



Skills Funding  
Agency

# **Advanced Learner Loans Prospectus 2015 to 2016: Designating Qualifications**

**Version 1.0**

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Official – Information for awarding organisations

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## Introduction

1. This Prospectus sets out how you (awarding organisations) can nominate qualifications for the 2015 to 2016 funding year Advanced Learner Loans (Loans) offer.
2. Loans are available for individuals aged 24 or above to undertake designated qualifications at Levels 3 and 4, with an **eligible training organisation** in England. Loans give individuals access to financial support for tuition costs similar to that available in higher education. Payments are profiled across a learners start and end dates and paid to the training organisation each month by the **Student Loans Company**.
3. As part of the move towards a simplified funding system, we are introducing a simpler and more regular process to designate technical and professional qualifications for Loans. This process places the emphasis on you to notify us directly when you want us to add your relevant qualifications to the annual Loans offer.
4. This Prospectus applies to Loans in the 2015 to 2016 funding year only. It does **not** cover the following areas:
  - Adult Skills Budget.
  - Apprenticeships.
  - Contracting: see the **Register of Training Organisations**.
  - Learner eligibility and entitlement: see our **Funding Rules**.
5. We expect you to publicly promote your Loans offer to your centres and to prospective learners. As part of our promotion of Loans, we are interested in working with you. We want to hear your ideas and proposals on how we can collaboratively deliver a high quality and demand led Loans offer for learners.
6. If you have any queries about this document or our process to designate qualifications for Loans, please email the **Qualifications** team.

## Which qualifications can be designated for Loans

### Overview

7. We want the qualifications we designate for Loans to deliver the right outcomes for learners. To do this we focus the Loans offer on technical and professional qualifications that will support clear routes into and through employment and progression to higher-level skills. The Loan should benefit an individual's professional development. It should also benefit the economy by supporting the aspiration of higher productivity set out in the government's productivity plan, **Fixing the Foundations**.

8. The following qualifications are in-scope for Loans:
  - Those at Level 3 and 4 that are part of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and offered by awarding organisations regulated by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual).
  - Those at Level 3 which are Access to Higher Education Diplomas and offered by organisations recognised as Authorised Validating Agencies by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

### The Loans offer

9. We automatically designate certain qualifications for the Loans offer. There is no need for you to notify us if you offer these qualifications and want us to include them in the Loans offer. These include the following qualifications:
  - QAA Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma.
  - GCE Advanced Level (A-level) and Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS-level).
  - Applied General Qualifications (recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) for the purposes of 16 to 19 Performance Tables).
  - Tech Level Qualifications (recognised by the DfE for the purposes of 16 to 19 Performance Tables).

10. If you have made a submission to DfE for their 16 to 19 Performance Tables we will confirm designation when this process completes.

11. If you offer a qualification on the RQF not listed above, you can ask us to designate it, provided it has been designed to support the following outcomes:

- Progression to and through higher-level technical and professional education and skills. (Qualifications that support progression must have a clear focus on a particular occupational area rather than be about generic 'study skills').
- Direct entry to a specific job role.
- Continuing professional development in an occupation.
- Upskilling or reskilling in an occupational area.

12. When you consider which qualifications to nominate, or new qualifications to develop, you should be aware we are very keen for the Loans offer to support:

- Governments **Industrial Strategies** and **Industrial Partnerships**.
- Science Technology Engineering Maths (STEM) subjects.
- Individuals to undertake higher level digital skills.

13. When we receive a notification for a qualification, we follow three steps.

#### **Step one – is the qualification within the remit of Loans?**

14. Qualifications are in scope to be designated if they are:

- Available in England.
- Available for learners aged 24 and over.
- At Level 3 and Level 4.
- Offered by awarding organisations that are recognised by Ofqual or QAA.
- Offered by awarding organisations who regularly upload data to the Personal Learning Record in line with the terms of the **Awarding Organisation Agreement**.

15. If the qualification falls into one of the following categories we will not accept your nomination:

- A licensing authority requires it so an individual can operate in a regulated job role.
- It provides the training to meet employers' legislative responsibilities such as Health and Safety, First Aid and Food Safety.
- It is part of higher education provision (for instance, it is a degree or a Higher National qualification).
- It has been designed to be used as part of end-point assessment for an approved apprenticeship standard in England.
- It is not subject to regulation by Ofqual or QAA.
- It may be specific to one employer or may be a 'vendor qualification'.

**Step two – does the qualification meet the size threshold for Loans?**

16. Although we have simplified the rules for qualifications to be in scope for Loans, we still require qualifications to be above a certain size threshold. Qualifications need to be a sufficient size to deliver meaningful learning to demonstrate the attainment of skills, knowledge and understanding.

17. The size threshold is as follows:

- If the qualification is linear in design, 150 guided learning hours (GLH).
- If the qualification is credit based, 15 credits.

18. We will take the GLH you have stated for the qualification on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications. We will take the most up to date entry you have made for the qualifications GLH.

