort are estimated to have dropped out. Concerns have been raised that T Levels are less accessible and less manageable for some groups, including lower attaining students, ethnic minority students and students with SEND. On top of this, despite T Levels being developed with the input of 250 leading employers, the DfE's own research shows that almost two-thirds of employers are not yet interested in providing a T Level replacement, and that where interest exists it appears to have declined. There are also many areas of the country where there are not yet enough employers near to colleges in regional, rural and left behind areas to accommodate learners on T Level placements. The Department must address these concerns as a matter of urgency to ensure the success of the programme. (Paragraph 102)
29. *The Department must closely monitor how learner satisfaction, attainment and progression for those undertaking hybrid T Level placements compares with those undertaking fully in-person placements. Evaluations on this should be published annually.* (Paragraph 103)
30. *Up until July 2022, employers could claim £1,000 for every T Level industry placement. The Department must reinstate this incentive for small and medium enterprises, and microbusinesses, in order to facilitate their participation with T Levels.* (Paragraph 104)

Applied General Qualifications

31. We welcome the Department’s ambition to simplify and declutter the post-16 landscape by tackling the 5,000 plus qualifications at level 3 and below with low or no enrolments. This will create a system that is clearer and easier to navigate, giving learners and employers confidence that qualifications are rigorous and high-quality. Nonetheless, the speed and scope of the Department’s reforms risks inadvertently narrowing opportunities for young people to progress and succeed. (Paragraph 135)
32. We are disappointed that the Department’s equalities impact assessment identifies that students with special educational needs and disabilities, Asian ethnic groups, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and males are disproportionately likely to be affected by the Department’s qualification reforms. The Department’s ‘expectation’ that its reforms will be “generally positive” for these groups is an insubstantial premise on which to defund a significant number of tried and tested Applied General Qualifications. It does not offer the evidence-based assurance that we would expect for a reform of this magnitude. (Paragraph 136)
33. The Department’s equalities impact assessment identifies that some students with protected characteristics may be disadvantaged by the reforms as they may no longer be able to progress to a level 3 qualification. We heard that this could result in a rise in 16–18 year olds who are NEET (not in education, employment, or training). While the Department outlines it expects this number to be “relatively small”, it remains unclear how many students might be affected. (Paragraph 137)
34. T Levels are a rigorous technical qualification which will offer the ideal pathway for many students, but they will not be the right choice for all learners. Applied General Qualifications serve a distinct and different purpose to T Levels, and play an important role in promoting social mobility by widening access to, and participation in, higher education and skilled employment. (Paragraph 138)
35. We have been told that demand for T level placements could reach up to 250,000 placements. The Department’s own research has concerningly identified that fewer employers were interested in providing T Level placements in 2021 than in 2019 (30% vs. 36%). And almost two-thirds (63%) of employers were currently not interested in offering T Level placements. This puts students at risk of having neither a T Level option, nor an Applied General option, which is a threat to the pipeline of skills needed by employers and the economy. (Paragraph 139)
36. *The ability of businesses to offer sufficient, high-quality industry placements, and a clear track record of T Level success as well as evidenced improvement in equalities outcomes, should be prerequisites to scrapping further Applied General Qualifications on the basis of ‘overlap’.* (Paragraph 140)
37. *The Department must place a moratorium on defunding Applied General Qualifications. Tried and tested Applied General Qualifications should only be withdrawn as and when there is a robust evidence base proving that T Levels are demonstrably more effective in preparing students for progression, meeting industry needs and promoting social mobility.* (Paragraph 141)

Post-16 apprenticeships

38. *The 19% increase in apprenticeship starts among under-19s between 2020/21 and 2021/22 is a positive step forward. However, all too often older, more highly qualified workers are being prioritised for apprenticeships at the expense of young people trying to get their foot on the first rung of the careers ladder. For apprenticeships to play their full part in the ladder of opportunity, they need to reach both groups. (Paragraph 155)*
39. *The Department must set out how it will address the long-term decline in apprenticeship starts among young people, and ensure apprenticeships are the gold-standard 'earn and learn' option for school and college leavers. The Department must commission an independent review to examine possible mechanisms to achieve this, for example, considering ways in which levy reform could effectively incentivise an increase in apprenticeship starts among younger and lower-skilled learners. (Paragraph 156)*
40. *Subject to positive evaluation, the Department must expand the flexi-job apprenticeship scheme with an ambition to support 5,000 apprentices on the scheme by 2025. The Department must maintain a particular focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to share apprentices. This will help ease pressure on SMEs by removing the requirement for a full 12-month training commitment. The Department must continue to work closely with trade unions, employers and other stakeholders to ensure fair pay and just terms and conditions for apprenticeships. (Paragraph 157)*

A baccalaureate model at post-16?

