

## DfE post-16 review of qualifications at Level 3 stage two: the OCR response

The following provides a summary of the key points arising from OCR's detailed response to the second stage of the DfE review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3.

### 1. Applied General Qualifications: strengths and recommendations

- Applied General qualifications such as Cambridge Technicals provide a **strong blend of the academic and the practical** providing an important enhancement to the academic pathway. They allow students to study a **broad programme** in line with practices in other high performing jurisdictions where 'deferred specialisation' has become the norm, and play a role in developing the **skills sought after** by universities and employers alike.
- A significant strength of applied generals is that they appeal not only to high-attaining students, but also to **disadvantaged groups** and individuals, and can aid their **success and progression**. A choice of A levels, T levels or nothing would risk these groups and individuals losing out.
- It shouldn't be assumed that an A Level in a vocational or practical subject always **provides a better model** than is provided by a vocational qualification in the same subject area, particularly when different assessment models have come under intense scrutiny during the pandemic.
- There is a case for retaining **larger Applied Generals** which are 720 GLH (equivalent to two A Levels) in size in addition to the one A Level or smaller size qualifications proposed in the review.
- There is a need for **greater uniformity** between similar qualifications from different awarding bodies in this pathway and the need for a common language for describing them. Review isn't simply about reducing the number of qualifications available (there are 555 'recently reformed' A and AS Levels and only 138 Applied General qualifications). Also, Applied General qualifications have already been reformed more often and more recently than A Levels.

### 2. Progression from Applied General qualifications

- Our work over many years with the HE sector has helped to ensure that Cambridge Technicals (Applied Generals) mirror their requirements. OCR developers have worked directly with a range of universities and we have consulted extensively with our Higher Education Forum which includes members from the majority of the Russell group universities and the full range of other institutions. They all tell us that Applied General qualifications work for them and are widely used to facilitate entry to their degree courses.
- Case studies and UCAS admissions data show how combinations of vocational and A Level study provide a range of progression routes into and out of Higher Education.

### **3. Flexibility to progress to different routes**

- Inclusion of vocational components in academic programmes allows greater flexibility where a student decides during their 16-19 study that employment rather than university is the route for them. In developing the content for Cambridge Technicals we have worked with a wide range of employers.

### **4. Withdrawal of funding from existing post-16 qualifications**

- The removal of funding from existing post-16 qualifications must be exercised with great care. The DfE has described the introduction of T Levels as a ten year programme and we strongly support such a cautious approach. There is a real risk that a significant body of students, for whom an A Level or T Level programme is not appropriate or available, become NEET. Nothing should be withdrawn until alternative provision is widely available and we support Ofqual's request in its response to this review for a year's delay to the start of the implementation.
- The process of withdrawing qualifications should be gradual and with long notice periods. According to the DfE's own impact assessment, the consultation proposals will result in the available number of Level 3 qualifications being reduced by 62%.

### **5. Occupational and additional specialist qualifications (other than T Levels)**

- There may be occasions when qualifications with the same purpose and features as a T Level, but in an occupation that isn't covered by an existing T Level, should be funded.
- The notion of 'employer-led standards' is too narrowly defined. There may be scope for qualifications based on standards which are not developed under the supervision of IfATE. The system created to deliver occupational qualifications and apprenticeships may not be responsive enough to deal with fast changing economic needs or sufficiently flexible to provide the skills of the future.
- We suggested a range of factors that should be taken into account when approving funding for occupational qualifications or additional specialisms.

### **6. Qualifications suited to adults**

- In order to meet the demand for modular courses for adults, there will be a need for a wide range of technical qualifications for adults which are distinct from T Levels. The majority of adults are not looking to make a wholesale career change by embarking on a two-year full-time course of study and lifelong learning will require a more atomised approach to learning and accreditation.