

Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

25th July 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Your positive response to the request made in our letter of June 2023 to pause and review the defunding of applied general qualifications (AGQs) was very warmly welcomed by the students, staff, leaders, and employers that we collectively represent and support.

We wrote to you on the day of your appointment as Secretary of State earlier this month urging you to announce an immediate pause to the defunding of Level 3 qualifications and confirm that students will be able to enrol on all 134 existing applied general qualifications up to and including the 2026/27 academic year.

However, it appears from your statement in parliament yesterday, and the written ministerial statement published today, that there will be no pause to the defunding of applied general qualifications planned for 2025 and 2026. There will only be a pause to the defunding of a small number of technical qualifications planned for 2024.

We are both surprised and deeply concerned by this development. The challenge of planning for September 2025 will not be helped by the proposed *“focused review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below”* due to conclude by the end of 2024. We understand that all 134 applied general qualifications will be within the scope of this review.

This means that schools and colleges will not know what AGQs they can offer in the 2025/26 academic year until December 2024 at the earliest. This will make it extremely difficult to provide effective information, advice and guidance to young people or ensure that the right staff are in place with the right level of training.

You are right to say that *“the sector needs certainty so that it can plan its future delivery”*. But a *“focused review”* of qualifications will not deliver that. Only a meaningful pause to defunding will ensure that qualification reform can be conducted in an orderly way that leaves no young person without a viable pathway.

It is also important that the proposed focused review is conducted in an open and transparent way and involves genuine collaboration with the education sector and employers. Around 280,000 students are studying at least one Level 3 AGQ - the decision about the future of these qualifications is too important to be made behind closed doors.

We urge you to reconsider the plan set out today and confirm that students will be able to enrol on all 134 existing applied general qualifications up to and including the 2026/27 academic year. We share your two central ambitions of enhancing and

spreading opportunity for everyone and growing the economy, and would welcome a meeting to discuss the impact this plan would have on achieving those ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

Pepe Di'lasio
ASCL
General Secretary

Kasim Choudhry BAME
Apprentice Network
Managing Director

Bruce Boughton
Construction and Built
Environment
Education Chair

Ed Hughes
Council of Deans of
Health
Chief Executive

Natalie Melton
Crafts Council
Executive Director

Caroline Norbury
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Daniel Kebede
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Qasim Hussain
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Bill Watkin
Sixth Form Colleges
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Sue Williamson
SSAT (The Schools
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Chief Executive

Jayne Taylor
The Elephant Group
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Jo Grady
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Vivienne Stern
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Laura-Jane Rawlings
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