



Department  
for Education

# **Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 2 March 2022**

**Respond by 27 April 2022**

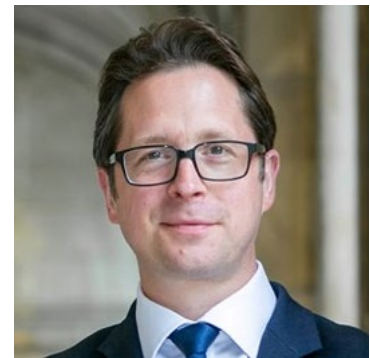
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# Foreword by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

**This Government is committed to transforming the outdated perceptions of technical education in England.**

It is vital in a fast-moving and high-tech economy that technical education closes the gap between what people study and the needs of employers. Priorities change rapidly and we need a technical education system that is dynamic and forward-looking. It needs to deliver the skills we will need in the future to strengthen the economy, not only as we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic but as we move forward in the 21st century.



As we set out in our *Skills for Jobs*<sup>1</sup> White Paper, reforming post-16 further education and skills is at the heart of our plans to build back better and level up this country. We are determined to create a technical education system that competes with the world's best. Every individual, in every corner of this country, should be able to access high-quality qualifications that help them develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to get great jobs and contribute to a thriving economy.

In July 2021, following two consultations, we published a [policy statement](#)<sup>2</sup> that set out the changes we will implement to streamline and improve the quality level 3 qualifications. The changes will lead to once in a generation reform, helping young people make positive choices in further education and supporting adults looking to upskill or retrain through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

**We must now ensure that the qualifications at level 2 and below, that underpin this reformed landscape, are of equally high quality.**

Qualifications at level 2 and below are an important part of our further education landscape - not just for their value to the economy but also for their potential to improve social mobility, inclusion and lifelong learning. For many years, these qualifications have helped individuals

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<sup>1</sup> [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England - note that the delivery timeline proposed in this document has subsequently been moved back by one academic year.](#)

enter work, upskill, specialise or gain essential English, maths and digital skills. They also play a key role in preparing students for progression to level 3 and thereby benefitting from the higher wage returns associated with achieving at this level.

We started our journey to transform the level 2 and below qualification landscape by publishing a call for evidence in November 2020, which set out our ambitions for level 2 and below study. I am grateful for the positive engagement and the responses we received to the call for evidence. We have used these to develop the proposals set out in this consultation.

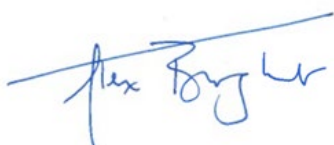
I am delighted to introduce this consultation, as it marks the next step in our review of post-16 qualifications in England. Like our reforms at level 3, our proposals are bold. Tinkering around the edges will not be enough if we are to improve our pipeline of skills. The qualifications available for 16 to 19 year olds and adults in future will be different from those available today.

Young people will benefit from clear progression pathways and high-quality qualifications that provide the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their aspirations.

Adults will benefit from high-quality qualifications that are flexible enough to meet their varying needs, supporting them to upskill, retrain and progress into employment or further study.

Employers will benefit from a clearer skills system, which is based on employer-led occupational standards so they can be confident qualifications will provide the skills they and the economy need and can adapt to meet the needs of the future.

I believe the proposals set out in this consultation offer a huge opportunity to transform the lives of young people and adults across the country. I look forward to hearing your views.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Burghart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the name.

**Alex Burghart MP**

## Who this is for

The consultation is for anyone with an interest in post-16 education and training for young people and adults in England. Some of the content of the consultation is technical detail aimed at professionals working in the post-16 education sector. It is important that we consult on this technical detail, but it is also important to gather the views of others – including potential students and parents or carers.

We are particularly keen to hear the views of young people so that we can better understand the impacts of our proposals on individual young people. We are also keen to hear the views of employers.

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 2 March 2022.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team by email [Post16level2andbelow.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk](mailto:Post16level2andbelow.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in 2022.

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations) to submit your response.

