

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

29th July 2021

Dear Gavin,

As the leaders of organisations that represent and support staff and students in schools, colleges and universities, we share your ambition that all 16 to 19 year olds should benefit from a world class education.

The review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 had an important role to play in realising that ambition. However, it is clear from the government's recently published response to the review that your Department has ignored the concerns expressed by us (and most other respondents) about the proposal to remove funding for the vast majority of applied general qualifications such as BTECs.

These are well established, well respected qualifications that play a vital role in helping young people progress to higher education or employment, and in meeting the skills needs of employers. For many students, studying one or more applied general qualifications will be a more effective way of accessing, remaining in, and progressing from 16 to 19 education than studying A levels or T levels.

Many young people will be adversely affected by this proposal, but disadvantaged students have the most to lose, a conclusion that your Department's own equalities impact assessment supports. Applied general qualifications 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 proposal to scrap most BTECs, including all larger versions of the qualifications that are deemed to overlap with A levels or T levels (86% of respondents to the review disagreed with your proposal to remove funding for qualifications on this basis). The 12 organisations in the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign speak with one voice on this issue.

This is not simply a matter of timing – while a delay to the introduction of these proposals would be welcome, it would not change the fact they have the potential to do huge damage to social mobility and are completely out of step with the views expressed by our members.

We urge you to rethink plans to remove funding for the vast majority of applied general qualifications and instead provide assurances that they have an important role to play alongside the equally valuable A levels and T levels in the future qualifications landscape.

Yours sincerely,



Geoff Barton
ASCL General Secretary



Ian Pretty
Collab Group Chief
Executive



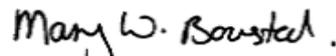
Alice Barnard
Edge Foundation Chief
Executive



Mark Fenton
GSHA Chief Executive



Patrick Roach
NASUWT General
Secretary



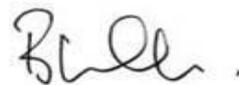
Mary W. Boustead
Kevin Courtney
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SFCA Chief Executive



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SSAT Chief Executive



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UNISON General
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Vanessa Wilson
University Alliance CEO

cc.

Gillian Keegan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills)

Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State (Minister for Universities)

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State (Minister for School Standards)

Baroness Berridge of The Vale of Catmose, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System)

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee