



Department  
for Education



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

# Low and no enrolments: Response to the first stage consultation on the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England

## Background

1. This document is the official government response to the feedback received on the questions relating to the removal of funding approval from qualifications with low and no enrolments in the first-stage consultation on the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England (Questions 21 – 24). This consultation ran from 19 March 2019 to 10 June 2019.
2. The government response to the remaining questions in the consultation will be published in due course.
3. In the first stage consultation we outlined our intention to secure early progress on our ambition to simplify the system by removing funding approval from August 2021 from qualifications we had identified as having low or no publicly funded enrolments. The removal of these qualifications would ensure the offer is smaller, easier to navigate, and only lists qualifications for which there is a clear demand from schools, colleges and students.
4. 45% of qualifications at level 3 or below that are approved for 16 to 19 year olds (5,531 qualifications) had no enrolments in 2016 to 2017. Whilst some of these qualifications were new, 42% of qualifications at level 3 or below that are approved for 16 to 19 year olds also had no enrolments in 2015 to 2016<sup>1</sup>.
5. The following section of this document sets out the response we received to the consultation relating to low and no enrolments.

## Qualifications with no enrolments

**Question 21 of the first stage consultation asked:**

***Do you agree with the proposed criteria for identifying qualifications with no enrolments?***

6. The criteria we proposed to identify qualifications with no enrolments in the first stage

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (2019). [‘Post-16 students and qualifications at level 3 and below in England’](#).

consultation were:

- Qualifications that have been approved and available for at least 2 years
- Qualifications that had no publicly funded enrolments in the last 2 years

### **Question 21 key findings:**

7. Of the 415 respondents who did answer Question 21, 78% answered 'Yes', agreeing with the proposed criteria for identifying qualifications with no enrolments.

8. In total, 62 of the 91 'No' respondents provided a clear reason for their 'No' response. Of these 34 (55%) were generally opposed to the 'streamlining' of qualifications, and (34%) disagreed with the proposed time period of 2 years, typically stating that it was too short to base any trends upon and should be extended (typically to 3 or more years).

### **Question 22 of the first stage consultation asked:**

***Are there specific reasons that a qualification with no enrolments should remain approved for funding?***

### **Question 22 key findings:**

9. Of the 406 respondents who did answer Question 22 a small majority (52%), answered 'No', with 48% answering 'Yes'.

10. Of the 195 respondents who answered 'Yes' to Question 22, 35 provided no clear reason for their 'Yes' response. For the remaining 160 respondents, the most frequently cited reason for answering 'Yes' (stated by 54 respondents – 34%) was that a new qualification might have no enrolments due to its newness, and that the number of enrolments might take a period of time to build up.

11. 38 respondents (24% of those who stated 'Yes') stated that qualifications with no enrolments may need to remain approved for funding in case there are future economic changes that lead to a change in demand for certain roles or skills.

12. 38 respondents (24% of those who stated 'Yes') stated that one reason that a qualification with no enrolments might remain approved for funding was if the qualification was related to niche skills or industries.

13. 12 respondents (8% of those who stated 'Yes') stated that labour market gaps might result if funding for more niche skills is removed, and that retaining funding approval might help prevent such gaps occurring.

## **Government response**

14. As the above summary outlines, the majority of respondents agreed with the proposed criteria for identifying qualifications with no enrolments. We are therefore proceeding with the removal of funding from qualifications with no enrolments from August 2021, although we are extending the qualifying period to 3 years in line with our approach to low enrolment qualifications.

15. Some respondents raised concerns about defunding qualifications that could be related to niche or specialist industries. We would expect a niche or specialist qualification to have at least one (low) enrolment over the past 3 years.

16. The [process for awarding organisations to request retaining funding approval for a qualification with low and no enrolments](#) guidance gives awarding organisations the opportunity to provide evidence where a qualification with no enrolments between 2015 and 2018 has shown increased demand in the first half of 2018 to 2019.

