



Skills Funding
Agency

Advanced Learner Loans

Prospectus 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017: Designating Qualifications

Version 2.0

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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 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017 funding years. The funding year runs from 1 August to 31 July.
2. Loans are available for individuals to undertake designated qualifications with an **eligible training organisation** in England:
 - for funding year 2015 to 2016 Loans are available to those aged 24 or over for qualifications at Levels 3 and 4
 - for the funding year 2016 to 2017 Loans will be available for individuals aged 19 or above for qualifications at Levels 3 to 6
3. Loans give individuals access to financial support for tuition costs similar to that available in higher education (HE). Payments are profiled across a learners start and end dates and paid to the training organisation each month by the **Student Loans Company**.
4. As part of the move towards a simplified funding system, we have introduced 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.
5. This Prospectus does **not** cover the following areas:
 - Adult Education Budget.
 - Apprenticeships.
 - Contracting: see the **Register of Training Organisations**.
 - Learner eligibility and entitlement: see our **Funding Rules** and **Advanced Learner Loans Funding Rules 2016 to 2017**.

6. 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 have convened a small working group with representative awarding organisations from the Federation of Awarding Bodies and the Joint Council for Qualifications. This group is looking at how we can collaboratively deliver a high quality and demand led Loans offer for learners, including at Levels 5 and 6. Alongside this we continue to want to hear your ideas and views on how we raise awareness of and demand for Loans.

7. If you have any queries about this document or our process to designate qualifications for Loans, please email the **Qualifications** inbox.

Which qualifications can be designated for Loans

Overview

8. 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**.
9. The **Spending Review and Autumn Statement** (November 2015) confirmed that from 2016 to 2017 government would extend Loans to include those aged 19 to 23 studying for a repeat Level 3 or Level 4 qualification, and for those aged 19 and over studying for a Level 5 or 6 qualification.
10. The **Skills Funding Letter** (December 2015) confirmed this and that learners aged 19 to 23 will retain a legal entitlement to full funding for their first Level 3 qualification, with Loans becoming an option for those seeking to re-skill. More generally the availability of technical and professional qualifications at Levels 5 and 6 in Loans enables us to make sure there is now a flexible and responsive pathway to support individuals to gain the higher level skills businesses need now and in the future.
11. 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 regulated by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual).
 - Level 3 that are Access to HE Diplomas and offered by organisations recognised as Authorised Validating Agencies by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The Loans Offer

12. 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 them in the Loans offer. These include the following qualifications:
 - QAA Access to HE Diplomas
 - GCE Advanced Level (A-level) and Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS-level)
 - Tech Level and Applied General qualifications the Department for Education (DfE) recognises in their **16 to 19 Performance Tables**

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

14. 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.
 - Direct entry to a specific job role.
 - Continuing professional development in an occupation.
 - Upskilling or reskilling in an occupational area.

15. When you consider which qualifications to notify us of, 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 skills (including digital skills).

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

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

17. 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 that are 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**

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

- 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 HE provision, for example, a degree or 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?

19. Whilst we have simplified the rules, we still require qualifications to be over a size threshold. Qualifications need to be a sufficient size to deliver meaningful learning to demonstrate the attainment of skills, knowledge and understanding.

20. 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.

21. 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.
22. 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.
23. If you notify us of 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 make a Loan application for the qualification, with no appropriate alternative that meets the size threshold.

Step Three – Information about the Qualification

24. To confirm the notification 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.
25. 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.
26. When you notify us, please provide a hyperlink to where you publish this information online. As well as making it available through the learner-facing

Loans Catalogue, we will share the hyperlink with the National Careers Service. The Loans Catalogue will contain information on those qualifications designated for Loans for both 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017.

27. We do not ask for evidence of recognition or endorsement. But 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:

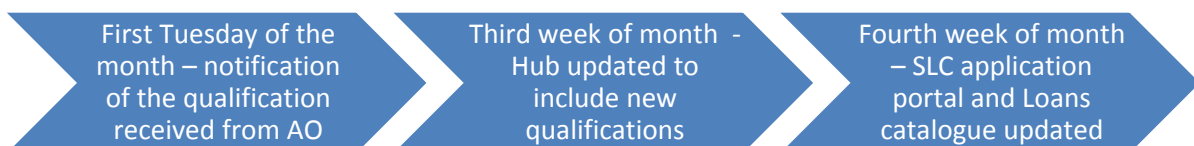
- Will lead to Professional Body membership.
- Is endorsed by a major employer in that occupational area.
- Is recognised by a Higher Education Institution for progression purposes.

28. 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.
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 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

29. You need to complete the Qualifications Funding Approval form and give us all of the information we need. The latest version of the form is available on the [Qualifications](#) page of GOV.UK.
30. The Loans process is a monthly one. 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 qualification information. This must be a link to the webpage where the information is available, not to a 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.
31. From February 2016 we will accept nominations for qualifications at Levels 5 and 6. You should note that for these qualifications:
- we will add them to the Loans Catalogue
 - learners will be able to make applications for a Loan from May 2016
 - delivery cannot begin until the start of the 2016 to 2017 funding year
32. 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

33. 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.
34. 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.
35. 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

36. 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.
37. We will monitor changes to a qualifications operational end date to inform learners and training organisation of changes to the last date for enrolments.
38. 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.



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