GuildHE FINAL response to:

Curriculum and Assessment Review

21st November 2024

About GuildHE

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK higher education, championing distinction and diversity in the sector. In this role, GuildHE works alongside UUK as joint guardians of the sector to advocate for institutions within our memberships and on behalf of the entire system. GuildHE is the most diverse representative body in the UK, serving 67 institutions across the nations and comprising universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions. Our members are small and large, rural and urban, practice-based and online, publicly and privately funded—the diversity of our membership enables us a unique and valuable perspective into the challenges and opportunities within and for the sector at any given time. Members are principally focused on vocational and technical higher education and include major providers of professional programmes in education and community service; healthcare; agriculture, food, and the built environment; business and law; and the creative arts.

Introduction

The Curriculum and Assessment Review, led by Professor Becky Francis CBE, has been established to examine the current national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England. Covering Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 5, the review will focus on the significant challenges to attainment for young people and the obstacles that prevent children from achieving the opportunities and life prospects they deserve. This includes a particular emphasis on those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

The expert review panel is made up of 11 educational specialists including our HE representative Nic Beech, Vice Chancellor of the University of Salford and chair of the Quality Council for UK Higher Education. We will be working collaboratively with Nic throughout the process.

Read more about the review <u>here</u> and respond to the call for evidence <u>here</u>. The deadline to respond is the 22nd of November.



Consultation Questions

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways Q11.What aspects of the current

- a) curriculum,
- b) assessment system and
- c) qualification pathways

should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

We have seen a sharp decline in the number of qualifications schools can offer due to resource implications which include a lack of subject specialists. In this revie, we wish the government to not only consider a broad curriculum but also ensure schools have the right resources to deliver one. We have heard that this resource prioritisation happens at all levels of school - not just at KS3 + and this impacts pupils' future KS3 choices. The deprioritisation of creative subjects through Progress/Attainment 8 and the eBacc has also led to a significant decline in the delivery of these important subjects due to school resource prioritisation. Without a strong creative curriculum, it jeopardises a diverse talent pipeline into one of our country's strongest industries as well as develops gaps in creative skills needed for all sorts of careers and overall weakens our economy and societal wellbeing. We'd like Government to ensure that:

- 1. Every child has a solid foundation of creative education skills
- 2. Drive the recruitment and training of specialist creative arts/education teachers
- 3. Put the creativity back into creative arts / cultural arts education
- 4. Review creative arts / cultural education assessment and qualifications to protect valuable qualifications in the long term and recognise/value creative skills
- 5. Value STEM, the Arts and Humanities equally

There are also practical challenges related to the supply of high-quality and appropriately qualified teachers for these subjects. We'd like to work with the government to ensure that there are enough qualified teachers to deliver this new vision through engagement with our Teacher Education Advisory Group, which we coordinate on behalf of both GuildHE and UUK.

BTECs are a significant way people can undertake a blended technical and academic qualification. We don't think T Levels are deliverable in all areas which will reduce opportunities for such qualifications and furthermore may restrict access to adults re-entering education from gaining a well-respected qualification. Our HE providers respect and champion BTEC provision, and in some cases over 30% of students enter our institutions with them. The uncertainty of the future of these awards is troubling to our members. We therefore are not supportive of the defunding of them and wish the government to think again about the impact that policy decision may have on those from diverse backgrounds.

We think it is vital that more time is spent on resilience, mental health, relationships and financial management - and schools should be given more time to teach this to support young people for the rest of their lives - not just train them to go into work or further study. More career advice and guidance is also needed - and not just based on political priorities, but is genuinely rooted in regional economic needs and opportunities as well as aspiration raising and consideration of wider further learning options. The Gastby benchmarks provide a useful framework - however, we have heard not all schools resource the delivery of them sufficiently. For specialist HE providers benchmark 7 also offers barriers to their engagement with schools as most schools only have time to provide pupils with generic IAG on university options.

