

CDI Response to DfE Consultation: Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England

There are a lot of questions (21, and some have two or three parts), all requiring free text responses. The CDI has taken a view on matters that relate directly to career progression and employability, and decided to adopt a lighter touch on more technical matters about qualifications. We are asked to submit the response using the online survey, so our responses have been drafted in Word and cut and pasted into the online document. Below – our responses to the consultation questions. The references indicate the page in the consultation document where the question is posed, following the discussion in the preceding pages.

Q.1 (ref. page 17)

We believe that clarity of purpose, as defined in the consultation document, is important to help students reach decisions about what qualifications to study, but it will also be important to retain the flexibility to transfer between the revised technical route and the academic route, in either direction. Students' aspirations and interests change as they pursue their studies, and the qualifications system must accommodate such vocational development. So, we agree that the qualifications should state a primary purpose but also enable students to change track if necessary as their career ideas develop between the ages of 16 and 19.

The current Applied General route provides students with exposure to vocational experiences and insights without committing them fully to a specific technical route and has been a valuable pathway for students who benefit from such learning approaches but who lack the certainty and vocational maturity to commit to a T level type programme. It would be helpful overall if there was a clearer alignment between the proposals regarding qualification reform and the industrial strategy including the future skills needs of the country. To support this there should be clear visual aids such as the 'tube map' produced to show the different pathways for 14-19 year-old students.

Q.2 (ref. page 18)

We suggest that every effort should be made to teach personal, social, employability and career management skills in all qualifications. These are the so-called 'soft' or generic skills that employers say all workers should have. However there remains a case for continuing with standalone qualifications in these important life skills, particularly for students working at Level 1 or below, who may not be taking other academic or specific technical qualifications. Career development professionals should be invited to help review and develop these qualifications.

It would be helpful if there could be a clearer alignment between the proposals on qualification reform and the ongoing commitment to the 16-19 study programme in terms of ensuring that young people have access to a broad range of development opportunities in this critical phase of education, including work experience and personal development – perhaps expressed in terms of a career learning entitlement. This would also ensure consistency with the five pillars of character education proposed by the Secretary of State. **Q.3 (ref. page 19)**

We suggest it should be investigated whether it would be possible to track the occupation an individual entered and link this to the qualification they studied. This might be achievable via the destination data required to be supplied to local authorities by schools and colleges, although this is a crude standalone measure as some qualifications will have been successful in achieving desired outcomes without directly mapping to the occupation or apprenticeship taken as the next step. Surveying students on a sample basis might also be insightful. Another option would be to include such questions in the Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey or the 10-yearly Census.

Q.4 (ref. page 20)

Tracking individuals and relating their qualifications to occupations entered gives some indication of how useful the qualifications are, but we suggest seeking feedback from employers would provide a better view. If employers are to be involved in the design of the qualification, their views on its eventual appropriateness in terms of preparing future employees should be sought. Employers could be asked to provide wider feedback, showing the employee's perspective as well as their own.

Q.5 (ref. page 22)

Yes, we agree that the quality features listed are appropriate.

Q.6 (ref. page 22)

We think that the features that should be given the greatest priority are: synoptic assessment (to test students' understanding of the interrelationship of all the components of the qualification); employer involvement (the reason previous attempts to revise vocational qualifications ultimately failed is because they were designed by educationalists, not in consultation with employers); progression. The work placement must be appropriately structured within the qualification.

Progression is the most important: if the qualification does not offer a clear route of progression to further study or work then it is of limited use to both employers and students.

Q.7 (ref. page 22)

We believe that the same principles should apply to both 16-19 year-olds and to adults. In terms of the evolving labour market, an additional consideration for adults would be the ability to build on prior learning where possible.

Q.8 (ref. page 24)

We believe there is likely to continue to be a need for some qualifications outside the T and A levels that may not achieve large enrolments but are still necessary to meet the needs of employers in certain niche sectors.

