



Education & Skills
Funding Agency

Advanced learner loans prospectus 2018 to 2019: designating qualifications

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Official – information for awarding organisations

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Introduction

1. This prospectus sets out how you (awarding organisations) can notify us of qualifications for the advanced learner loans (loans) offer for the 2018 to 2019 funding year. The 2018 to 2019 funding year runs from 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2019.
2. Loans are available for individuals to undertake designated qualifications at levels 3 to 6, with an eligible training organisation in England. They are available for individuals aged 19 or above when they start their qualification. Learners aged 19 to 23 retain a legal entitlement to full funding for their first level 3 qualification.
3. Loans provide a source of fees support for learners, allowing them to study specified qualifications. The **Student Loans Company** will work out a monthly payment profile for these fees across the learning duration, and pay the training organisation each month.
4. For 2018 to 2019, we have not changed the qualifications that are available as part of the advanced learner loans offer. Qualifications will continue to be available in the loans offer, if they are available for delivery in 2018 to 2019.
5. We have not changed the criteria we apply to designate qualifications for loans. In the loans process, you need to tell us to add relevant qualifications to loans.
6. This prospectus does **not** cover the following areas:
 - adult education budget (AEB)
 - apprenticeships
 - contracting: see the **Register of Training Organisations**
 - learner eligibility and entitlement: see our **funding rules** and **Advanced Learner Loans Funding Rules 2018 to 2019**
 - how maximum loan amounts are set: see our **Maximum Loan Amounts for Advanced Learner Loans Designated Qualifications 2018 to 2019**

7. Where your qualifications are part of the loans offer, we expect you to publicly promote your qualifications to your centres and to prospective learners. This includes providing learners with accessible information about your qualifications and the outcomes they support, so that learners can make an informed choice. You can do this through your website, or through the centres offering your qualifications.
8. If you have any queries about this document or our process to designate qualifications for loans, please email [**Qualifications.ESFA@education.gov.uk**](mailto:Qualifications.ESFA@education.gov.uk).

Which qualifications can be designated for loans?

Overview

9. Qualifications designated for loans should deliver the outcomes described in paragraphs 14 and 15. They should also benefit the economy, in line with the aspirations set out in the **Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future**. To enable this, the loans offer will continue to focus on technical qualifications that support clear routes into and through employment, and progression to higher-level skills.
10. The (further education) qualifications in scope for loans are those at:
 - levels 3 to 6 that are part of the **Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)** and offered by awarding organisations recognised by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual)
 - level 3 that are Access to Higher Education (HE) diplomas and offered by organisations recognised as **Authorised Validating Agencies** by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

11. Qualifications designated for loans are set a maximum loan amount. This is in line with the methodology and matrix set out in the **Maximum Loan Amounts for Advanced Learner Loans Designated Qualifications 2018 to 2019.**

Qualifications that are automatically designated

12. We will automatically designate the following qualifications for the Loans offer.

- QAA Access to HE diplomas
- GCE A-levels and AS-levels
- Tech level and applied general qualifications the Department for Education (DfE) recognises in its 2020 **16 to 19 Performance Tables**

You do not need to notify us if you offer these qualifications and you want them in the loans offer.

13. If you have made a submission to DfE for its **16 to 19 Performance Tables**, we will confirm the designation when this process completes.

Qualifications that you need to notify us about

14. You can ask us to designate a qualification on the RQF that is not automatically designated for loans, as long as you have designed it to support one of the following outcomes.

- Progression to and through higher-level technical skills in the context of skilled employment – see paragraph 15
- Direct entry to a specific job role
- Continuing professional development in a specific occupation
- Upskilling or reskilling in an occupational area

15. Qualifications that support progression for higher level technical skills must:

- have a clear focus on a particular occupational area
- be clear about how they support progression into that occupational area through skilled employment

16. When we receive a notification for a qualification, we follow three steps to decide whether to designate it for loans.

Step 1: Is the qualification within the remit of loans?