We think schools should move away from the primary assessment method being an examination. We do not think this suits all learners and is only one skill. Portfolios, essays and other assessment methodologies would provide a far richer experience for learners and develop different types of skills - and would better mimic further study at HE and tasks in employment. The production of practical work means HE providers can take a holistic approach to admissions decision-making.

The removal of AS levels has also made it more difficult to assess students' potential as the lack of a national exam means HE providers are reliant on predicted grades, which are very school dependent. Reinstating an interim (AS Level) or ongoing assessment would support a more effective university admissions process.

We'd like Government to recognise the additional challenges of pupils achieving good grades in English and Maths (especially) due to having a specific learning disability and that opening up more opportunities for these students to take qualifications like sport and arts will support them to leave school with strong qualifications and confidence in their future.

HE providers must also be involved in the development of future qualifications to ensure that they are suitable for onward mobility.

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

Q12.In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Aside from the variability of resources available at different schools to support diverse students, we think that a lack of a broad and balanced curriculum creates barriers for socioeconomically disadvantaged students to build enough resilience and creative thinking to find their talent and pursue a wide range of career options. With the cultural and creative industries contributing £126 billion in GVA and continuing to outpace the broader economy in terms of growth, all young people from all backgrounds must be supported to learn creative skills which are very much a vital component of many UK businesses (not just those in the creative sectors). The demand for creative talent has also evolved, with new roles emerging at the intersection of creativity and technology. For example, careers in VR design, digital content creation and interactive media are increasingly important, requiring a mix of technical skills and creative problem-solving — and employers are placing ever-increasing value on digital literacy with creativity, adaptability and entrepreneurial thinking. However, roles are often challenging to fill due to skills shortages. By putting creative skills back in the curriculum (across all subjects as well as a commitment to teaching subjects like music, drama, design, and technology) you will be ensuring that no further barriers exist for students from diverse backgrounds to secure good employment.

2024 research by the Education Policy Institute (EPI)

(https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/access-to-extra-curricular-provision-and-the-association-with-outcomes/) finds that participation in extracurricular activities at secondary school is associated with better future outcomes, with arts clubs being stronger than sport activities (the odds of progressing to higher education after engaging in an art/music club is 56% higher compared to 42% for those who attend sports clubs). However, access to extracurricular activity is not universally available - with the research citing vulnerable students are less likely to attend clubs for arts and music when compared to their peers. Young people in independent schools are much more likely to attend extra-curricular arts and music than those in other schools. The reduction in extracurricular opportunities in creative subjects disproportionately affects students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The Cultural Learning Alliance's 2024 Annual Report Card

(https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf) identifies evidence of what it calls an 'enrichment gap', where young people from more affluent backgrounds continue to participate in the arts, even after creative programmes at their schools are cut because they are more likely to be able to access private resources.

We would therefore like to see government ensure that creative skills are fully embedded in the curriculum to ensure the widest reach, but also find ways to enable schools to encourage diverse students to undertake extra-curricular activities.

Q13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)?

We believe that there is still significant stereotyping taking place within schools and society, in part because of the weaknesses in the careers advice system. Without an understanding of potential future careers, it is often challenging to disrupt long-held cultural views of who 'should' be undertaking certain subjects and career pathways. There are a variety of charities working on improving this perception, especially within STEM but schools should also ensure that they are not inadvertently reinforcing gender or ethnic stereotypes and challenging parental expectations.

It would therefore be advantageous for the government to ensure that career advice and guidance in schools is working to break down perceived barriers to careers, and through its wider policy leavers around skills, encourage businesses to undertake more inclusive hiring practices.

Q14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Creative education provides opportunities for students with additional learning needs to unlock talent and the removal of the arts curriculum restricts opportunities for positive outcomes. In GuildHE institutions, we see a disproportionate number of students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia and ADHD undertaking creative degrees - in our specialist creative institutions the percentage of students with such additional needs is over 40%.

