



Department  
for Education

# **Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England**

**Additional guidance for providers**

**July 2021**

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## Summary

This document supports the policy statement on the future of level 3 qualifications and consultation response.

The consultation ran from 23 October 2020 to 31 January 2021 and was the second stage of consultation on the review of post-16 qualifications, focussing on level 3 . The first stage consultation was conducted between 19 March and 10 June 2019 and we responded in October 2020 .

This document sets out additional guidance for providers, and clarifies a number of points we have been asked about the review process and the coming changes to the level 3 qualifications system. It includes a number of diagrams also published in the longer policy statement setting out the future qualifications landscape and timeline for change.

The review of post-16 qualifications also encompasses level 2 and below. Alongside the consultation at level 3, we held a call for evidence on level 2 and below . This ran from 10 November 2020 to 14 February 2021. We are currently considering this evidence and developing proposals for reform which will be published for consultation later in 2021.

## Who is this publication for?

This additional guidance is primarily aimed at professionals working in the post-16 education sector.

# Additional guidance for providers

## 1. Types of qualification that are being reviewed

All level 3 qualifications approved for ESFA funding are subject to review, with the exception of:

- A levels
- T Levels
- Extended Project qualifications
- Advanced Extension Awards
- Performing Arts Graded Examinations
- Core Maths qualifications
- The International Baccalaureate Diploma
- Access to HE qualifications

Apprenticeships, traineeships, and the 14 to 16 offer (Key Stage 4) are also not in scope of the review.

The Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) have responsibility for adult education for their residents, including determining which qualifications should be funded for adult residents. They must also fund the statutory entitlement.

## 2. Decisions about the future funding of individual qualifications

We have not made decisions about individual qualifications yet. To be approved for ESFA funding in future, an awarding organisation will need to submit a qualification for approval and be assessed against new criteria. This process will involve a check of the necessity of the qualification, that it meets new quality criteria, and whether it overlaps with T Levels (more detail about the criteria we will use to determine overlap with T Levels is provided below at point 10).

## 3. Further opportunities to influence the criteria for approval

There will be further opportunities to influence the criteria for approval. The consultation response sets out the categories of qualifications that will be funded in future but the detailed criteria for approval are still in development. We will continue to work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Institute), Ofqual, employers, awarding organisations and post-16 providers to finalise them.

Ofqual will consult publicly on any proposed regulatory requirements and the Institute will also engage with the sector on the development of technical qualifications.

#### **4. When final funding criteria for reformed qualifications will be available**

Guidance, qualification approval criteria and funding approval criteria for the digital pathfinder qualifications to be approved for delivery from 2023 will be published later in 2021.

Guidance, qualification approval criteria and funding approval criteria for qualifications to be approved for delivery from 2024 and beyond will be published in 2022.

#### **5. When the results of the approval process will be published**

Timelines for the publication of the results of the approvals process will be released alongside the funding criteria.

#### **6. Funding of small Applied General qualifications (AGQs) in future**

We recognise the need for a small range of other high quality academic qualifications to sit alongside A levels where there is a clear need for skills and knowledge that A levels alone cannot provide.

We will fund small (one A level sized or smaller) qualifications that complement A levels, for example if they have more of a practical component, such as health and social care or engineering. It also includes those that are designed to enable progression to more specialist higher education (HE) courses.

To ensure there are sufficient routes to HE in government priority subjects we will consider small qualifications where there are A levels available in the same broad subject area. This means that there is the potential to have small qualifications in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) and those which align with the Plan for Growth, such as IT or applied science. This is a change from the consultation proposal that overlap with A levels should not be allowed.

#### **7. Funding of large AGQs in future**

We will give funding approval to qualifications supporting progression to specialist HE courses in areas which are not covered by T Levels and not well-served by A levels as alternative programmes of study to A levels, such as those in performing and creative arts. These qualifications will need to meet strict criteria such as having a strong practical focus and offer breadth and depth that is valued at HE.

Where a qualification does not overlap with a T Level, and is designed to support progression to HE, it will be subject to approval criteria which apply to academic qualifications. We will set out further detail about the tests to be applied for academic qualifications when we publish the approval criteria.

## **8. Subjects that will be funded in future**

The range of subjects funded in future will depend on the outcome of the approvals process. This will include an assessment of the need for a particular qualification and its quality against the new approval criteria.