## **Other ways to respond**

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

### **By email**

[Post16level2andbelow.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk](mailto:Post16level2andbelow.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk)

### **By post**

Post-16 Qualifications Review Team  
Department for Education  
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## **Deadline**

The consultation closes on 27 April 2022.

## Background and executive summary

1. This Government is clear that the purpose of post-16 education is to support people to move into great jobs. Our reforms will make sure people across the country can gain the skills that are demanded by employers and can progress on to further training, thereby improving their lives and boosting the UK's productivity.
2. We've already started this journey with our apprenticeship reforms, the introduction of employer-designed T Levels and the T Level Transition Programme as well as through our reforms of higher technical education. The review of qualifications at level 3 and below<sup>3</sup> seeks to simplify the landscape and ensure that qualifications within the new landscape are high-quality and will lead to strong outcomes for every student in terms of further study and employment. It is a key step in putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills training. Our reforms are also part of our wider drive to ensure a high-quality qualifications system that aligns with the proposals set out in our Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>4</sup> and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill<sup>5</sup>.
3. In July 2021, we published a [policy statement](#) that sets out the changes we will introduce to level 3 qualifications to ensure that every qualification is necessary and of high quality. It summarises the groups of qualifications that we will approve for funding alongside A levels and T Levels. It also sets out how we expect students to progress beyond level 3 and how the new range of qualifications will support all students to fulfil their potential. These reforms will strengthen the pathways to progression, creating clearly defined academic and technical routes with qualifications leading to further study or skilled employment, including apprenticeships. This clarity of purpose will provide students with a range of good options and allow them to see more easily how their study will help them to progress.
4. Alongside the changes to level 3 qualifications, we want to improve provision at level 2, level 1 and entry level. Everyone studying at level 2 and below deserves to benefit from high-quality provision that helps them realise their talents and achieve their career ambitions. For young people, we believe that this is best achieved by delivering

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<sup>3</sup> [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill](#)

qualifications as part of a broad study programme<sup>6</sup> that is tailored to the aspirations and needs of the individual student.

5. As highlighted by both the [Sainsbury](#) and [Wolf](#) reviews, the current qualification landscape is confusing for employers and individuals. The Wolf Review found that the content of many technical qualifications was not valued by employers and provided little marketable value to students. Similarly, the Sainsbury Review found that employers continue to report that many individuals who have successfully completed qualifications remain poorly equipped to enter skilled work.
6. The [Whitehead Review](#) (2013)<sup>7</sup> and the [Augar Review](#) of Post-18 Education and Funding (2019)<sup>8</sup> identified similar concerns in level 2 and below study for adults. The Whitehead Review found that a complex further education system meant that technical qualifications used by adults are often poor quality, lack employer involvement, and have no clear identity. The Augar review found that England needs a stronger technical education system at sub-degree levels that increases opportunities, supports disadvantaged students and addresses structural skills shortages.
7. In 2020, we published a call for evidence to inform proposals on how we reform post-16 study and qualifications at level 2 and below. The call for evidence gathered 371 responses<sup>9</sup> from a range of stakeholders with an interest in this area. We received responses from FE colleges, schools, adult/community learning providers, charitable organisations, employers, sector representative organisations, trade unions and awarding bodies. Respondents provided evidence of effective programmes that support progression into further education, employment and training.
8. This consultation represents the government's response to the call for evidence. It sets out our proposals for qualifications and study at level 2 and below in the future (we refer to this as the level 2 and below landscape). We also publish our response to the consultation on level 2 digital skills qualifications in this publication.

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<sup>6</sup> [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2021 to 2022 academic year\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Whitehead and others (2013), '[Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England](#)'.

<sup>8</sup> Augar and others (2019), '[Independent Panel Report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#)'.