We also agree with policy ideas which call for a connected support system (e.g. disability passport) so that all parts of the education system have an understanding of the pupil's needs and can tailor support accordingly This is especially helpful as the young person moves through the education system and onto HE. Developing agency and advocacy skills so that individuals have the confidence to access and use the substantial support that is available would also be welcomed. Too often we see in HE that students are concerned about asking for help.

We therefore encourage the government to deliver a disabled student passport for young people to take with them into FE, HE and future employment. We also hope as part of PSHE reform, there is more work to be done to promote respect around individual differences and characteristics; for example preparing all pupils to work with others with ADHD, Autism, or physical disabilities would be a positive step.

Q15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above?

Higher education providers can see the impact of aspiration raising and breaking down stereotypes for certain

professions and pathways - however this needs to happen from the age of 7 to ensure the greatest impact, and universities do not have the resources to undertake this activity themselves.

For older learners, role models and mentors do offer young people from diverse backgrounds the ability to build confidence and work with those who can offer more personalised advice and guidance. HE institutions around the country are contributing to this work as part of their access and participation activities.

We are delighted that the government is continuing to invest in coordinated regional outreach activities through the Uni Connect programme. HE providers and their students can support schools in tackling equality issues, but the coordination and additional financial support makes this work more impactful.

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

Q19. To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

English and maths are fundamental skills, and as such, just like creative skills, should be embedded across the curriculum. We don't think forcing young people to continue to take distinctive English and Maths qualifications if they are unable to secure a 'good' grade post 16 supports their wider achievement and they may become disenfranchised if they are forced to continually retake the exam, or told that this will restrict their future career options.

Instead, we'd like to see the government ensure that English and Maths competencies are embedded into the subjects young people want to study. This will support more young people to learn fundamental literacy, oracy and numeracy skills where the formal qualification might be too abstract.

Section 5: Curriculum and Qualification Content

Q26.In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

The curriculum is too narrow, locking young people into a set of choices at a very young age that can then affect their prospects for the rest of their lives. While preserving student autonomy, it seems important to facilitate (where appropriate) a broad range of subject learning through age 18, both to better prepare them for the broad inquiry that HE should encourage and to support them with a wider range of career and study choices.

Emphasis within schools often leans heavily towards STEM subjects, leaving creative disciplines like art and design with limited space in the curriculum. This focus narrows students' learning experiences, limiting their development in creativity—a skill that extends far beyond the arts and holds universal value. Creativity is increasingly recognised as a critical skill for all industries, enabling problem-solving, adaptability, and innovative thinking, all essential for today's rapidly evolving workforce. By fostering creativity from an early age, we equip students with versatile skills that benefit not only creative HE courses but a broad range of future careers. To bridge this gap, schools could benefit from a more integrated curriculum that emphasises not only traditional academic subjects but also structured, practical creative projects. By embedding creative thinking in all areas of the curriculum. Exposure to hands-on, project-based learning across subjects helps develop a mindset that values creativity as a key skill, whether students pursue art or engineering.

Introducing more creative subjects within the curriculum could transform student outcomes across fields. Subjects like music, drama, dance and art encourage imagination and innovation, fostering skills that are highly prized in any career path. The arts promote problem-solving and idea generation which is a critical skill for developing independence and innovation. Music, art, sports, drama and other vocational subjects all have an element/s of encouraging teamwork, collaboration and unity. These skills are needed throughout life. A typical 18-year-old, moving away from home for the first time will cope much better through social interactions with others than working purely within a textbook.

A broader curriculum that treats creativity as essential prepares students not only for creative HE programmes but also for roles in fields such as technology, healthcare, and business, where innovative thinking is increasingly in demand. Emphasising creativity across all subjects ensures that students see it as an integral part of their education and future career toolkit. We explore many of these carers in our recent Value of Creative Graduates Report (https://guildhe.ac.uk/guildhe.and-ukadia-launch-new-report-the-value-of-creative-graduates/).

Digital skills are vital across all future work opportunities and should also be emphasised within the curriculum to meet HE and employer expectations. Training teaching staff in the use of digital tools (such as AI) would be a starting point as so many young people are familiar with technology, but many teachers aren't.

