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| Campaign fact checker |
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* Set out below are the main arguments that ministers use when defending the proposal to remove funding for BTEC qualifications. Alongside each are the **#ProtectStudentChoice** campaign’s counter-arguments and fact-check information. This is a briefing for campaign partners and is not a public document.
* It is important to note that when ministers are asked questions about applied general qualifications like BTECs they usually provide answers about technical qualifications. This appears to be a deliberate strategy and is one that should be challenged at every opportunity.
* ***“The government is streamlining post-16 qualifications”.*** Streamlining is often linked to what the DfE consultation described as a *“bewildering choice”* of qualifications. This may be the case with technical qualifications but is simply not the case with BTECs. For example, there are only 39 subjects available across the entire sixth form college sector. A local college/school sixth form/UTC etc. will typically offer a fraction of this number. It is worth having a couple of examples to hand to illustrate this point.
* ***“The government is improving the quality of post-16 qualifications”.*** BTEC qualifications have recently undergone a rigorous process of reform. They are popular with students, respected by employers and provide a well-established route to higher education or employment. The government claims that T levels are a *“gold standard”* improvement, but they are a different type of qualification. Many students will not be willing or able to enrol on such a large, occupation-specific qualification at the age of 16. And even if it made educational sense to do so, withdrawing funding for BTECs from 2023 while just 1,500 of the 864,304 Level 3 students in England are currently enrolled on a T level, risks leaving many young people without the choice of an appropriate qualification.
* ***“The case for change is strong” usually citing the*** [***Wolf Review***](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report) ***(2011) and*** [***Sainsbury Review***](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf) *(****2016)”.*** The Wolf Review said BTECs are *“valuable in the labour market and a familiar and acknowledged route into higher education”.* The Sainsbury Review did not consider BTECs or A levels as *“Reform of this option falls outside the Panel’s remit”.* So, the Department for Education’s “case for change” for scrapping BTECs rests on one report that rated them highly and another that did not look at them at all.
* ***“We are not scrapping BTEC funding; we are upgrading our level 3 qualification offer to make sure that it keeps in line with the needs of today’s economy”*** The DfE consultation response states that, with only a small number of exceptions, *“Larger academic qualifications (including applied general qualifications larger than one A level) will not be funded if they overlap with T Levels or A levels”.* So while a small number of 1 A level equivalent BTEC qualifications will remain, most 2 and 3 A level-equivalent BTECs will be scrapped. The plan is for T levels and A levels to be the *“qualifications of choice”* for most young people.
* ***“We have consulted in two stages on reforms to level 3 qualifications alongside T Levels and A levels and have listened to feedback at each stage of the review”.*** DfE may have listened to feedback, but it has not acted on it. For example, 86% of respondents to the consultation disagreed with the proposal to remove funding for qualifications that were deemed to overlap with A levels or T levels. This remains a fundamental part of the government’s approach. In many cases, DfE is taking the opposite course to that suggested by the majority of respondents to its consultation.