



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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11 December 2024

Dear Helen,

Thank you for your letter on 4 December regarding the Review of Qualification Reform. I wanted to let you know that today, I am announcing the outcomes of the review. This review focused on qualifications on published defund lists for 2024 and 2025 to determine if any of these qualifications should be retained.

I agree that the sector needs certainty, and this announcement should provide this certainty until 2027. Further clarity about future reforms to the post-16 landscape will be provided by the Curriculum and Assessment Review, which will publish its recommendations in autumn 2025. We are clear that the quality of qualifications needs to continue to improve and that qualifications must deliver on two central missions for this government: of enhancing and spreading opportunity for everyone and growing our economy. Young people should have a choice of a simpler suite of high-quality qualifications that provide them with the skills they need, and qualifications must deliver good outcomes.

In approaching the Review of Qualification Reform, this government has been clear that we must take a pragmatic approach. We undertook extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the review, consulting with over 250 individuals including principals of FE and sixth form colleges, senior and curriculum leaders, teachers and subject specialists in FE, employer representative bodies, industry leaders, awarding organisations, mayoral combined authorities, and other government departments. We have been clear; we believe that T Levels provide an excellent qualification option for 16 to 19 learners. The industry placement is a key part of T Levels' unique selling point, providing valuable experience of the workplace. There is consensus that T Levels are high quality qualifications that need to be available to more learners. Therefore, where learners wish to study a large qualification in a T Level route, this should be the main option for them. We have however moved away from blanket restrictions, such as defunding qualifications simply because they overlap with a T Level.

We have also been clear that we must trust providers and their judgements about what a good learning programme looks like for 16–19-year-olds, allowing them to meet individual's ambitions and needs. We also acknowledge that there should be some flexibilities in learning programmes and that not all learners at level 3 will want or are suited to studying A levels or T Levels. I agree that, while there is consensus that T Levels are high quality qualifications, they need to be available to more learners and we will continue to work on this.

The first change we will be making is that we will not tell providers and students which types of qualifications they can combine to form a mixed programme. We believe it should be for colleges and sixth forms to work with students to devise the best mix for each individual. This will be of particular benefit to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with lower prior attainment, as without these

restrictive rules they will be able to undertake programmes of study without A levels or T Levels if that is their best option at level 3. The Curriculum and Assessment Review may make recommendations about future rules of combination, which we will consider in due course.

The review identified over 200 qualifications that had either low or no enrolments per year over the last 3 years. With the premise that if there were low or no enrolments, those qualifications were not needed, we have pushed ahead with defunding these qualifications. Awarding organisations have had the opportunity to appeal, and we will remove funding from these on 1st August 2025.

For the remaining qualifications in scope of the review, we have looked at the qualifications route by route, recognising the needs of learners and employers, and balancing this with a need for a clear post-16 offer that is focussed on good quality outcomes. We have moved away from blanket restrictions, such as removing funding for qualifications simply because they overlap with a T Level. This means that alternative provision for learners in T Level routes will now be available. Depending on the route this may include Applied General Qualifications in the short term, before reformed alternatives are subsequently introduced.

On the basis of not defunding simply on the basis of overlapping with a T Level, we have concluded that we will not proceed with defunding qualifications on published lists in agriculture, environmental and animal care; legal, finance and accounting; business and administration; and creative and design before 2027.

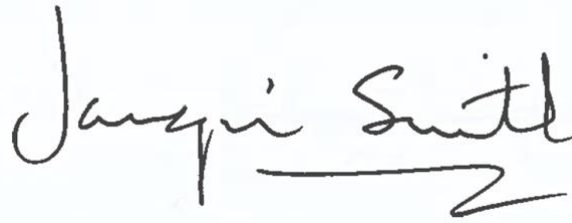
We reviewed qualifications in the remaining five routes: construction and the built environment, health and science, digital, education and early years, and engineering and manufacturing. In summary, we will retain 157 qualifications in the system alongside T Levels and A levels that were previously scheduled to be defunded on 1st August 2025. The length of time we are retaining qualifications for differs from route to route, depending upon the needs of the cohort and the economy in that route. To provide certainty to education providers, students and their parents and guardians, we have published timings alongside the decision for each qualification. Further details about the route-by-route outcomes will be published on gov.uk following the announcement. Any future decisions on these routes, and on level 2 qualifications reform, will be taken alongside the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

In the Construction pathway, there will be no further enrolments onto the T Level in Onsite Construction. We recognise that this T Level is providing valuable education and industry experience to students undertaking it, and it will support them to progress into positive destinations. We are confident that moving forwards, the needs of learners and the economy in this pathway will best be met through apprenticeships and other classroom provision. The two remaining T Levels in Construction are going from strength to strength and will be unaffected by this decision.

We believe these changes accurately reflect what we have heard from stakeholders throughout the review and present a pragmatic approach to reforming qualifications. I look forward to engaging with you more on the future of reforms.

Yours sincerely,
Baroness Smith

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**