

Campaign summary

September 2021

Background

- Young people in England can currently choose between three types of Level 3 qualification at the age of 16: academic qualifications such as A levels, technical qualifications that lead to a specific occupation, and applied general qualifications such as BTECs that combine the development of practical skills with academic learning.
- In July, the Department for Education [confirmed](#) plans to replace this three-route model with a two-route model of A levels and T levels (a new suite of technical qualifications), where most young people pursue one of these qualifications at the age of 16. As a result, funding for the majority of BTEC qualifications will be removed.

The case to #ProtectStudentChoice

- The [#ProtectStudentChoice campaign](#) coalition of 21 organisations that represent and support staff and students in schools, colleges and universities is deeply concerned about this plan. In our view, it is far too simplistic, and many young people will continue to be better served studying a BTEC rather than an A level or T level-only study programme. The current three-route model works well and should be retained – particularly as BTECs have recently undergone a rigorous process of reform.
- A huge number of young people will be affected by this change. We estimate that at least 30% of the 864,304 16- to 18-year-olds [studying](#) a Level 3 qualification in England are pursuing a BTEC qualification (either alongside A levels or as a standalone study programme) – some **259,291** students. The government plans to start removing funding for BTECs from **2023**.
- Scrapping BTECs will leave many students without a viable pathway at the age of 16 and will hamper progress to higher education or skilled employment. Disadvantaged young people are amongst those with the most to lose from this plan, a conclusion from DfE's own [equalities impact assessment](#): *“those from SEND backgrounds, Asian ethnic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds, and males [are] disproportionately likely to be affected”*.
- BTECs are engines of social mobility. [Research](#) from the Social Market Foundation found that **44%** of white working-class students that enter university studied at least one BTEC and **37%** of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications.
- It is impossible to square the government's stated ambition to 'level up' opportunity with the plan to scrap most BTECs, including all larger versions of the qualification that are deemed to overlap with A levels or T levels (**86%** of respondents to the government's recent [consultation](#) disagreed with the proposal to remove funding for qualifications on this basis).
- The government hopes that scrapping the majority of BTECs will increase the number of students taking its new T level qualifications. But the way to boost the number of students taking a new, untested qualification is not to remove an existing, well-established one that has a fundamentally different purpose.
- BTECs are popular with students, respected by employers and provide a well-established route to higher education or employment. Removing this option would be disastrous for social mobility and the economy. The government must rethink its plan to scrap BTECs and provide assurances that they will continue to be available to students alongside A levels and T levels in the future.
- For more information about the #ProtectStudent Choice campaign visit: www.protectstudentchoice.org