We have not pre-judged which subject areas will be funded in future but there are a number of areas where we see a clear role for qualifications alongside A levels and T Levels. These include performing and creative arts, sport and STEM subjects. It should be remembered that the review has not looked at qualifications on a subject by subject basis and this list simply reflects some of the areas where we found evidence submitted through the consultation to be particularly persuasive.

## **9. When T Levels will be available across the country**

From 2024 onwards, all providers delivering 16 to 19 study programmes in England will be able to deliver any of the available T Levels. We deliberately started with a small number of selected providers to get the quality of courses right. We expect the number of providers will grow to over 100 in 2021 and to almost 200 in 2022. We expect that number to grow further in 2023 when Ofsted 'Good' and 'Outstanding' providers can deliver all T Levels, and other providers can deliver the more established T Level courses. Providers are best placed to determine the appropriate courses for their students, and we will work with providers to monitor the availability of T Levels across the country to ensure there are no gaps in provision.

## **10. The criteria for assessing whether a qualification overlaps with a T Level and is in scope for defunding**

We will apply three tests to identify overlap with T Levels:

- Is it a technical qualification, in that it primarily aims to support entry to employment in a specific occupational area(s)?
- Are the outcomes that must be attained by a person taking the qualification similar to those set out in an occupational standard covered by a T Level?
- Does the qualification aim to support entry to the same occupation(s) as a T Level?

Further guidance will be published later this year. A confirmed list of qualifications which will no longer continue to attract funding for 16 to 19 year olds because they overlap with wave 1 and 2 T Levels will be published in Summer 2022. We will then remove funding approval from these qualifications for new starts from 2023. Students part way through a qualification will be able to complete their course.

Following this, we will also review qualifications in the same routes as T Levels in waves 3 and 4. Technical qualifications that overlap with the T Levels in these waves will have funding removed from 2024.

## **11. Defunding qualifications that overlap with T levels**

We believe that T Levels will be the right choice for 16 to 19 year olds who wish to pursue a level 3 technical course in the routes for which T Levels are available. We believe a simpler system is important as well as a higher quality one which is why we are removing any qualifications – regardless of quality – that fulfil a similar role to T Levels for 16 to 19 year olds.

## **12. Students studying the technical route and progression to university**

Students studying the technical route can still go on to university. Technical qualifications are those that are designed to meet employer needs for a particular occupation but students can still use technical qualifications as a springboard to higher technical education such as a higher or degree apprenticeship, Higher Technical Qualification, or an undergraduate degree related to their field of study. UCAS tariff points are allocated to T Levels.

## **13. The number of qualifications that will be left after the review is complete**

The impact assessment for the consultation has estimated a 50% reduction in qualifications. However, this is not a target. What's more important than the overall number is that every qualification approved for public funding in future should be high quality and lead to good outcomes for students and employers.

## **14. Post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below**

Alongside our reforms to level 3 qualifications, we want to improve post-16 study at level 2 and below. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3, apprenticeships, traineeships, and for some, directly into employment. The review is considering all funded qualifications with the exception of GCSEs, Essential Digital Skills qualifications and Functional Skills. We are considering feedback to the call for evidence which ran from 10 November to 14 February and will consult on proposals for reform later this year.

## **15. Academic qualifications for adults**

Adults who want to progress into further study will have access to the same range of academic qualifications as 16 to 19 year olds. This is because these qualifications offer the best preparation to progress onto and successfully complete high quality HE courses.

We will also fund Access to HE Diplomas to support adults who do not have traditional qualifications to progress into HE as well as to reskill

## Diagrams

Diagram illustrating the technical qualifications that will be funded in future for 16 to 19 year olds

### Technical landscape for 16 to 19 year olds

Qualifications that provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours students need to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.

T Levels

Occupational-entry technical qualifications in areas not served by T Levels

Specialist qualifications

Apprenticeships

### Technical qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

- **T Levels:** We are introducing T Levels as the new technical programme of choice for 16 to 19 year olds. T Levels are co-designed by employers to ensure students develop the skills required by businesses and industry. T Levels are a prestigious technical alternative to A levels providing direct entry into occupations and progression to further and higher education.
- **Occupational-entry qualifications:** Based on employer-led occupational standards, these qualifications will support entry to occupations that are not covered by T Levels. Recognising there are certain occupations where the extent of workplace experience required to develop competence cannot be delivered through a classroom-based qualification, the Institute may, by exception, approve technical qualifications in these occupations.
- **Specialist qualifications:** These qualifications will cover recognisably specialist areas of skill and knowledge which go beyond those available in a T Level or other competence-based technical qualification in an area not served by T Levels e.g. low-carbon construction design, building on the Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction T Level.

