



October 2021

The Department for Education have confirmed plans to remove funding from the majority of BTECs and other Applied General Qualifications. This decision will prevent many young people from accessing a creative education after they leave school, negatively impacting the talent pool available to creative industries employers.

The Crafts Council passionately believes in education choices for everyone and fully supports students having the option to do BTECs and other Level 3 qualifications. The introduction of the industry-developed T Levels as a vocational route to sit alongside A Levels is one we welcome.

While T Levels may prove to be transformational for many young people, they have not been tried and tested. It is wrong to take away current options before we are certain that new qualifications are fit for purpose. We don't need to pitch qualifications against each other – there is room for T Levels alongside the existing offer. Funding should be universal across all Level 3 qualifications.

The range of options available at Level 3 can be confusing to students, who are used to a more linear approach at school. However, we believe it is important to continue to support multiple pathways. Post-GCSE studies mean a shift towards studying for a career, which will inherently require more flexibility to ensure all learners get an education that meets their aspirations.

Aside from the next generation of creatives, Applied General Qualifications offer opportunities for adult learners and second careerists, who have always been an important part of our sector. The new T Levels will not be an option for part-time students and will alienate those who need to earn a living while they study.

A creative career should be an accessible option to everyone: ensuring our creative workforce represents all communities is of fundamental importance. The current offer for craft and design provides a vital pipeline for students from all backgrounds and ages. We know that students from less advantaged backgrounds find BTECs a vital route to continuing their education after school, accessing higher education and opening up career opportunities.

A report from NEON (the National Education Opportunities Network) tells us that: ***'In 2020, of the 12,615 18-year-old black students entering HE with A-Levels, 33% did so with either BTECs or A-Levels/BTECs. Of 18-year-old Asian students entering HE 25% did so with BTECs or A-Levels/BTECs compared to 21% of white students.'***¹

Young people who have decided that they want a career in the craft sector often find that the technical side of BTECs and other applied general qualifications give them an advantage in their chosen pathway and a head start in developing a portfolio for higher education or employment.

Chloe Moore, Senior Product Engineer at Burberry says: ***'I knew from an early age that I wanted to work in fashion, so instead of doing A Levels I went straight to a local college to study fashion and clothing. When I look back, I think doing a BTEC was a key moment – they were incredible platforms.'***²



We are fortunate to have highly skilled craft and design teachers working in further education, who have shaped the current qualifications to make them relevant for their own communities. This has taken years of development. It would be crushing for the FE sector to see this work swept away, alongside the networks and pedagogy that have been put in place.

The flexibility and range of choices within craft, art and design education has always been one of its strengths. It is vital that we keep these choices and let colleges make decisions on what works best for them and their students.

In light of these arguments and overwhelming response to the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign, we are calling on the government to reconsider their decision.

Crafts Council
October 2021

Notes

1. 'Will abolishing BTECs mean reversing widening access to higher education?' – NEON report by Dr Graeme Atherton, February 2021.
2. Chloe Moore studied for a BTEC National Diploma in Fashion & Clothing at North Kent College, before going onto a BA at Northbrook College and an MA at LCF.