Design skills are also a valuable contributor to the UK economy and creative industries, but the rapid decline in Design and Technology puts education provision and the UK's talent pipeline at risk. There has been a 67% decline in GCSE entries in England between 2011-23, teacher numbers have halved in the last decade, and there is a diversity gap which carries through into the design industry. To secure a strong future for authentic design qualification pathways, and the future of the design economy, we need action to:

- Place sufficient value on design subjects in school performance frameworks
- Update and improve the D& T curriculum, qualification content, and assessment
- Strengthen and clarify design competencies within the art and design curriculum.
- Ensure equity within design education offered across English schools.
- Support teachers in delivering the best design education with relevant and continuing CPD.
- Embed design thinking and design skills across the broader curriculum.

Also, the availability/flexibility of IT, such as more funding for proficient laptops would be of benefit. Some schools have secured funding for 'Digital technology labs' such as gaming rooms and VR spaces to support digital skills. However, we must also ensure young people have the basics in place such as word processing and spreadsheet applications, how to write a professional email, how to organise digital files and how to type using a QWERTY keyboard. These are skills we in HE see lacking in new undergraduate students, and are skills that many of us need for employment.

We therefore urge the government to review the curriculum, in collaboration with HE providers and skills boards to ensure that we are setting up our future workforce with a variety of subject and transferable skills.

Q27.In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

The current creative curriculum provides limited support for the transition to HE, with minimal focus on creative, practical, or vocational pathways essential for the arts and cultural workforce. The curriculum lacks accessible, diverse pathways to equip students with industry-aligned skills, especially in arts and creative fields. In particular, it provides limited preparation for students pursuing HE and the focus on academic subjects pre-16 has reduced the availability of specialist creative training and fundamental skills development.

For example, the minimal dance exposure in PE lacks the depth and breadth students need for a conservatoire or university-level dance course, such as advanced techniques, choreography, and theory. This means that the only way to receive the appropriate prerequisite training for performing arts degrees is through extracurricular activity which ultimately excludes economically disadvantaged students. This trend can also be acutely seen in music. Increasing diversity through accessible entry points, support systems for disadvantaged students, and dedicated progression pathways would better support transition.

In 2021 we undertook an analysis (https://ukadia.ac.uk/2021/09/28/trends-in-creative-arts-qualifications/) of the qualifications offer holders of creative courses had in their UCAS application. We found that not only has there been a decline in the number of young people undertaking creative qualifications but there has also been a decline in applicants who hold more than one arts qualification (A level, BTEC or other creative qualification) when applying to university and the sharpest decline is seen from those in the least advantaged areas of the country. The most advantaged in society are more likely to hold any arts qualification, and the least advantaged less likely to be able to access arts qualifications. This paints a worrying picture of a lack of equality of opportunity to develop creative skills and for the future workforce as the creative industry is heavily reliant on Higher Education as the key pipeline into the industry. This is especially true as other technical education routes such as Apprenticeships are mostly unworkable due to the flexible nature of the jobs within the industry. The 2020 PEC report For Love or Money (https://pec.ac.uk/research-reports/for-love-or-money) showed that 82 per cent of graduates working in design, 78 per cent in music, performing and visual arts and 75 per cent in architecture have a creative degree. The recent House Of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry (https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldcomm/125/125.pdf) therefore concluded that the Government needs to do far more to improve the reputation and uptake of creative qualifications to secure the industry's future as there is already a chronic skills shortage. We can see from UCAS data that whilst students attending university have increased by 2.4% between 2019 and present, there has been a 7.4% decline in those undertaking Design, Creative & Performing Arts qualifications. Young people are less prepared for creative degrees and are also now less likely to apply to them.