17. For qualifications that have had no enrolments for all the last 3 years and cannot show tangible evidence that demand has increased since we collected the data and that there is sustainable demand in the future, we will remove funding approval.

## Qualifications with low enrolments

18. The criteria we proposed to identify qualifications with low enrolments in the first stage consultation were:

- Qualifications that had fewer than 100 enrolments but more than 1 enrolment in the each of the last 2 years
- Qualifications that had fewer than 100 enrolments but more than 1 enrolment 2 years ago and no enrolments in the previous year

**Question 23 of the first stage consultation asked:**

***Do you agree we should consider removing approval for funding from qualifications with low enrolments?***

## Question 23 Key Findings

19. Of the 448 respondents who did answer Question 23, a majority stated 'No' to this question (57%) and a minority stated 'Yes' (43%).

20. The most commonly cited reason for answering 'No' was the view that qualifications with low enrolments might need to retain approval for funding because they are related to niche skills and industries (123 respondents – 48% of the 255 'No' respondents).

21. 49 (19%) 'No' respondents stated that the context was important in any decision about removing approval for funding, based on low enrolments. They were typically opposed to a blanket removal of funding, stating that the reasons for low enrolment should be explored, and careful consultation undertaken, prior to any removal of approval for funding.

22. Other common reasons for a 'No' response were: concern that the threshold of 100 enrolments is too high (27 respondents – 11%); and concerns about the detrimental impact of removing funding for student choice/access (19 respondents – 7%).

**Question 24 of the first stage consultation asked:**

***Are there specific reasons that a qualification with low enrolments should remain approved for funding?***

## **Question 24 Key Findings**

23. Of the 424 respondents who answered Question 24, 84% answered 'Yes'. The findings indicate a strong overall view that there will be specific reasons that a qualification with low enrolments should remain approved for funding.

24. By far the most frequently cited reason for a 'Yes' response was that there may be niche qualifications that are important to particular industries or sectors, but that have relatively small numbers of enrolments (143 respondents – 40% of 'Yes' respondents).

25. 46 respondents (13%) indicated that they felt that removing approval for funding from qualifications with low enrolments might limit choice for students, and 17 (5%) stated that they felt such qualifications might still be important for students' progression.

26. Other key themes for low enrolments included:

- qualification is relatively new
- certain qualifications might be delivered to relatively small cohorts of students to meet specific regional or local need
- that consultation with stakeholders is needed before decisions about removal of approval for funding are made
- that contextual issues should always be considered in decisions about whether or not approval for funding should be retained; and
- some qualifications might need to remain approved for funding if they meet the needs of an occupational sector and there is no alternative qualification available

## **Government response**

27. We recognise that more than half of respondents were not in favour of removing public funding from low enrolment qualifications (using the criteria outlined above). However, we believe that the removal of public funding for low demand qualifications is an important step in achieving our policy objectives.

28. Our aim for the post-16 level 3 and below qualifications review is to simplify the qualifications landscape and ensure that all publicly funded qualifications are high quality, necessary, have a clear purpose and lead to positive outcomes. The removal of public funding of qualifications with low demand will help achieve this aim and by streamlining the range of qualifications available for post-16 at level 3 and below.

29. There were some concerns raised that 2 years might not be a long enough period of time for a qualification to establish itself and gain over 100 enrolments. In response, we have extended this period from 2 to 3 years, to allow for new qualifications taking longer to build an evidence base.

30. The responses highlighted a concern about removing funding for niche and specialist qualifications serving a particular industry, or geographical area. It is not our intention to defund

specialist and niche qualifications that are of proven value.

31. The 6 week notification period set out in the [process for awarding organisations to request retaining funding approvals for a qualification with low or no enrolments](#) guidance published on 13 February 2020 gives awarding organisations the opportunity to provide evidence if they believe that the removal of public funding from a qualification will have a significant adverse impact on a sector or occupational area or geographical/ mayoral authority or to provide evidence that the qualifications are linked to such niche industries.

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