

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP

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

8th October 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

Many congratulations on your appointment. We share your ambition to create a world class 16 to 19 education system that helps every young person to fulfil their potential.

As many young people study applied general qualifications such as BTECs, we are writing to ask that you make an early reassessment of your Department's plans for these valuable Level 3 qualifications.

We are particularly concerned about the proposal to remove funding for the vast majority of BTECs. The plan for T levels and A levels to become the "qualifications of choice" for most young people will leave many students without a viable pathway after their GCSEs, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds; the Department for Education's impact assessment concluded that these students had the most to lose from defunding BTECs.

School and college leaders tell us that for many young people, studying applied general qualifications will continue to be a more effective route to higher education or skilled employment than studying A levels or T levels. The recently reformed BTECs are very popular with students (more than 250,000 young people study these qualifications each year) and they are highly respected by employers and universities. There is deep concern in the education sector that removing the vast majority of BTECs will lead to students taking courses that do not meet their needs, or dropping out of education altogether.

We welcome the introduction of T levels and believe they have a valuable role to play in improving the quality of technical education. But it is not necessary to remove applied general qualifications to make T levels a success. It is perfectly possible for both to co-exist with A levels in the future qualifications landscape.

Fundamentally, BTECs are a different type of qualification that provide a different type of educational experience - one that combines the development of skills with academic learning. A decision to retain this option would be warmly welcomed by students, the education sector and employers, and would greatly benefit social mobility and the economy.

We hope you will take the opportunity to recalibrate your Department's plan to move to a two-route model of A level and T levels and assure us that students will continue to have the choice to study a wide range of applied general qualifications in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Diana Johnson (Co-Chair, APPG on Sixth Form Education)
Jason McCartney (Co-Chair, APPG on Sixth Form Education)

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cc.

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State (Minister for Higher and Further Education)
Alex Burghart MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Skills)
Robin Walker MP, Minister of State (Minister for School Standards)
Baroness Barran MBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System)
Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee