



**Lord Agnew Kt DL**

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Lord Watson of Invergowrie  
House of Lords  
London  
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31.10 October 2019

With regard to the Lords Question for Short debate on Monday 28 October 2019, I agreed to respond to the question you asked about the likely reason behind the fall in the number of vocational qualifications in England in the second quarter of this year, which has decreased by 6% compared to the same quarter in 2018.

This statistic, which has been published on Gov.uk by Ofqual in its "Vocational and other qualifications quarterly: April to June 2019" relates to the fall in the number of certificates awarded to all ages of students, not just those in secondary schools. It reflects an ongoing trend in the overall decline in certificates awarded for vocational qualifications over the last five years.

There is no single reason for this trend. The underlying data covers many different types of qualification, many of which are not directly aimed at facilitating entry to employment, for example performing arts graded examinations, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualifications and Functional Skills, as well as vocationally-related and occupational qualifications. Some of these types of qualification have actually risen in number of certificates awarded (for example, performing arts graded examinations), while others have fallen.

The fall in the total number of certificates awarded is not in itself of concern, since it is the quality of the qualifications being taken and the outcomes that students are achieving that is important. There may also be demographic effects on the data, as well as funding effects since the data covers all qualifications awarded, not just those funded by the Department for Education.

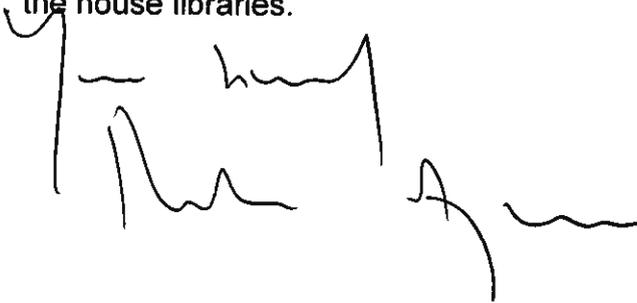
We agree that it is vitally important for government to continue to strengthen vocational and technical education, so that young people are aware of their options as they progress through secondary school and onwards. Vocational and technical qualifications are becoming increasingly vital in underpinning a robust economy. Our ambition for T Levels is that they, and A Levels, should

become the programmes of choice for those opting for classroom-based study, as apprenticeships are for those seeking a work-based option.

Alongside the introduction of T Levels, we are conducting a review of qualifications at level 3 and below (with the exception of GCSEs, A Levels and T Levels). The aim of the review is to ensure that every single qualification approved for public funding is necessary and has a distinct purpose, is high quality and supports progression to positive outcomes, as part of a simplified landscape. We want there to be clearer and simpler high-quality options for students ready and able to study at level 3, and for as many young people as possible to benefit from T Levels, just as many thousands on the academic route already benefit from A Levels.

Our continued reform of apprenticeships, development of T Levels and review of vocational and technical qualifications will help us to support young people in achieving their highest of aspirations after leaving school or college.

I hope this response to your question has been useful, and I will place a copy in the house libraries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theodore Agnew'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'A'.

THEODORE AGNEW

P.S. Hope to see you again  
in December !!