41. The IB Careers Programme (IBCP) is a broad and flexible post-16 qualification, enabling students to acquire a valuable blend of academic, vocational and employability skills. The IBCP prepares students effectively for a range of progression opportunities. A destinations survey for the 2019 IBCP cohort showed that 56% of students had progressed to higher education, 19% to employment and 11% to an apprenticeship. The IBCP has been particularly successful in Kent, where it has been adopted by 24 schools to support local aspirations of economic regeneration and employability. Despite these successes, the Department does not plan to continue funding the IBCP. (Paragraph 165)
42. *The Department must revisit its decision to withdraw funding for the IB Careers Programme. It should continue to fund this rigorous and accessible qualification, or provide evidence that any replacement will generate improved outcomes. (Paragraph 166)*
43. Whereas many other countries insist on students covering a broad and balanced curriculum up to age 18, England is an international outlier in the narrowness of its upper secondary education. The average number of A levels taken by a student is just 2.67, and T Levels, the new technical qualification, offer an even more narrow and specialised route. (Paragraph 178)
44. *A baccalaureate model offers a broad and ambitious curriculum, enabling students to develop skills and knowledge across a wide range of disciplines. It also places important emphasis on holistic, extracurricular learning. Whilst there is little appetite for a major system change in this space, there needs to be proper research into the benefits*

of a broader approach. The Department must establish an independent expert panel, reflecting a wide range of educational perspectives, to conduct a full and considered review into the possibility of adopting a baccalaureate model in England. To prevent a further narrowing of 16–19 education, the Committee urges the Government to undertake a wholesale review of 16–19 funding, including offering more targeted support for disadvantaged students. (Paragraph 179)

45. There is a strong case for improving young people’s mathematical and problem-solving skills. The Government’s proposal to introduce compulsory maths up to 18 is a welcome and ambitious pledge. England is an international outlier in not requiring the study of maths up to 18. There is rising demand from employers for mathematical and quantitative skills at all levels of the labour market, but consistent undersupply of these skills. Society and jobs are likely to become ever more data-driven, meaning that those with poor mathematical skills are at risk of being left behind. (Paragraph 186)
46. Young people should be leaving compulsory education equipped with a portfolio of key mathematical skills such as numeracy, data analysis, financial literacy and statistical reasoning that they will need for the modern world. (Paragraph 187)
47. An A level maths qualification will evidently not be appropriate for all students. A level 3 core maths qualification provides applied, real-world maths skills, including financial skills, and we believe that more students should have the opportunity to study this qualification. The Government should consider a qualification or accreditation in numeracy for those who currently miss out on level 4 grades as an alternative to repeated retakes of GCSE Mathematics. (Paragraph 188)
48. *As part of the introduction of compulsory maths up to 18, the Department must convene an independent expert advisory panel to undertake an evidence-based assessment of any changes required to ensure curricula for post-16 maths delivers the practical and applied mathematical skills needed by students, employers and the economy. This needs to take into account a realistic assessment of the proportion of students who might struggle to achieve a grade 4 in GCSE mathematics, and a route for them to continue appropriate studies. (Paragraph 189)*
49. *There are a number of challenges to be addressed prior to the delivery of this important reform. These include tackling recruitment and retention of specialist maths teachers, and building a stronger foundation of numeracy and mathematical skills and knowledge at GCSE and below. Addressing these issues is a pre-requisite to ensuring the success of compulsory maths up to 18, and the Department must work with the sector to clearly set out how it plans to do so. (Paragraph 190)*
50. *Consideration should be given to how focused qualifications in practical numeracy and financial skills could be used to broaden the reach of this initiative and ensure that a wide variety of students can benefit from further study of mathematical skills in context. (Paragraph 191)*

Formal minutes

Wednesday 19 April 2023

Members present:

Robin Walker, in the Chair

Caroline Ansell

Flick Drummond

Anna Firth

Nick Fletcher

Kim Johnson

Andrew Lewer

Ian Mearns

Mohammed Yasin

Report consideration

Draft Report (*The future of post-16 qualifications*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 191 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

[Adjourned till 9 May 2023 at 9.30 am.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 30 March 2022

The Rt Hon. the Lord Baker of Dorking CH; Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary General, OECD

[Q1–40](#)

Wednesday 27 April 2022

The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett; The Rt Hon. the Lord Willetts; Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair, QA Group

[Q41–77](#)

Tuesday 17 May 2022

Jane Gratton, Head of People Policy, British Chambers of Commerce; **Lisa Silcock**, Interim Group HR Manager, Naylor Industries PLC; **Chris Pont**, Founder and Chair, IJYI Ltd; **Peter Cadwallader**, Managing Director, The Port Hotel; **Andy Webb**, Managing Director, Skysmart; **Matthew McCarrick**, Director, McCarrick Construction Ltd; **Steven Kearney**, Director, SKARCHITECTS