We therefore urge the government to impact assess the current data on who studies for certain qualifications and what their onward trajectory looks like. We have also already provided specific asks for government on what is needed to bring back creative skills into the school curriculum.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

Q29.To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

Oracy and digital literacy are indispensable across industries, whether in business, technology, or healthcare. In particular, digital skills, when taught through a creative lens, allow students to approach technology with an open mind and adapt as technology evolves. By teaching students to articulate their ideas and leverage digital tools effectively, schools lay a foundation for adaptability—where creativity, rather than just technical knowledge, becomes a core strength. These skills are critical for future professionals who will need to innovate, communicate, and collaborate in complex work environments.

Despite the major technological advances of the last 25 years, in Higher Education we have not seen improvements in the initial digital skills students arrive with (word processing, file management, typing skills etc). Also, because at university and at work, students must navigate different systems, a mindset of being digitally capable and prepared to try and learn for oneself is as important as any specific skill. Therefore it would be advantageous for schools to develop pupils' digital skills to look up and search to solve problems, or who can imagine and develop digital solutions to meet their own needs.

Students often arrive in HE with very different oral capabilities. Some are highly confident, and others need support. This is not only about 'presentations'; it is an enabling skill that underpins seeking support and engaging with peers, so it is a gateway skill. Appreciating oracy can be linked to anxiety and fear, more could be done earlier in the curriculum to scaffold and support confident speakers in informal and formal situations, in-person and online.

GuidIHE believes that a broader curriculum could attract a wider student demographic into HE by building confidence, developing both practical and academic skills and fundamental flexible skills which break down barriers and wish for government to think about the development of fundamental and transferable skills and how they are developed in school settings.

Q30.To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

Students in recent years may have experienced learning loss, and this will have ongoing impacts for at least the next decade. Therefore it is in part hard to judge the extent to which the current curriculum supports learners as they will all have experienced a condensed curriculum within the last 5 years.

Many first-year university courses accept students from varied subject backgrounds. GuildHE institutions also see students with varied combinations of BTEC, T Level and A Level as well as projects (EPQs), so staff are used to working in the first year of programmes to lay foundations and ensure readiness for higher levels of the specific study that follows. On that basis, depth of study in schools is not a concern, and, if anything, the more varied backgrounds in music, sport, and languages etc., could deeply enrich peer interaction and bring new perspectives. Classrooms with a diverse range of experiences will add richness to discussion, debate and problem-solving.

Q31.To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

We have already outlined in a number of sections our concerns with the lack of creative education built into the curriculum. Without it, it will undoubtedly disadvantage this generation in the workplace, regardless of the industries they work in.

To fix the issue, there are a number of things which the government should think through. Firstly, the way in which performance metrics drive school behaviour. Since the introduction of Progress/Attainment 8 and the eBacc schools have been disincentivised from delivering creative education. This is further exacerbated by the lack of specialist teachers in the system able to provide a comprehensive creative learning experience.

School funding has also been squeezed to the extent that subjects with ongoing additional material costs (such as art, D&T) are paired back - as well as free after-school clubs which have traditionally supported the nurturing of creative talent.

The decline in the population who hold a formal qualification or have access to develop their creative skills is concerning as the world of work changes, the creative industry continues to grow to be one of the UK's leading areas of economic growth and creative skills are core to fixing UK productivity throughout our workforce. It is unacceptable for access to arts and culture to remain a privilege for the few.

These are the reasons why we are a founding partner of the #ArtIsEssential Creative Education Manifesto and Creative Education Alliance

(https://ukadia.ac.uk/2023/09/21/artisessential-campaign-coalition-launch-creative-education-manifesto/) which has brought together education providers, and the creative sector to call for the protection of the creative arts talent pipeline. We believe if we invest in creative skills there are multiple benefits including:

- Job, skills and wealth creation and generation
- Increased innovation, productivity and growth
- High street renewal, safer streets and desirable communities, a true pathway to delivering levelling up across the UK
- Healthier, happier and responsible citizens equipped with powerful self-efficacy and agency.