17. Regulated qualifications are in scope to be designated if they are:

- available in England
- available for learners aged 19 and over
- at levels 3 to 6
- offered by awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual or QAA
- offered by awarding organisations who regularly upload data to the personal learning record in line with the **Awarding Organisation Agreement**, including the learning records service data management policy

18. We will not accept a qualification that falls into one of the following categories.

- It is a licence to practise – see paragraph 19
- It provides the training to meet employers' legislative responsibilities such as health and safety, first aid or food safety
- It is part of HE provision – for example, a degree, a higher national qualification or a level 5 diploma in education and training
- 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 is specific to one employer, or is a vendor qualification linked to a particular employer or commercial system.

19. We define licence to practise as where it is a legal (or statutory) requirement for all practitioners to obtain a licence that confirms the licence holder meets prescribed standards of competence. This includes situations where it is unlawful to carry out a specified range of activities for pay, without first having obtained a licence.

Step 2: Does the qualification meet the size threshold for loans?

20. From the funding year 2017 to 2018, we stopped using a credit threshold to designate qualifications for loans. This does not affect qualifications that were designated for loans in 2016 to 2017 based on their credit value. These qualifications remain in the loans offer for 2018 to 2019.
21. Qualifications must be over a size threshold to be designated for loans. This means they can deliver meaningful learning, and learners can demonstrate the attainment of skills, knowledge and understanding. We will consider exceptions to this size threshold in order to enable certain qualifications at level 4 to 6 to be included in the loans offer. Paragraphs 24 to 31 provide further information on this.
22. For 2018 to 2019, the minimum size threshold for a new qualification to be designated for loans is 150 guided learning hours (GLH).
23. We will take the GLH you have stated for the qualification on **Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications**. At the point of designation, we will take the most up-to-date entry you have made for the qualification's GLH.
24. For the funding year 2018 to 2019, we will consider an exception to the size threshold of 150 GLH, where the qualification meets all of the criteria below.
 - a. It is at level 4, level 5 or level 6 – we will not consider exceptions at level 3 or below
 - b. It is between 45 GLH to 149 GLH
 - c. It maps to one of the 15 technical routes – see paragraph 27
 - d. It is in a particular occupational area and supports one of the following outcomes
 - It is a particular requirement for a specific occupation
 - It supports specialisation or the need to upskill within an established profession

- It meets a specific higher-level skills gap in a named occupational area

25. For us to consider the qualification as an exception, you must give some extra information in the notification form, and include a statement that explains and evidences all of the following.

- Which of the 15 technical routes the qualification aligns to – see paragraph 27
- Which standard occupational classification (SOC) or occupation the qualification maps to
- Which of the outcomes listed in paragraph 24, bullet (d) the qualification supports
- An explanation about how the qualification supports the outcomes listed in paragraph 24, bullet (d)
- Evidence that the qualification supports the outcomes that you have listed – see paragraph 26

26. You must use evidence that already exists when providing evidence that the qualification supports the outcomes you have listed rather than collect letters of support. For example, you could use:

- a link to a professional body website that references the qualification title at the level that you are submitting
- a selection of links to a job advert that reference the requirement of a particular qualification – you do not need to provide more than 10 examples
- a link to evidence that the qualification has been designed to respond to a higher level skills gap, such as local skills strategy, a sector specific strategy, or industry specific strategy

27. Where a qualification maps to a technical route, this is not a confirmation that a qualification will be included in a technical route being developed as part of the

technical education reforms. DfE are **reviewing education at levels 4 and 5**, to understand how it can address the needs of learners and employers.

28. You must make sure that your approved centres have the necessary occupational capacity and capability, adequate resources, and the assessment experience and expertise to deliver the qualification. They must also have appropriate quality assurance processes and policies in place.
29. As part of this exception process, we will not consider qualifications that are smaller in size and share the content of another larger qualification already in the loans offer. If you want to replace the larger qualification in the offer with a smaller one, you must provide the details of the larger qualification including the qualification reference and title. We can then remove the larger qualification, so the qualification below the size threshold is included.
30. We will not consider qualifications whose only purpose is to support progression to higher-level education, and which do not lead into skilled employment.
31. During the 2018 to 2019 funding year, we will monitor the qualifications that you submit as part of the exception process, and their take-up by learners.

