



## Education Committee

From the Chair  
**Helen Hayes MP**

### **The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP**

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

### **The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern**

Minister for Skills  
Department for Education  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

4 December 2024

Dear Ministers,

### **Re: Review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below**

We welcome the Government's decision to review post-16 qualification reforms and to pause the planned removal of funding from qualifications deemed to overlap with T Levels launched in waves one and two.

In order to better understand the impact of the review on students, teachers and further education providers the Education Select Committee took evidence on Tuesday 3 December 2024 from: Ruth Perry, Natspec; James Kewin, Sixth Form Colleges Association; Catherine Sezen, Association of Colleges; Simon Cook, Principal of MidKent College, FE representative on ASCL Council; Alice Gardner, Edge Foundation; David Robinson, Education Policy Institute; and Jenifer Burden, Gatsby Charitable Foundation. We urge the Government to review this evidence and to take account of our initial views on this issue which are set out in this letter.

We were told that the Government's review has caused great uncertainty. It is concerning to the sector that the terms of reference for the review have not been published, and that there has not been a full and open consultation process. Further education providers are currently unsure which qualifications they can offer in the coming years and students are faced with a narrowing range of qualification options at the age of 16 and uncertainty about which qualifications best serve their needs. We were also told about the anxiety some students have about the possibility the qualification they wish to pursue is defunded but their second-choice option is at full

capacity and therefore unavailable to them. The Government must urgently clarify which level 3 qualifications will be available until at least 2027 in order to provide the sector with certainty and stability.

We know that for some students T Levels are a highly successful option, and that it will take time for the full benefits of this qualification to be realised. We also heard about, and are supportive of, the need to move towards parity of esteem for technical routes of education. We are, however, concerned about the high drop-out rate for T Levels due, in part, to their size, scope and method of assessment, and some of our witnesses told us that transition courses are not working well.

It is clear that if post-16 education only offered A Levels or T Levels there would not be a sufficient and appropriate range of options for students with different abilities and prior attainment. Our view, therefore, is that students should not be faced with the binary choice of A Levels or T Levels. Alternative forms of level 3 qualifications, including Applied General qualifications and Tech Level qualifications, must remain a long-term option, to enable students who either do not wish to, or are not able to, study A Levels or T Levels to continue their education at level 3. It is clear that some students benefit from being able to mix and match A Levels and AGQs or Tech Level qualifications. We heard compelling evidence of the importance of the availability of these qualifications in providing much needed flexibility and accessibility for all students, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also know that AGQs provide a very important route to higher education for some students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Removing these qualifications could potentially exclude some of these students from accessing and pursuing higher education. Further, we believe that this could act in direct contradiction of the Government's wider focus on inclusion within the education system, including with the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

That is not to say that some level 3 qualifications may not benefit from reform, whether through rationalisation or updated content. However, the process for any reform must be clear and transparent and, as a matter of urgency, schools and colleges must be given certainty about both the immediate and long-term future of level 3 qualifications up to and beyond 2027 and the broader landscape.

Our witnesses told us about a number of other significant challenges for further education providers, both mainstream and specialist, including the need for a strong vision and strategy from the Government which delivers parity of esteem for vocational education pathways and quality assurance for all types of qualification. The Education Select Committee will continue to take a close interest in further education and skills, and we look forward to discussing these issues with both of you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Hayes', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Helen Hayes MP**  
**Chair, Education Committee**