19. We recognise that in certain occupational areas this size threshold may be inappropriate. In this case, we may consider an exception to the size rule for qualifications that are 130 to 149 GLH or 13 to 14 credits.

20. If you nominate a qualification below the size threshold we require the following additional information from you:

- Clear employer evidence that the qualification is of the appropriate size for entry to that occupation.
- Clear employer evidence that the qualification is of the appropriate size for upskilling or reskilling in a particular occupational area.
- Evidence of demand from learners who are waiting to take out a Loan application for the qualification with no appropriate alternative that meets the size threshold.

### **Step Three – Information about the Qualification**

21. To confirm the nomination we will check that you have made information available to learners about the qualification. This information must explain and promote the outcomes of the qualification directly to learners considering taking out a Loan. It should be in addition to the qualification specification.

22. The information should be clear, concise and accurate. It should help the learner understand what outcomes they can achieve with the qualification and why they would take one particular qualification over another that you offer. To make sure this information is accessible and easy to understand, we recommend you write it in plain English.

23. When you submit your nomination, please provide a hyperlink to where you publish this information online. As well as making this information available to individuals through the learner-facing **Loans Catalogue**, we will share the link you provide with the National Careers Service.

24. We do not ask for separate evidence of recognition or endorsement. However, it is beneficial for the learner to see a clear reference to the organisations that support the qualification. So you may wish to make learners aware if a qualification:

- Will lead to Professional Body membership.
- Is endorsed by a major employer in that occupational area.
- Is recognised by a Higher Education Institution for progression purposes.

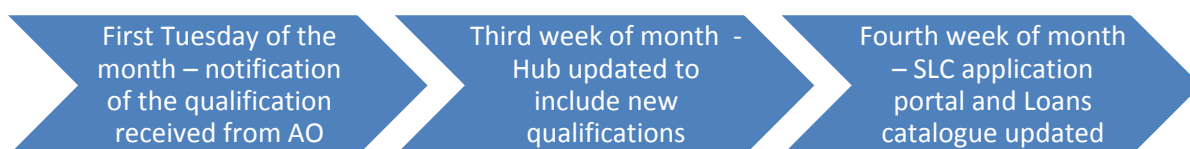
25. The table below details the information you should include.

<b>What to include</b>	<b>Value to learner</b>
The qualification's content, structure and outcomes.	They can see the knowledge, skills and competencies they will develop.
Comparison to similar qualifications you offer.	They can decide which qualification is appropriate for them.
Other ways to achieve the same outcome.	They can decide which route would be best for them, for example a Loan or an apprenticeship.
An explanation of how the qualification supports the identified outcome/s.	They can see the progression opportunities in the job role/s or occupation/occupational and/or the subjects, qualifications and apprenticeships they can go on to study at the next level.
Reference to organisations that support the qualification.	They can see that the qualification will support their entry to higher education, into employment or to gain membership status with professional bodies
The UCAS points tariff the qualification attracts, if it has them.	They can see how it will support a higher education application



## Notifying Us

26. You need to complete the Qualifications Funding Approval form and give us all of the information we need. The latest version of the form from is available on the [Qualifications](#) page of GOV.UK.
27. The Loans process operates on a monthly basis. You must send us the form by **midnight** on the **first Tuesday of the month**. Please follow the instructions below:
- Use one form for all the qualifications you notify us of each month. You need to provide all the information requested. Without this information, we cannot confirm the qualification as part of the Loans offer.
  - Include a working hyperlink to the information about the qualification. This must be a link to the webpage where the information is available, not to an actual document.
  - If the qualification is below the size threshold make sure you give us the additional evidence (please refer to **paragraph 19** above).
  - Before you send the form, please check its contents are correct and that the qualification/s meet the requirements set out in this Prospectus.
  - If you submit your form before the deadline, you can amend it. Please indicate in your email if this replaces an earlier form.
28. We will only write to you if we need to clarify something or at the end of the process if we are not designating your qualification. If we do not designate a qualification, we will tell you why.



## Publishing the Loans offer

29. Once we designate a qualification, we will first add it to the **Hub** in the third week of each month. (You can see the update schedule for the Hub [here](#)). We

will then update the Loans Catalogue in the last week of the month. These timings will make sure that Student Finance England's systems are updated with the same information at the same time.

30. In the learner facing Loans Catalogue we will include the qualifications maximum Loan rate and the link you have given us to the qualification information.
31. If we designate a qualification after 1 August, we will backdate its availability to 1 August or its operational start date if that is later.

### **Managing the Loans offer**

32. We will monitor changes to the size and sector subject area of qualifications. If you amend a qualification and it becomes ineligible, we will remove it from the Loans Catalogue. We will continue to support enrolled learners.
33. We will monitor changes to a qualifications operational end date to inform learners and training organisation of changes to the last date for enrolments.
34. We will monitor the take up of qualifications in the Loans offer in order to make sure that the offer stays focused on high demand.
35. We will say more about the process for the 2016 to 2017 funding year Loans offer, including the recent announcement on the expansion of Loans, in early 2016.