THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Department for Education: Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England

Icon response

4 June 2019

How could we extend this clarity of purpose to all qualifications at level 3 and below so that the intended outcome for the student is clearer? Please give reasons for your answer, including any examples of how this may be achieved.

Icon supports the Government's aim to simplify the qualifications system and the principles for qualifications.

We agree that it is important to provide clarity of purpose to differentiate between technical and academic qualifications. However, defining the primary purpose for technical education as providing a "direct route into skilled employment" may be inappropriately rigid. Students undertaking technical education are expected to decide on their careers at an earlier stage than those undertaking A Levels, which leave options open for longer.

Applying this clarity of purpose to all qualifications should not exclude flexibility within technical education for students to return to academic education or pursue different employment routes. Entry level qualifications that are too rigid will not prepare young people for careers that require a varied set of skills and knowledge. For example, a career in cultural heritage conservation requires skills in science, craft, art and an understanding of history, art history and architecture.

Are standalone qualifications in personal, social and employability skills necessary? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us if there are other changes we should explore to support these skills being delivered in other ways. Please make clear if your answer varies in relation to different student groups, such as adults or those with SEND.

Personal, social and employability skills should be embedded within all academic and technical qualifications. We believe standalone qualifications in these skills are not necessary and that these skills should be delivered in parallel with broader study.

Are the quality features listed under paragraph 55 the right starting point for framing future quality requirements for publicly funded qualifications? Please give reasons for your answer.

Icon generally agrees that the features **listed under paragraph 55** are an appropriate starting point. However, we have regarding the following features:

- Synoptic Testing: We recommend qualifying synoptic assessment with 'where appropriate'. Synoptic testing is not essential within some subject areas, such as arts and crafts. It may deter potential candidates from enrolling for qualifications in these subjects.

- Progression: We are concerned by how "related employment" will be defined. Qualifications within cultural heritage can lead to a range of employment sectors that are not necessarily associated with the qualification. For example, a conservation student could gain employment within the construction industry.

- Proven track record: We consider the proposed numbers too strict.

  Some qualifications will need to be delivered by providers that facilitate smaller numbers of students on their courses. For example, education and training in cultural heritage conservation requires low student-staff ratios to deliver necessary practical skills.

  Furthermore, smaller specialist sub-sectors may not require the proposed number of students. For example, within conservation a greater intake of students could diminish employability rates as the UK workforce would not be able to absorb a higher number of graduates in certain fields or specialisms.

  We consequently cannot support the number of student achievements as a quality requirement.

While we support T Levels setting the gold standard for technical education, we are concerned by the following points made in Para 56:

- Content designed by employers – applying this standard to all qualifications would not recognise that some qualifications are stepping stone qualifications and employer involvement in designing content would be unnecessary.

- 45-day industry placement – smaller sectors, such as the conservation sector, which is made up of micro and small businesses, will not be able to meaningfully facilitate placements without financial support. This could lead to difficulties in delivering qualifications.

At level 3, what purposes should qualifications other than T Levels or A Levels serve:

a) for 16 to 19 year olds? Please give reasons for your answer.

b) for adults? Please give reasons for your answer.

They should provide upskilling and continuing professional development opportunities (CPD). CPD is essential to ensuring adults within the workforce sustain their skills and knowledge and are able to respond to changes within their profession.

Do you agree we should consider removing approval for funding from qualifications with low enrolments? Please give reasons for your answer.

No. Specific industries will require qualifications that are delivered through courses that sometimes accommodate limited student numbers.

Cultural heritage conservation is a niche and small field that cannot absorb high numbers of graduates. Qualifications are nonetheless needed to support a workforce with the skills to ensure the UK's heritage is protected for future generations.

The A Level in Archaeology was an important route into the archaeological profession. The decision in 2016 to withdraw the course due to limited entries was damaging to the sector at a time when there was an existing shortage of archaeologists to meet demand created by the growth in national infrastructure projects and the sector's efforts to diversify routes into the profession.

https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/post-16-level-3-and-below-qualifications-review/supporting_documents/Post%2016%20level%203%20and%20below%20qualifications%20review%20%20Consultation%20Document.pdf

An accessible, user-friendly and employer-focused database of all qualifications, that enables users to conduct searches based on course content, could improve enrolments across more specialist and unknown fields.

Are there specific reasons that a qualification with low enrolments should remain approved for funding? Please give reasons for your answer.

Small sectors are reliant on the supply of qualifications with low enrolments. The size of the sector and its ability to absorb graduates does not always correspond with its importance. For example, the conservation sector is small but vital – it facilitates access to and enjoyment of our cultural heritage and supports key industries like tourism and the creative industries.