We therefore call on government to ensure that:

- 6. Every child has a solid foundation of creative education skills
- 7. Drive the recruitment and training of specialist creative arts/education teachers
- 8. Put the creativity back into creative arts / cultural arts education
- 9. Review creative arts / cultural education assessment and qualifications to protect valuable qualifications in the long-term and recognise/value creative skills
- 10. Value STEM, the Arts and Humanities equally

Q32.Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the subject take up analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Although analysis in this consultation indicates that the popularity of Art and Design courses has remained relatively consistent, this trend masks the profound impact of wider educational policies on the curriculum. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2010, which mandated the publication of the number of students achieving A-C grades in English, maths, Modern Foreign Languages, and humanities, has significantly altered the subject priorities of schools. Department for Education data from 2018 reveals a substantial decline in the number of hours dedicated to arts subjects, decreasing by 21% between 2010 and 2017, alongside a 20% reduction in the number of arts teachers.

Q33.To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

We believe that a broad and balanced curriculum should also cover a variety of learning activities, assessments and experiences. Our members continually say that the students they take with BTEC qualifications (which offer a blend of academic and technical learning experiences) provide students with the best foundations for HE study. Our institutions offer 'applied' qualifications in a variety of subjects including education and community service;

healthcare; agriculture, food, and the built environment; business and law; and the creative arts. If applied qualifications were removed from the qualification pool we believe it would have adverse consequences, especially for pupils with SEND and those who do not thrive in purely academic settings. Furthermore, applied qualifications are also a useful route for adults wishing to retrain, in a way that academic qualifications do not offer the same opportunities.

We are therefore in full support of the #protectstudentchoice campaign to ensure vital BTEC qualifications are not eradicated and urge the government to pause and rethink the defunding of BTEC programmes.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

Q36.Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

The current curriculum to 19 is overly reliant on standardised exams, which for the most part do not translate to the learning and assessment style in higher education or real life. Returning assessed coursework to the curriculum could go a long way toward better preparing students for HE.

Traditional assessments (namely examinations) are often rigid, failing to capture the creative and critical thinking skills students will need in HE and beyond. Adopting more flexible assessment methods that include portfolios, projects, and practical applications would better prepare students for a future where creativity and independent thinking are critical. Assessments that recognise innovative approaches and originality could help foster these abilities from a young age, demonstrating the value of creativity to students and reinforcing its importance.

We are also concerned that there is an emerging culture in schools of 'teaching to the test' rather than 'developing abilities', particularly for pre-16. This may be for a number of reasons including targets, resources, lack of CPD opportunities and time. This is unhelpful, and we are seeing more and more young people enter HE driven by assessment, often at the expense of learning and curiosity and without the necessary skills to undertake independent study or reading around a subject area. Independent learning is an important life skill. It enables them to learn how to motivate themselves and organise tasks.

Varied assessments would also help students move into a more mature approach to assessment where they are more confident to offer ideas, give perspectives and make judgments. In examination settings, there is often one single answer which is not conducive to developing debating and negotiating skills nor does it provide an outlet for creative thinking.

Universities do a lot of work to support students to become assessment confident, e.g. working with criteria, noticing feedback, and seeking feedback. Having students who are more confident to seek support when needed, and to work with guidance would be helpful, as would students equipped to understand feedback and challenge teachers and their peers.

There has been a lot of concern in recent years related to the accuracy and therefore fairness of predicted grades in supporting applications to university. We believe reinstating interim (AS Level) or ongoing assessment would support a more effective university admissions process. This would help build confidence in the admissions process.

We therefore encourage the government to change the approach to assessment in schools to ensure that young people develop diverse skills, and secures a fairer outcome for all students.

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

Q47.To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners

- a) Level 3
- b) Level 2
- c) Level 1 and entry-level

We have been concerned in recent years about the progress to move away from BTEC qualifications in favour of T Levels. Whilst T levels may have a place in the qualification landscape they do not offer all students from all backgrounds the opportunity to study an applied qualification. This is due to the lack of take up in some areas and the complication of the mandatory work experience element which is sometimes undeliverable - especially in sub-urban and rural locations.

T levels are also not a qualification that could easily be taken by adults looking to retrain and we are frustrated by the lack of response to concerns raised in the equality impact assessment of the T level policy.