## Technical landscape for adults

Qualifications that provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours to upskill or retrain to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.

T Levels

Apprenticeships

T Level  
Occupational  
Specialisms

Competence-  
based technical  
qualifications

Qualifications  
providing cross-  
sectoral skills

### Technical qualifications for adults, in addition to those available for 16 to 19 year olds

- **Occupational-entry technical qualifications in T Level areas:** these qualifications will support entry to occupations that are served by T Levels e.g. construction (as well as occupations that are not served by T Levels).
- **Occupational-entry technical qualifications for occupations without employer-led occupational standards but which are still in demand by employers:** these qualifications would help to ensure the availability of qualifications in occupations that are valuable to employers, but where it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed.
- **Qualifications focusing on a range of cross-sectoral skills:** these qualifications would offer a discrete set of knowledge and skills that is valuable in its own right and transferrable across multiple occupations.
- **Specialist qualifications that build on qualifications aligned to employer-led occupational standards:** these would include qualifications which are more appropriate for adults (such as those that are essential to certain safety critical industries).
- **T Levels:** we are considering how T Levels could be made available to adults in future, subject to the outcomes of future Spending Reviews. This could include:
  - The two-year T Level programme with flexibilities applied, such as recognition of prior learning and reduction of industry placement hours for those with relevant work experience; and
  - T Level Occupational Specialisms as stand-alone qualifications.

Diagram illustrating the academic qualifications that will be funded in future for 16 to 19 year olds

## Academic landscape for 16 to 19 year olds

Qualifications that support students to progress onto and achieve high quality FE and HE academic courses.

A/AS levels

Small qualifications  
alongside A levels

Large alternatives to  
A levels

### Academic qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

- **A levels:** These world renowned qualifications will be central to the study programmes of most students taking the academic pathway to progress to university.
- **Small qualifications that can be taken alongside A levels:**
  1. Qualifications with a practical or occupational component, supporting progression to an aligned HE subject and designed to complement A level study e.g. health, or qualifications in STEM subjects, such as engineering. These would typically be no larger than 1 x A level in size.
  2. Qualifications that offer additional and complementary skills to support progression to HE, including Core Maths, Extended Project Qualifications, and Performing Arts Graded Examinations.
- **Large alternatives to A levels:**
  1. Qualifications with a strong practical focus that support progression to high quality specialist HE courses. They will be in subject areas less well-served by A levels and will not overlap with a T Level e.g. creative and performing arts. One of these qualifications would typically be a student's full study programme.
  2. Alternative programmes to A levels, including the International Baccalaureate Diploma, and Access to HE Diplomas (these are funded for 18 year olds in exceptional circumstances).

Timeline showing the introduction of reformed qualifications alongside rollout of T Levels

Timeline for national rollout of T Levels

Wave 1 pathways:

- Digital production, design and development
- Design, surveying and planning for construction
- Education and childcare

Wave 2 pathways:

- Building services engineering for construction
- Onsite construction
- Digital business services
- Digital support services
- Health
- Healthcare science
- Science

Wave 3 pathways:

- Maintenance, installation and repair
- Engineering design and development
- Manufacturing, processing and control
- Accounting
- Finance
- Management and administration

Wave 4 pathways:

- Legal
- Agriculture, land management and production
- Animal care and management
- Catering
- Craft and design
- Hair, beauty and aesthetics
- Media, broadcast and production

**National rollout of all planned T Levels**  
From 2024/25 all providers can deliver all planned T Levels irrespective of Ofsted rating.