Step 3: Information about the qualification

32. To confirm your qualification, we will check its specification. We will also check that you have made information about the qualification and the expected learning outcomes available to learners who may be considering taking out a loan. This information should be clear, concise and accurate, so that the learner is able to identify why they should choose one qualification over another. To make sure this information is accessible and easy to understand, we recommend you write it in plain English.
33. When you notify us, please include a hyperlink to where you publish this information online. We will make this link available through the learner-facing **Loans Catalogue**, and we will share it with the National Careers Service. The

loans catalogue contains information on qualifications designated for the funding year 2018 to 2019.

34. We will not ask for evidence of recognition or endorsement, but it is helpful for learners to see a clear reference to any organisations that support the qualification. You may want 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 an HE institution for progression purposes

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

What to include	Value to learner
The qualification's content, structure and outcomes	They can see the knowledge, skills and competencies they will develop
An explanation of how the qualification supports the identified outcome(s)	They can see the progression opportunities in the job role(s) or occupation, and/or the subjects, qualifications and apprenticeships they can go on to study at the next level
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 qualification by taking out a loan or an apprenticeship
Reference to organisations that support the qualification	They can see that the qualification will support their entry into HE, 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 HE application

Notifying us

36. You need to complete the **notification form for Advanced Learner Loans** with all of the information we need, and email it to **Qualifications.ESFA@education.gov.uk**.

37. The loans process happens every month, as shown in the figure below.



38. From March 2018, we will accept nominations for the loans offer in the funding year 2018 to 2019. This process will run until May 2019. Alongside this, we will continue to accept nominations for the 2017 to 2018 loans offer until 1 May 2018.

39. Any qualifications that you nominate must meet the criteria set out in this prospectus. This includes making sure each qualification has at least 150 GLH, unless you are notifying us of an exception between 45 GLH to 149 GLH at levels 4 to 6.

40. To nominate qualifications, you must follow the instructions below and send us the form by **midnight** on the **first Tuesday of the month**.

- Use one form for all the qualifications you notify 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 qualification information. This must be a link to the webpage where the information is available, not to a document.
- If the qualification is at level 4 or above and is below the size threshold of 150 GLH, make sure you give us the additional evidence (please refer to paragraphs 25 and 26).
- 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 tell us in your email if your amended form replaces a form you have sent us earlier.

41. 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 explain why.

Publishing the loans offer

42. Once we designate a qualification, we will add it to the **Hub** as part of the second update of the Hub in that month. You can see the updated schedule for the Hub **on GOV.UK**. Once we update the Hub, we will transfer the same information to the Student Loans Company, because it uses this information to check learner eligibility for loans. We will then update the **Loans Catalogue** in the last week of the month.

43. In the learner-facing loans catalogue, we will include the qualification's maximum loan amount, and the link you have given to the qualification information.

44. You must make sure that your hyperlinks work, for both new qualifications that you submit and those that are already designated for loans. If you would like us to update a link already published in the loans catalogue, please use the **notification form for Advanced Learner Loans**. Where a link is no longer working, we will remove the link from the catalogue.

45. If we designate a qualification after 1 August 2018, we will backdate its availability to 1 August 2018, or to its operational start date if that is later.

Managing the loans offer

46. 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. If that qualification has learners enrolled on it when we remove it, we will continue to support those learners to complete that qualification.

47. We will monitor changes to a qualification's operational end date. We do this so we can tell learners and training organisations about changes to the last date for enrolments, through the **Hub** and the **Loans Catalogue**.
48. Where a qualification is part of the 2017 to 2018 loans offer, it will still be available in the 2018 to 2019 loans offer, as long as it does not have an operational end date on or before 31 July 2018 and is available on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications.
49. If Ofqual takes **regulatory action** against an awarding organisation, we will review what action to take on their qualifications approved for delivery. We will do this on a case-by-case basis.
50. We will monitor the take-up of qualifications in the loans offer, to make sure that the offer stays focused on high demand. This will include monitoring the take-up of the higher-level technical qualifications we make available through the exceptions process.