There may also be a need for some specific qualifications that enable adults who already hold recognised qualifications to gain certain skills without having to complete an entire T level.

As careers professionals we see a significant minority of 15 and 16 year-olds who are not ready to make a decision about specific level 3 or level 2 qualifications. They need another year or two to gain greater vocational maturity. In the past the needs of such students were well met by 'pre-vocational'

qualifications, which combined: further study of literacy and numeracy; personal, social, employability and career management skills; opportunities to 'taste' a number of different vocational sectors. We urge the government to make such programmes available in the future.

We believe there should be more substantial consultation with young learners and with schools and Pupil Referral Units/ Short Stay schools that have a lot of experience of using alternative KS4 programmes and Applied General routes. Outcomes from previous initiatives such as the KS4 Engagement programme should be taken into account

Q.9 (ref. page 24)

We do not have a particular view on 'overlap'.

Q.10 and Q.11 (ref. pages 24 & 25)

A key factor in enabling better progression from key stage 4 to study at Level 3, and subsequent achievement at level 3, would be to design the level 2 qualifications taken at key stage 4 so that they articulate more clearly with level 3 qualifications.

The Technical Awards at KS4 are an important feature of the qualifications landscape and introduce parents and young people to this approach to learning in Years 8 or 9. We suggest it might be more appropriate to consider 14-19 as a coherent phase of education, rather than separately as KS4 and post-16.

Where the CDI could make a major contribution would be by working with the DfE to ensure that all careers advisers working in schools had a clear understanding of the new T levels, so they could give informed advice to students. The DfE should provide much greater support in terms of mapping out the range of pathways available 14-19 and showing how the lattice of provision interrelates. This is important for advisers, employers, young people, teachers and parents.

Q.12 (ref. page 26)

If level 2 qualifications are intended to lead directly to employment then employers and careers advisers must be involved in their design. The other quality principles listed earlier in the document for level 3 qualifications must also be applied to level 2 qualifications. The question of literacy and numeracy at level 2, and the role of Functional Skills, need to be considered as employer organisations such as the CBI often raise this as a concern.

Q.13 (ref. page 26)

The role of level 1 and below qualifications should be to enable progression to further study at level 2 or to employment.

Q. 14 (ref. page 27)

We do not have a particular view on the additional principles that should be applied to qualifications at level 1 or below, other than to say that due consideration must be given to making them as accessible as possible to young people with SEND, and individuals with ESOL. The qualifications system should have enough flexibility built into it to allow such students to progress to level 2 rather than starting on another level 1 course/study.

Q.15 (ref. page 31)

We suggest that it will be important to assess the impact on individuals who hold older qualifications, so that they are not disadvantaged when the proposed new qualifications are promoted.

Q.16 and Q.17 (ref. page 32)

Yes, we agree with the proposed criteria for identifying qualifications with no enrolments. And no, we cannot think of any reason that a qualification with no enrolments should remain approved for funding.

Q.18 and Q.19 (ref. page 33)

Yes, we agree with the general principle that qualifications with low enrolments should be reviewed for possible removal of funding. One possible circumstance in which such a qualification might remain approved for funding is if it meets the needs of a particular occupational sector and there is no alternative qualification available.

As we have stated earlier, there should be a clear relationship between the industrial skills needs and the qualification provision.

A further consideration relates to individuals currently enrolled on qualifications for which funding might be removed. They should be enabled to complete the qualification rather than have the transfer to a new qualification and have to start again.

Q.20 (ref. page 35)

We agree with the point made in the impact assessment that students with SEND must not be disadvantaged as a result of the reforms to level 3 and below qualifications. . Indeed, the Government should use this opportunity to develop qualifications that would better prepare such students for employment, such as the pre-vocational qualifications referred to in our responses to an earlier question. There is also a need to consider support for these students as they transition to the workplace, both for the employer and the student, so a bridging qualification from within their first work role might be useful.

Q.21 (ref. page 35)

We are unable to suggest any additional impacts that should be included in the second stage consultation.