[Q78–122](#)

Tuesday 12 July 2022

Kirsti Lord, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Colleges; **Tom Bewick**, CEO, Federation of Awarding Bodies; **David Gallagher**, Chief Executive, NCFE; **Mrs Ruth Perry**, Representative, Special Educational Consortium and Senior Policy Manager, Natspec; **Dr Lisa Morrison-Coulthard**, Research Director, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

[Q123–186](#)

Tuesday 18 October 2022

Yiannis Koursis, Principal and CEO, Barnsley College; **Andria Singlehurst**, Director of Learning, Aspirations Academies Trusts; **Martin Said**, Instructional Lead XP Trust, founding teacher at the first XP School in Doncaster, XP School Doncaster; **Tina Götschi**, Sixth Form Principal, Ada, National College for Digital Skills

[Q187–219](#)

Tuesday 8 November 2022

Alice Barnard, Chief Executive, Edge Foundation; **Tom Richmond**, Director, EDSK; **Richard Markham**, CEO, IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA); **Kate Grieg**, CEO, Coastal Academies Trust, King Ethelbert School

[Q220–255](#)

Tuesday 13 December 2022

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Department for Education; **Sue Lovelock**, Director of Professional and Technical Education, Department for Education

[Q256–316](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FPQ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 AQA ([FPQ0033](#))
- 2 ASCL ([FPQ0056](#))
- 3 Ada, National College for Digital Skills ([FPQ0083](#))
- 4 Anonymised ([FPQ0003](#))
- 5 Association for Project Management ([FPQ0035](#))
- 6 Association of Colleges ([FPQ0120](#))
- 7 Association of Colleges ([FPQ0080](#))
- 8 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([FPQ0008](#))
- 9 Bailey, Mr Nicholas (EPIC Business Support Officer (previously; Vice Principal in FE, National Manager for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities for the Skills Funding Agency), University of Plymouth) ([FPQ0002](#))
- 10 Baker Dearing Educational Trust ([FPQ0108](#))
- 11 British Association for Shooting & Conservation ([FPQ0051](#))
- 12 British Chambers of Commerce ([FPQ0111](#))
- 13 Brunert, Jacob (Student, University of Sheffield) ([FPQ0032](#))
- 14 CBI ([FPQ0109](#))
- 15 Capital City College Group ([FPQ0078](#))
- 16 Chartered Management Institute ([FPQ0034](#))
- 17 Cirencester College ([FPQ0001](#))
- 18 Cirencester College ([FPQ0004](#))
- 19 City & Guilds ([FPQ0013](#))
- 20 Construction Industry Training Board ([FPQ0057](#))
- 21 Council for Disabled Children ([FPQ0110](#))
- 22 Council of Deans of Health ([FPQ0018](#))
- 23 Coventry University Group ([FPQ0052](#))
- 24 Crucis Designs Ltd ([FPQ0116](#))
- 25 Dane Court Grammar School ([FPQ0054](#))
- 26 Department for Education ([FPQ0123](#))
- 27 Department for Education ([FPQ0122](#))
- 28 Department for Education ([FPQ0105](#))
- 29 Disability Rights UK ([FPQ0114](#))
- 30 EDSK ([FPQ0030](#))
- 31 Edge Foundation ([FPQ0021](#))
- 32 Energy & Utility Skills ([FPQ0036](#))

- 33 Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) ([FPQ0086](#))
- 34 Engineering Professors' Council ([FPQ0044](#))
- 35 EngineeringUK ([FPQ0049](#))
- 36 Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0119](#))
- 37 Federation of Awarding Bodies ([FPQ0055](#))
- 38 Finlayson, Katie ([FPQ0012](#))
- 39 Gatsby Charitable Foundation ([FPQ0076](#))
- 40 GuildHE ([FPQ0059](#))
- 41 Holmes, Mr John (FE Lecturer and course lead for Land and Wildlife Level 3 qualifications, Easton College) ([FPQ0084](#))
- 42 IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) ([FPQ0031](#))
- 43 IHAV ([FPQ0015](#))
- 44 Impington International College ([FPQ0065](#))
- 45 Incorporated Society of Musicians ([FPQ0041](#))
- 46 Ingeus ([FPQ0075](#))
- 47 Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education ([FPQ0071](#))
- 48 Institute of Directors ([FPQ0087](#))
- 49 Institute of Physics ([FPQ0088](#))
- 50 International baccalaureate ([FPQ0099](#))
- 51 Landex ([FPQ0089](#))
- 52 Learning and Work Institute ([FPQ0107](#))
- 53 Linking London, hosted by Birkbeck, University of London ([FPQ0007](#))
- 54 London Councils ([FPQ0011](#))
- 55 London South Bank University (LSBU Group) ([FPQ0022](#))
- 56 McDonald, Miss Nicola (Director of the International Baccalaureate Programme, The Abbey School) ([FPQ0019](#))
- 57 MillionPlus ([FPQ0039](#))
- 58 NACRO ([FPQ0045](#))
- 59 NAHT ([FPQ0017](#))
- 60 NASUWT ([FPQ0093](#))
- 61 NCFE ([FPQ0050](#))
- 62 NOCN ([FPQ0009](#))
- 63 National Citizen Service Trust ([FPQ0077](#))
- 64 National Deaf Children's Society ([FPQ0070](#))
- 65 National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) ([FPQ0058](#))
- 66 National Education Union ([FPQ0082](#))
- 67 National Foundation for Educational Research ([FPQ0068](#))
- 68 National Hair & Beauty Federation ([FPQ0081](#))
- 69 National Union of Students ([FPQ0043](#))