<sup>9</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England: Responses to the call for evidence



## Context

9. At post-16, level 2 and below consists of level 2, level 1 and entry level qualifications, with entry level being subdivided into entry levels 1, 2 and 3. Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) and GCSEs are also taken post-16 and together represent 3% of the qualifications currently available at level 2 and below and 40% of enrolments. Both FSQs and GCSEs are out of scope of this review, as are Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs), which were introduced in the 2020/21 academic year.
10. At present, there are in excess of 8,000 qualifications approved for funding<sup>10</sup> at level 2 and below, the vast majority of which are ‘technical’ or ‘vocational’ qualifications. By comparison, looking at countries that are widely regarded as having high performing technical education systems, the Netherlands<sup>11</sup> has fewer than 500 technical qualifications equivalent to level 2 and below in England, and there are fewer than 100 such qualifications in Germany<sup>12</sup> and Switzerland<sup>13</sup>.
11. Currently at level 2 alone, there are over 400 health and social care qualifications and over 200 hospitality and catering qualifications that range in size from awards at 4 guided learning hours to extended diplomas with nearly 600 guided learning hours. We are already making progress in streamlining the landscape by removing funding for nearly 3,700 qualifications at level 2 and below which have had low or no enrolments in each of the last three funding years<sup>14</sup>. 54% of these qualifications are at level 2, 23% are at level 1 and 23% are at entry level.

**Figure 1: Study at level 2 and below by qualification type<sup>15</sup>**

	Number of qualifications	16 to 19 enrolments	Adult enrolments
Level 2 and below	8120	764,000	1,245,700
...of which are GCSEs	140	234,400	56,600

<sup>10</sup> DfE (2020), ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2020

<sup>11</sup> [NLQF - home](#) (accessed 15 February 2022)

<sup>12</sup> Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, [Liste der zugeordneten Qualifikationen \(Stand 01.08.2021\)](#) (accessed 15 February 2022)

<sup>13</sup> Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation, [Berufliche Grundbildung](#) (accessed 15 February 2022)

<sup>14</sup> [Withdrawal of funding approval from qualifications with low and no publicly funded enrolments for the funding year 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment

...of which are Functional Skills Qualifications	120	170,700	334,200
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12. All young people aged 16 to 19, who are funded through the Department's 16 to 19 funding methodology, must be enrolled on a study programme<sup>16</sup>, or T Level programme, which typically combines qualifications and other activities and is tailored to each student's prior attainment and career goals. Study programmes are flexible programmes built around the needs of the individual student and deliver additional skills and experience to offer a breadth of study beyond that contained in a qualification. All study programmes must have a core aim which is the principal or "core" aim of the programme. This will be tailored to the needs of the individual and typically include a substantial qualification (academic or technical) or preparation for employment. A new core aim for the T Level Transition Programme was introduced in 2020.

13. The Wolf and Sainsbury reviews, along with research from Ofsted<sup>17</sup>, emphasise the importance for young people of considering not individual qualifications, but rather a 16 to 19 study programme designed as a whole, echoing international best practice for upper-secondary education.

**The Association of Colleges (AoC) said:**

*"It is important to remember that it is the technical or subject specific skills that are the hook for students who have not always experienced success in pre-16 GCSE provision. All study programmes should include elements of enrichment, wellbeing and personal and social development. Employer engagement is also important in the design and delivery of the programme, Students should be able to access live projects co-created with employers, or work placements."*

14. Study programmes will remain an important part of the 16 to 19 landscape in the future, especially as all young people are required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday<sup>18</sup>. We want them to be high-quality, supporting students to progress in English and maths, delivering essential skills, providing strong careers guidance and pastoral support and delivering curriculum outcomes shaped with employers where needed.

15. The proposed reforms to qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds set out in this document

<sup>16</sup> [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2021 to 2022 academic year\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/16-to-19-study-programmes-guidance-2021-to-2022-academic-year)

<sup>17</sup> [Level 2 study programmes \(2018\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/reports/level-2-study-programmes-2018)

<sup>18</sup> [Participation of young people: education, employment and training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/reports/participation-of-young-people-education-employment-and-training)

assume that these qualifications will continue to be delivered as part of a study programme. We will continue to publish detailed guidance in relation to 16 to 19 study programmes and we will strengthen this guidance where appropriate.

