

Professor Becky Francis CBE

Chair, Curriculum and Assessment Review

Department for Education

20 Great Smith Street

London, SW1P 3BT

19th March 2025

Dear Professor Francis,

We are writing to you as leaders of the organisations that support the *#ProtectStudentChoice: don't scrap BTECs* campaign. Collectively, we represent and support students, staff and leaders in schools, colleges and universities; our coalition also includes a number of employer representative groups.

Applied general qualifications (AGQs) such as BTECs are popular with students, respected by employers and provide a well-established route to higher education or employment – particularly for disadvantaged young people.

We believe that for many students, studying an AGQ (either alongside A levels, or as part of a standalone study programme) will continue to be a more effective way to develop their skills and achieve their ambitions than pursuing an A level or T level-only study programme. There has been widespread support for our campaign to retain AGQs, including from the [previous](#) and [current](#) Education Committees.

We are pleased that the government recently agreed to implement our [recommendations](#) to remove the proposed constraints on combining different types and sizes of qualification, and pause the defunding of AGQs in key subjects such as Applied Science, Health and Social Care, IT, and Engineering for at least another year.

However, we remain concerned about the long-term future of AGQs. Following the recent review of qualifications undertaken by the Department for Education, the government published [guidance](#) on the size and type of level 3 qualifications that will be available in the future.

The guidance is clear that funding will be removed from large AGQs in T level routes. However, this definition of 'large' includes qualifications that we would consider to be medium in size: *"...where learners wish to study a large qualification (of 720 guided learning hours or more), in a T Level route, the T Level should be the main option for them"*.

This would have the effect of removing funding from all diploma-size (2 A level equivalent, 720 GLH) qualifications in T level routes.

As you know, many students successfully combine a diploma-size AGQ with an A level to reach higher education or skilled employment. These qualifications are a very [different size](#) to T levels (that average 1,200 GLH, plus an industry placement of at least 315 hours) and serve a very different purpose.

Although this guidance was published while your review was underway, the government may not revisit it before your review has reported. This will have the effect of 'timing out' diploma-size qualifications in Cycle 1 subjects (e.g. Applied Science, Health and Social Care, IT, and Engineering) as awarding bodies are required to submit new versions of these courses for approval before your review concludes.

We are writing with two requests. First, that your review signals that it sees a role for diploma-sized qualifications in the future and the government should revisit its guidance to allow qualifications of this size to be submitted for approval in T level routes. This would help to ensure that this valuable and well-established pathway is not closed off to young people in the future and does not exacerbate skills shortages in key sectors such as healthcare, digital and engineering.

And second, that your review urges the government to remain open to the idea that extended diploma-size (3 A level equivalent, 1080 GLH) qualifications should continue to be available to young people in the future, even in T level routes. Protecting student choice in this area is important, as many young people (for a range of [very well documented reasons](#)) will not be able to access or successfully complete a T level.

There are currently 63,840 16 to 19 year olds [studying](#) an AGQ of 720 GLH or more in a T level route. Removing these qualifications will lead to many students disengaging from education and increase the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

It is perfectly possible for applied qualifications and T levels to co-exist in the future qualifications landscape and it is essential for social mobility and economic growth that they do.

We were pleased to read in your interim report that the next stage of the review will: *"...explore what qualifications should sit alongside A levels and T Levels at level 3 to provide learners with an effective, comprehensive offer that is simple to understand. In doing this, we will consider how different qualifications can be combined to build robust and high-quality study programmes for learners".*

With that in mind, we hope that you will consider our two requests and we would be happy to discuss them with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



Pepe Di'lasio
ASCL
General Secretary



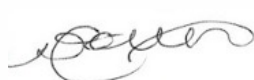
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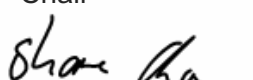
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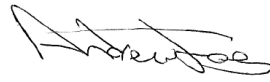
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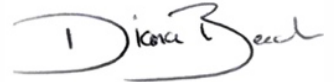
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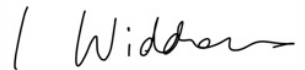
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Martin Webster
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Interim Director



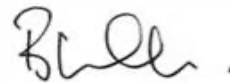
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Mandy Crawford-Lee
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Laura-Jane Rawlings
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cc.

Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister of State (Minister for Skills)