

Dear Secretary of State,

**Date**

07.07.2022

I write to you on behalf of employers in the NHS to raise their serious concern with the intention to remove the BTEC courses in health and social care and the exacerbation of the workforce crisis in the NHS and in social care this will cause.

**For the attention of**

Secretary of State for Education

[ministers@education.gov.uk](mailto:ministers@education.gov.uk)

[NHS Employers](#) is part of the [NHS Confederation](#), the membership body that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The NHS leaders we represent employ 1.4 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care and reducing health inequalities.

Currently, around 30,000 students are participating in a health and social care related BTEC qualification in England, of which 14,700 are studying full time. These courses appeal to a different student group to those who pursue A-levels or T-levels. There are a broad range of learners who take BTEC's in health and social care, but it is particularly popular with learners who value a vocational, flexible, modular approach to continuing their education. Further Education providers have confirmed that forty seven percent of those enrolled on the courses are from the most deprived areas in our communities and forty seven percent have educational learning needs.

The BTEC facilitates direct entry into employment to support worker roles in nursing, midwifery or allied health. It also provides the foundation to move into higher education to train to be a registered nurse, midwife, radiographer or occupational therapist.

The 2017 data shows us that 7,120 people on the nurse degree training programme had completed the BTEC Nationals in health and social care. This was higher than those who had taken A-levels as the entry route to nurse degree training. This shows that the course provides an effective pathway to nurse training for a significant number of people.

The new T-level in health does not offer a comparable alternative to the BTEC for the individual or the employer. T-levels are open only to 16–19-year-olds. On a practical level the scale of employer work placement capacity required for T-Levels could not be met, even with additional funding. There are also several clinical settings where we cannot provide placements for those under 18. In contrast, the BTEC provides a broad range of course content and requires no employer placement time.

Our members employ 1.4 million people and with our colleagues in adult social care offer employment to 1.6 million people. We have over 105,000 vacancies in the NHS and 150,000 care worker vacancies in social care alone.

Every sector is experiencing challenges with finding sufficient numbers of people to fill jobs. There are more job vacancies than we have seen in decades and fewer people are unemployed or looking for work. Health and social care feature at the top of the list of vacancies by sector.

This is unprecedented and has led to more than 100 NHS organisations from across all parts of England telling us that we should not be bringing the provision of this course which nurtures and supports those with an interest in health and social care to an end at this time.

We need the Government's education and skills policy to support us in tackling the workforce crisis in the NHS and social care and ensuring we level up job opportunities across England.

The decision to remove this particular set of qualifications is counter-intuitive to the work employers are trying to do to engage more people from a diverse range of community groups and age groups into NHS and social care employment.

We are writing to ask you to, at the very least, pause the decision to end of provision of the BTEC in health and social care qualifications and undertake an in-depth impact assessment to look at the effect

this policy would have on the NHS and social care workforce supply, and patient safety.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to discuss this in more detail. If they would like to get in touch, they can reach me at [Daniel.mortimer@nhsemployers.org](mailto:Daniel.mortimer@nhsemployers.org)

Yours sincerely,



**Daniel Mortimer**  
**Chief Executive, NHS Employers and Deputy Chief Executive,**  
**NHS Confederation**

CC: The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Robert Halfon MP  
Chair of the Education Select Committee

Susan Acland-Hood  
Permanent Secretary to Department for Education