

DfE Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England:
A response from the Special Educational Consortium

About SEC

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership includes the voluntary and community sector, education providers and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, the SEN legal framework, exclusions and alternative provision.

This response from SEC does not seek to address all the specific questions in the consultation document, rather it sets out some key considerations in ensuring that the post-16 qualifications framework is accessible to young people with special educational needs and disabilities and enables them to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes. With this consultation focused on the principles that should underpin the streamlining of post-16 qualifications, our points inform the three main principles that the DfE proposes should apply to the current process.

Key considerations for SEC in simplifying the range of qualifications available at level 3 and below in post-16 provision

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are not a homogenous group; whether they are progressing to higher education, work or to a more independent life than they would otherwise have achieved, there should be progression routes for all young people post-16 and value attached to qualifications at every level. In seeking to address the diverse needs of young people with SEND we ask that the points we make below are taken as a whole.

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- With poor outcomes at age 19, progression routes post-16 should be designed to ensure that more young people with SEND acquire the skills and knowledge to progress into employment, further education, training and higher education at 19.
- Young people should be able to access specialist expertise to ensure that they get impairment specific support and appropriate advice about next steps. It is too easy to compromise expectations of young people where they have access requirements that have been inadequately addressed.
- Many young people with SEND including many without an EHC plan, will need more time in education or training than their peers. For them, progression into work, further education or training, will extend beyond the age of 19. This needs to be factored in to the design of FE and into adult education as well.
- Many young people will achieve a level 2 qualification as a step towards a level 3 qualification before the age of 19; some young people need more time to progress to level 3, and this will extend beyond the age of 19; some young people will not progress to level 3 and, for them, level 1 and 2 qualifications have value in their own right and as a stepping off point into employment.
- A high proportion of users of qualifications at level 2 and below (and particularly level 1 and below) are learners with SEND; from the outset, the system must be designed to meet their needs and be fully inclusive of them; this is likely to mean including flexibility in the access requirements and assessment methodology to enable learners with SEND to access the qualification content.
- The importance of personal development should be recognised within all courses; and those courses specifically designed to address personal, social and employability skills form an important part of progression and preparation for the next stage and should be recognised with awards and qualifications at the appropriate level.
- Not all young people will be able to progress into work. For some young people qualifications may be focused on achieving a better quality of life or a more independent form of living. Such qualifications should be seen as having high value and should be appropriately funded. Non-accredited programmes should also be available, with learners' progress and achievements recognised through the rigorous application of RARPA.
- We would welcome improved data on employment outcomes for young people with SEND following completion of qualifications at different levels. As young people with SEND are a diverse group, this data should be broken down by primary SEN need and or disability.
- Poor outcomes for young people with SEND at age 19 are fuelled by lack of personally tailored support and repetition of the same course. There should be

progression routes for all young people and recognition that for some young people progression will involve generalising skills and applying them in new contexts.

- The primary focus within this guidance is on 16-19 year olds. There needs to be better linkage both between qualifications primarily available to 16-19 year olds and those available at key stage 4; and between 16-19 and post-19.
- SEC recognises the need to simplify the complex range and variety of qualifications available. SEC recognises that there will also be a reduction in the number of qualifications available. However:
 - a qualification should not be removed simply because there are low numbers; some courses are designed for learners with SEND and may therefore have smaller numbers;
 - there needs to be good understanding of the potential impact of the removal of qualifications where there is a significant proportion of young people with SEND;
 - there may be low take-up of individual qualifications where there are several qualifications all in the same area; simplification may be achieved by retaining one qualification in a subject area where several currently exist.
- There should be high quality information, advice and guidance for young people with SEND to ensure there is ambition for them beyond KS4.
- Given the limited resources providers have to deliver Maths and English tuition, we would welcome the retention of qualifications that indirectly support progression in Maths and English through contextualisation.

For further information:

If it would be helpful to provide further information or to clarify any aspect of this response, we would be pleased to help.

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