GuildHE believes BTECs offer the right blend of applied technical and academic content required to work in specific industries or move into further study. Falmouth University takes in roughly 30-40% of its student cohort annually with BTECS. They find them to be robust qualifications that prepare students well for study within Higher Education and are often better prepared for their courses than A Level students. This is because the BTECs allow for more creative freedom due to the way they are taught. Students often have better investigative skills and exploratory skills than those of their A level peers. BTECs also suit neurodiverse students. Leeds Arts University (LAU) also finds that students with BTECS are also experienced in the 'project brief, independent research/development and production' phases of the creative process used in Higher Education and the creative industries which helps them settle into their studies swiftly. Employers in the creative industries are usually micro-organisations and are not able to offer work experience below undergraduate level. Level 3 Diplomas and Extended Diplomas typically provide alternative engagement and good simulated experiences with employers that enhance their educational experience. LAU experience suggests that these qualifications also provide a more attractive route to Higher Education for some students from under-represented groups.

The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) also finds that BTECs give students far more live performance and practical experience over those who have studied A-Levels. Around 20% of incoming students to ICMP enter with Extended BTEC qualifications.

The University of Law also highly values the BTEC route. Given that many institutions don't offer an A Level in this area, they find that this gives students the opportunity to study some traditional academic subjects via A Level but to also begin their vocational studies using the BTEC route. They have no academic concerns regarding this cohort in terms of their performance at Level 3 and beyond.

We therefore urge the government to pause and rethink the defunding of BTEC programmes and review the delivery of T levels to see if they are a genuinely viable alternative qualification route that is deliverable in all areas of the country.

Q48. Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners:

- a) AS/A level qualifications
- b) T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes
- c) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3
- d) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

A comprehensive review of the study programme, and more time dedicated for learners to develop skills and confidence is vital. More time on essay writing would also help post 16 learners to be more HE ready where a lot of HE curriculum relies on essays / dissertations etc.

A lot of HE assessment is modular submission with almost all including a written evaluation. So, preparing learners for such skills reflective thinking and conclusion will help. Not only on paper, but also in person through presentation and critique.

We are unclear if the post-16 reform of the inclusion of T Levels will serve those who wish to progress to HE (which is promoted) as well as those who study an academic route. While BTECs are well understood to be a blend of academic and technical content, it is unclear whether academic skills such as essay writing and critical thinking are developed enough within the curriculum at T level. GuildHE institutions are well placed to offer support to students who come into HE with T levels, but we are concerned that the sector more broadly misunderstands or ignores the additional learning needs that these students may have. Until we have more students coming into with T Levels, the picture will remain unclear.

Q49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

There must be a fundamental reform of careers advice and guidance in schools. We do not think at present the approach services all young people, and is varied depending on the location and resources within the school.

In creative careers in particular, these are not well understood and need more investment. Arts University Bournemouth has created a new creative careers advice tool for schools in collaboration with Global Teacher Prize winner Andria Zafirakou and creative design agency Bond & Coyne. It is called WonderWhat (
https://www.wonderwhat.co.uk/). The app showcases the variety of job roles available but rather than a traditional search engine, it uses images for young people to click on and then career opportunities are curated based on these interests. This means that they don't have to know anything about the industry or keyword terms to search for - it is completely demystified and inspires those who use it to consider how their skills, talents and interests could be used in a creative career.

Careers advice outside of the creative sector also needs updating. At present it is felt that much of the careers support available is outdated. If we truly wish to raise aspirations and break systematic disadvantage, investing in future career advice should be a key priority.

Q51.Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

We believe there are a number of core competencies that must be developed to support well rounded individuals to reach their potential. they are:

- 1. A stronger emphasis on critical information skills Developing awareness of misinformation, quality sources, bias, and, interpreting reading, and the risks of taking information from a narrow range of sources.

