

Association for Project Management (APM) Consultation Response
House of Commons Education Select Committee Inquiry – The Future of Post-16 Qualifications

Question 1	The experience to date of those taking or delivering T Levels, and any changes to T Levels that may be needed to ensure they are accessible to all students
	<p>APM is seeing anecdotal evidence of a potential inequality around placements. There looks to be a bias towards those in and around big cities as there are more options for placements within easy reach. Those in more rural settings often have to take ‘virtual’ placements as there aren’t enough easily accessible options within the local area.</p> <p>Government policy appears to suggest it is up to employers to solve this issue. APM believes this issue needs to be shared between government, schools and employers. It is in all their interests to get this right.</p> <p>Government can provide additional funding at a local level (e.g. through Local Authorities) to encourage the take-up of T-levels, indeed, this could be weighted towards T-level cold spots, e.g. rural areas. Employers can then access some of this additional funding to remove barriers to participation and encourage take up. There is little point stimulating demand for placements while ignoring supply.</p>
Question 2	The strengths and weaknesses of the current system of post-16 qualifications, with reference to A Levels, T Levels, BTECs and apprenticeships, in preparing young people for work or further and higher education
	<p>The experience of APM and its members is that the education system isn’t set up to prepare people for the world of work. The priority ends up being to get pupils through exams, so we see a workforce that has developed excellent skills in preparing for and passing exams, but skills needed for the working environment are less developed, for example, communication/interpersonal skills, time management and taking the initiative, leading to a general lack of understanding of how to ‘be’ in a work environment. This is unfortunate as all are key components of project management.</p> <p>There is a chance that this will be addressed through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament, and we would encourage further dialogue with professional bodies and employer/employee bodies on how to rectify this.</p> <p>On the specifics of project management, it is fast becoming an essential skill within the workforce. APM members are in huge demand across multiple sectors. Project management skills were identified as a skills gap in the recent House of Commons Transport Select Committee report into Major Transport Infrastructure Projects, and the House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning’s report Preparing for Extreme Risks.</p>

	<p>Part of the reason for this skills gap is that often project management and project delivery are only embedded within one or two other qualifications, for example business studies or engineering. We'd like to see project management skills either embedded into more qualifications, to reflect the transferable skills noted above, or linked to an existing PSHE area, for example into personal (having some structure in how you live your life) or economic (being a successful and aware person in the wider, project-based world).</p> <p>This skills gap often stems from a lack of understanding about project management and its role. Teachers, for example, will already possess project management skills but they might not identify them as such. Project skills will be used every day to help them plan classes, understand their pupils needs and motivations and develop long term teaching outcomes. More needs to be done to highlight the value of project management skills to all sectors of society – it's a key transferable skill.</p> <p>But part of the problem is that teachers do not have, nor need to possess, a full understanding of what is needed in the workplaces of today, and the workplaces of the future. This is not to blame teachers – their workloads and priorities do not encourage development here. And if they come straight from undergraduate programmes how would they know what is needed specifically? How has teaching changed to reflect the changes in the workplace seen over the past two years?</p> <p>APM would like to see greater support for teachers to understand workplace requirements and teach the skills needed by local businesses, including project management. So there is work to do in linking teaching bodies with professional bodies and trade associations to offer training and guidance in the needs of the workforce.</p> <p>Ultimately though, returning to the first point, this cannot occur if the system prioritises exam results over real world experience.</p>
<p>Question 3</p>	<p>The benefits and challenges the Government's proposed changes to Level 3 qualifications would bring, with reference to any implications for BTECs and routes into apprenticeships</p>
	<p>The main benefit seems clear once the vision is realised: a world in which academic and vocational qualifications are on a par and each adds value to the workforce and to society. This should help address some of the concerns in the previous answer.</p> <p>The main challenge that stems from this is to minimise the impact of the transition from one system to the other, which could take five to ten years to really bed in. The transition period means that all children and young people currently in secondary schools could be impacted and even some of those children currently in primary school.</p> <p>We need to avoid a generation of students being lost in transition.</p>

	<p>Another challenge was the loss of some BTECs, although we welcome the recent Government announcement that it “will continue to fund some BTECs and other applied general qualifications in future where there is a clear need for skills and knowledge that A-levels and T-levels cannot provide.” This is vital until such time as all subjects, including project management, are covered sufficiently by A- or T-levels.</p> <p>Another challenge of creating an education system that supports future workforce needs is that the needs of the workforce can change quickly. As we have seen during the pandemic, working routines and required skills can change almost overnight, so the system needs to build in agility and adaptability to allow it to remain relevant over time, given the lag between learning and entering the workforce.</p>
Question 4	The extent to which the Government’s review of level 3 qualifications will impact disadvantaged groups, students from minority ethnic backgrounds, students known to the care system, and students with special educational needs or disabilities, and what measures might be put in place to mitigate any negative impacts
	<p>By ensuring this review works for all those in the groups listed, the government will improve the system for all groups. The system, in theory, will become more accessible and inclusive for all.</p> <p>In terms of impact, the barriers of the existing system will simply transfer over to the new system if they are not addressed directly. This includes higher levels of NEETs in some of these groups and unconscious bias within recruitment practices. These barriers need to be addressed for this to succeed.</p> <p>On a more positive note, for those with SEND, the strengthening of vocational qualifications provides formal recognition of a broader notion of outcomes beyond academic outcomes. A system focused on exams will undoubtedly favour those who are good at exams. But a modern workforce benefits from the inclusion of a range of neurodiverse conditions that might struggle with exams.</p> <p>Any system that provides opportunities for all and reduces discrimination against specific conditions needs to be encouraged.</p>
Question 5	The benefits and disadvantages of introducing a baccalaureate system in post-16 education that allows students to take a variety of subjects, including both academic and vocational options
	No comment
Question 6	The benefits and disadvantages of a post-qualifications admission system
	No comment
Question 7	International good practice examples of systems for post-16 education and qualifications

	No comment

About APM

In our changing world, project professionals are at the forefront of delivering change and the environment for delivery is becoming ever more complex. The project profession needs to be better understood, to have consistent standards and to set the highest bar.

We're Association for Project Management – APM. We're the only chartered membership organization representing the project profession in the world, building the profile and respect the profession warrants and setting the most exacting standards. We're a registered charity, delivering education and developing qualifications, conducting research and providing resources. We run events, share best practice and give the project management community – individuals and businesses – the opportunity to connect and debate.

We know that better project delivery is about achieving your desired outcome. We believe it's about more than process alone. When doing so will make a difference, we challenge the status quo and champion the new. So, in a complex and shifting world, we help the project profession deliver better.