

BTEC Defunding Briefing Paper

Introduction:

This paper outlines (i) the government proposals to defund BTEC qualifications; and (ii) the Protect Student Choice Campaign, of which London Higher is a coalition partner. It provides the context for the campaign and the implications for London HE. It sets out the progress made so far and the next steps for the campaign as it progresses into a new phase.

Context:

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 2021, 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, the DfE proposed that the funding for the majority of BTEC qualifications would be removed.

Protect Student Choice Campaign:

The [Protect Student Choice Campaign](#) is a coalition of 29 organisations, including London Higher, that represents staff and students in schools, colleges and universities. The Campaign has argued against the proposed defunding of BTEC qualifications on the basis that:

- The proposed changes are too simplistic and do not represent the diversity of provision that is needed to appropriately serve young people.
- BTECs provide a different type of educational experience, unique from either A Level or T Levels, which combines the development of skills with academic learning.
- BTECs are disproportionately used as a pathway for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those currently under-represented in higher education. For example, 42% of Black students entering London HE do [so with a BTEC](#). Removing BTEC provision will reduce the progression pathways for these students.
- The timeline for the implementation of these proposals is not feasible and defunding should not happen unless an impartial, evidence-based assessment has concluded that a qualification is not valued by students or employers.

The Implications for London HE:

In March 2022, London Higher ran a campaign event as part of the Protect Student Choice campaign to highlight the implications of defunding BTEC qualifications for London HE:

- 20% of students at London HEIs hold BTECs, either as standalone qualifications or alongside A Levels.

- Students who hold BTEC qualifications are more likely to be ethnically diverse and come from socioeconomically deprived areas (IMD Q1-2). Defunding BTECs risks reversing the progress made by London HEIs in access and participation in recent years.
- These students study a diverse range of subjects, meaning defunding BTECs will impact on many subject areas across a wide range of London institutions.
- Higher education institutions were not initially consulted on the proposals for the defunding of BTEC qualifications and the introduction of T Levels, despite the significant implications these would have on the pipeline to higher education. Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan MP wrote to universities on 17 November 2021 to encourage universities to accept T Levels for 2022 admissions, however, little is known about the qualifications and their implications for student preparedness for higher education.

Campaign Successes:

The Protect Student Choice campaign has been hugely successful over the past 12 months and has secured the following:

- **January 2022:** the Protect Student Choice petition surpassed 100,000 signatures and is scheduled for a debate in Parliament on [18 July 2022](#).
- **April 2022:** the UK Government changed its stance and announced that only a '[small proportion](#)' of BTECs would be defunded, moreover, these would only be BTEC qualifications that overlap with existing T Level provision.

Next Steps:

DfE has now [published](#) the first list of 'technical' Level 3 qualifications that it proposes to defund in 'Wave 1' based on overlap with Wave 1 and 2 T level subjects. This will be followed by a further two waves, one in each of the next two years, addressing overlap with successive T levels in order of their introduction. The number of qualifications on this first list is relatively small and includes many technical qualifications, particularly in construction and childcare, which are not used to access HE in large numbers. Awarding bodies are also appealing the inclusion of several qualifications on the list; the final list, pending any successful appeals, will be published in September.

However, in addition to this list, which rules out some 'technical' qualifications in 'overlap areas' by name for further funding, BTEC and other applied general qualifications – 'academic' as well as 'technical' in the overlap areas will all need to be submitted for **reapproval** under terms [recently consulted](#) upon by Ofqual. There are concerns that the elimination of BTEC qualifications, including more 'academic' qualifications more frequently used to access HE – such as the Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care, among many others - may also occur through this 'reapproval' process, whereby qualifications are submitted to Ofqual and subsequently not approved.

Below is a summary of the subject areas which are in scope for review under both the defunding list (now published) and the reapprovals process. Those covered by both the list and the reapproval process are shaded darker; those with no qualifications on the defunding list, but in scope of the same reapproval process, are shaded lighter.

AGQ Subject Area	'Sector Subject Area' (SSA) Code
Health and Social Care	1.3 - Health and Social Care
IT/Computing	6.1 - ICT Practitioners 6.2 - ICT for Users* <i>(not every qualification in this SSA likely to be in scope)</i>
Engineering	4.1 - Engineering
Childcare	1.5 - Child Development and Wellbeing
Applied Science	2.1 - Science
Digital Games Design/Esports	7.3 Service Enterprises 8.1 Sport, Leisure and Recreation <i>Not every qualification in these SSAs is an eSports qualification</i>

Qualifications in other subject areas, including creative media, art and design, animal management, and business will follow in future 'waves' of defunding and reapproval.

Additional Information:

- <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/04/28/defend-dont-defund-proven-qualifications-for-school-leavers/>
- <https://www.protectstudentchoice.org/>
- <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/even-if-btecs-disappear-the-students-taking-them-wont/>

Further Information:

If you would like to discuss this briefing paper further or require any further information, please contact Sally Burtonshaw, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer at London Higher on sally.burtonshaw@londonhigher.ac.uk