 Information literacy more broadly would be valuable, especially in the context of AI.
- 2. Digital skills including basics of self-management using IT, e.g. file storage and tool selection, productivity type tools which also can help accessibility and learning (e.g. voice to text), as well as spreadsheets, word processing, graphic creation, digital accessibility awareness, and information seTheying.
- 3. Working in groups encouraging collaboration in different forms would pave the way for this in HE and beyond.
- 4. Stronger verbal skills and building confidence in in-person speaking, question asking, and presentation is important. This is something that we experience as being highly variable with students.
- 5. Reform PHSE: ensure it covers equality and diversity, sex education, platonic relationships, resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence and provides young people with the tools for supporting positive mental health. We are particularly concerned with the rise in young boys being radicalised by social media in their views of women, pornography and tolerance and their understanding of consent.
- 6. Universal life skills such as managing finances, understanding employment rights, and time management, should also be woven into the curriculum. These are also skills which can entrench disadvantage.
- 7. Change management: Recognising that the world is changing rapidly, individual pupils themselves are going through change and transition, and that knowledge is always changing, the transition to university can be challenging.
- 8. More content on global perspectives and environmental sustainability.

Many of these echo the 2022 report by the Skills and Productivity Board (https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/skills-and-productivity-board) who provide independent, evidence-based advice to ministers at the Department for Education on matters relating to skills and their contribution to productivity. We hope that as part of DfE's ongoing thinking it will include this sort of evidence in the design of new curriculums, and longer term work collaboratively with Skills England on reviewing skills gaps.

Furthermore, it is imperative the government consults broadly with the HE sector around changes to curriculum delivery. Not only does that impact our curriculum offer and admissions expectations, but we also have academics within our sector who have a deep understanding of foundational learning and teaching in all subjects taught in schools, as well as a useful understanding of systemic and structural barriers to equality.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

53. How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

Al and technology must be embedded into teaching and learning (just as we are thinking about in HE). Everyone will need to use technology in their jobs in some way and we know that digital poverty exacerbates societal inequalities (https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/)

54.Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Neither parents nor schools have the resources to understand regional and national employment trends, industry opportunities and future workforce plans as it is a huge undertaking and is immensely complex. We hope that the introduction of Skills England and the new regional skills collaborations will incorporate a schools and public engagement strategy to ensure that there is up-to-date IAG available for future career opportunities. The current careers system, whilst has evolved over the last 10 years, is still reliant on teacher and parent knowledge and HE providers can still see inherent biases in the advice provided. For example, the creative industries are vital to UK

GDP but are misrepresented, misunderstood or ignored as legitimate career paths for young people. This bakes in inequalities in both access to creative education and the talent pipeline into the industry. Our members like Arts University Plymouth provide careers advice booklets for parents, but there should be a nationally coordinated approach to parent IAG. For businesses to succeed in recruiting diverse staff, schools must equip all students with the skills and tools to succeed in their chosen industry regardless of their background and/or their parental biases.

As the secretariat for the Teacher Education Advisory Group, we have a strong understanding of the way in which HE trains future teachers. However, we have heard from members that their experience of working with schools suggests that whilst HE training provides teachers with the skills to teach a broad curriculum in flexible ways, the pressures of teaching through resources and performance metrics means that curriculums are often watered down and focuses on knowledge retrieval and an assessment led approach rather than robust learning which develops broad haptic and critical thinking skills, enthusiasm and curiosity for learning. There is a perception that new staff who are trained through MATs for example seem to only be learning how to teach for assessment and not for learning. Whilst we can see the value of employer-delivered teacher training, we believe that university-delivered ITT provides the profession with the full spectrum of skills required to deliver high-quality learning for our young people which will set them up for lifelong success, not just to learn content for examination. This style of learning must be the key to laying the foundations for a successful society where we have a happier, healthier and more resilient workforce.

School performance measures undoubtedly impact on behaviour. We support the recent government policy to remove the Russell group metric from school performance targets but wish for a more holistic review to take place which looks at the consequences of metrics on behaviour. For example, without reforming progress/attainment 8, schools will continue to deprioritise arts and sports from the curriculum.