- 70 Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([FPQ0042](#))
- 71 Northern Skills Network ([FPQ0063](#))
- 72 Nottingham Trent University ([FPQ0067](#))
- 73 OCR Examinations Board ([FPQ0095](#))
- 74 Office of the Children's Commissioner ([FPQ0112](#))
- 75 Ofqual ([FPQ0106](#))
- 76 Oldham College ([FPQ0104](#))
- 77 Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group Education and Employment Sub-Committee ([FPQ0092](#))
- 78 Pearson ([FPQ0079](#))
- 79 Petitions Committee ([FPQ0121](#))
- 80 QA Group ([FPQ0115](#))
- 81 Royal Mencap Society ([FPQ0072](#))
- 82 Royal Society of Biology; Association for Science Education; Institute of Physics; and Royal Society of Chemistry ([FPQ0069](#))
- 83 Ryde School With Upper Chine ([FPQ0090](#))
- 84 Sandwell College ([FPQ0047](#))
- 85 Select Committee Engagement Team ([FPQ0118](#))
- 86 Sixth Form Colleges Association ([FPQ0038](#))
- 87 Socialist Educational Association ([FPQ0037](#))
- 88 St Edmunds Society ([FPQ0005](#))
- 89 St. Leonards School ([FPQ0061](#))
- 90 Sutton Trust ([FPQ0094](#))
- 91 TUC ([FPQ0085](#))
- 92 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([FPQ0097](#))
- 93 The APPG on Hong Kong ([FPQ0062](#))
- 94 The Bell Foundation ([FPQ0020](#))
- 95 The Brilliant Club ([FPQ0010](#))
- 96 The Home Educators' Qualifications Association (HEQA) ([FPQ0048](#))
- 97 The Joint Council for Qualifications ([FPQ0074](#))
- 98 The Local Government Association ([FPQ0073](#))
- 99 The Prince's Trust ([FPQ0064](#))
- 100 The Royal Harbour Academy ([FPQ0025](#))
- 101 The Royal Society ([FPQ0040](#))
- 102 The St Martin's Group ([FPQ0066](#))
- 103 The Traveller Movement ([FPQ0028](#))
- 104 The University of Sheffield ([FPQ0014](#))
- 105 Tonbridge Grammar ([FPQ0024](#))
- 106 UK Hospitality ([FPQ0117](#))

- 107 Ufi VocTech Trust ([FPQ0060](#))
- 108 Universities UK ([FPQ0027](#))
- 109 University Alliance ([FPQ0096](#))
- 110 University and College Union ([FPQ0026](#))
- 111 University of Cumbria ([FPQ0098](#))
- 112 University of Oxford ([FPQ0091](#))
- 113 University of the Arts London Awarding Body ([FPQ0029](#))
- 114 West Suffolk College; Suffolk One; and Abbeygate Sixth Form ([FPQ0102](#))
- 115 West Yorkshire Learning Providers ([FPQ0023](#))
- 116 Weston College of Further and Higher Education ([FPQ0016](#))
- 117 Willetts, Lord ([FPQ0101](#))
- 118 Youth Futures Foundation ([FPQ0053](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity	HC 56
2nd Report	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it	HC 57
1st Special	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 273
2nd Special	Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 645
3rd Special	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 854

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it	HC 85
2nd Report	Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual	HC 512
3rd Report	Strengthening Home Education	HC 84
4th Report	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?	HC 940
1st Special Report	Strengthening Home Education: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 823

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Getting the grades they've earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades	HC 617
2nd Report	Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England	HC 1030

Number	Title	Reference
3rd Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution	HC 278
4th Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Office for Students	HC 1143
1st Special Report	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 668
2nd Special Report	Getting the grades they've earned: COVID-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades: Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 812
3rd Special Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1310