Timeline for introduction of new, reformed level 3 qualifications

Reformed technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations in the Digital route introduced from 1 August 2023

Reformed technical and academic qualifications introduced that align to Wave 1 and 2 routes and Wave 3 Engineering and Manufacturing route from 1 August 2024

Reformed technical and academic qualifications introduced that align to remaining Wave 3 and 4 routes from 1 August 2025

2020/21

2021/22

2022/23

2023/24

2024/25

2025/26

Timeline for removal of existing level 3 qualifications

Qualifications with no publicly funded enrolments defunded from 1 August 2021

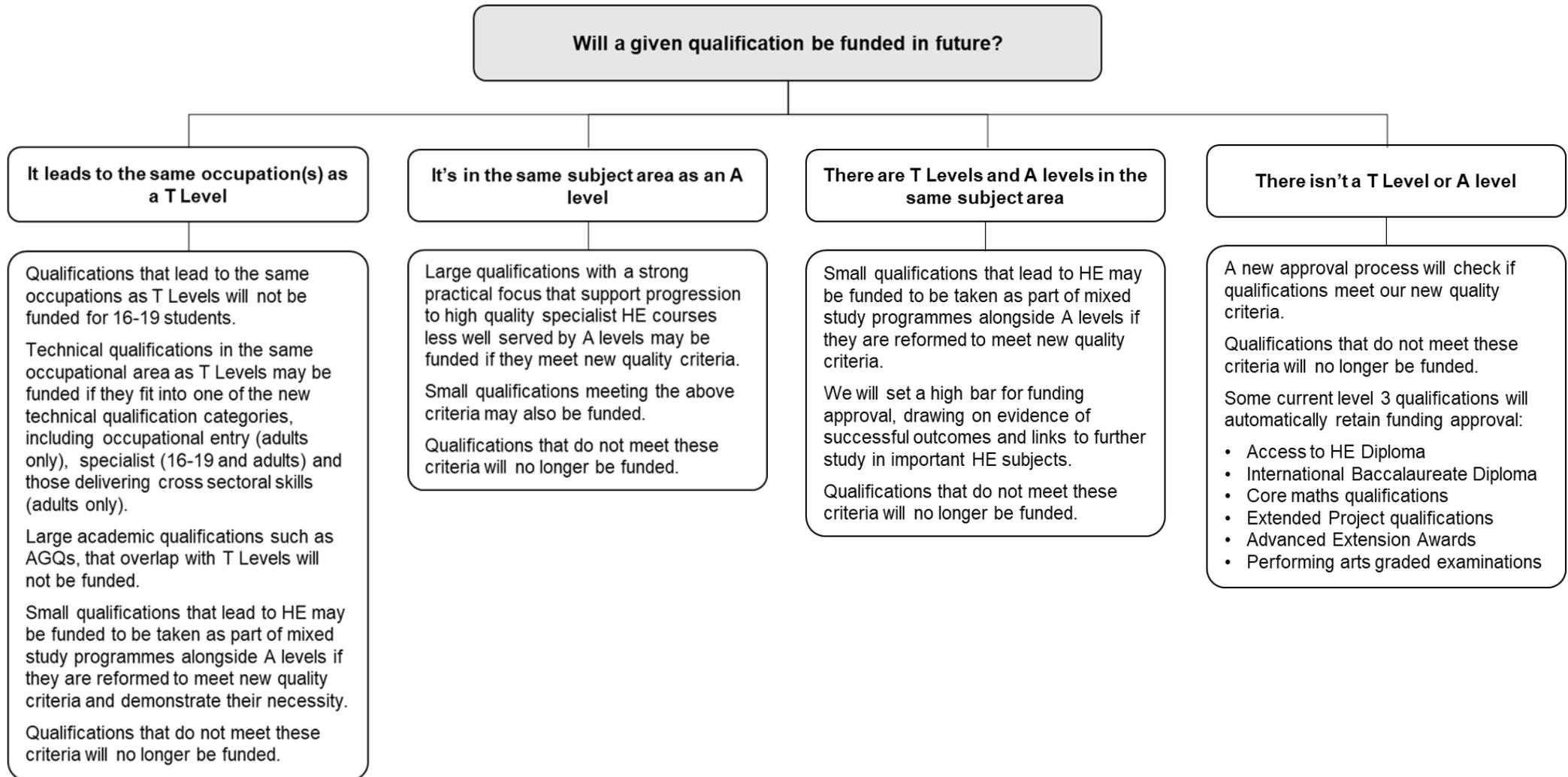
Qualifications with no or low publicly funded enrolments defunded from 1 August 2022

Technical qualifications that overlap with Wave 1 and 2 T Levels defunded from 1 August 2023

Technical qualifications that overlap with Wave 3 and 4 T Levels defunded from 1 August 2024

All other technical and academic qualifications that do not have a place in the new landscape defunded

Diagram showing the potential routes to future funding approval for different qualifications





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