16. Whilst every classroom-based qualification approved for funding in the future will need to have a clear purpose, we recognise that students' circumstances change and some flexibility will be required to support students who need to change their programme of study. We want to support smooth transitions between programmes, both classroom-based and work-based programmes such as apprenticeships, where this is appropriate.

## **A system that works for everyone**

17. This review is a once in a generation opportunity to develop a future facing qualifications system where every student can benefit. Our proposed landscape – with employers at the heart and a more consistent focus on quality – will serve all students better.

18. We recognise the diversity of the cohort studying at level 2 and below. Individuals who take these qualifications will have very different backgrounds, achievements, needs, aspirations and motivations. It is more important than ever that these students can benefit from high-quality provision that gives them the skills and knowledge they need to unlock their potential and benefit from great progression opportunities.

19. We know young people who live in the most deprived areas<sup>19</sup>, as well as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are disproportionately represented at level 2 and below<sup>20</sup>.

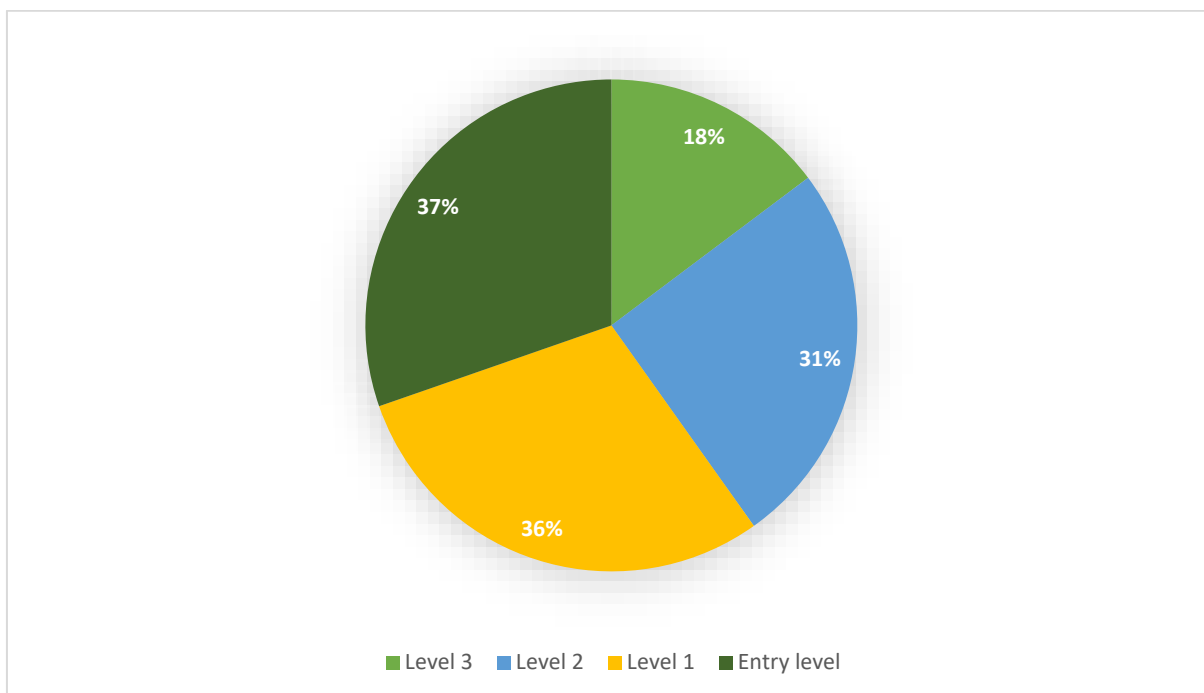
20. Figure 2 shows that 31% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 2, 36% at level 1 and 37% at entry level represent students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. This compares to 18% at level 3 and 22% across the whole 16 to 19 cohort at level 3 and below.

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<sup>19</sup> The deprivation measure is based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), part of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The index gives a score to each postcode area representing the proportion of children under 16 in that area who are income-deprived. Scores for students' home postcode areas are grouped into bands 1 (most deprived) to 5 (least deprived)

<sup>20</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment

**Figure 2: 16 to 19 year old enrolments by students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds**

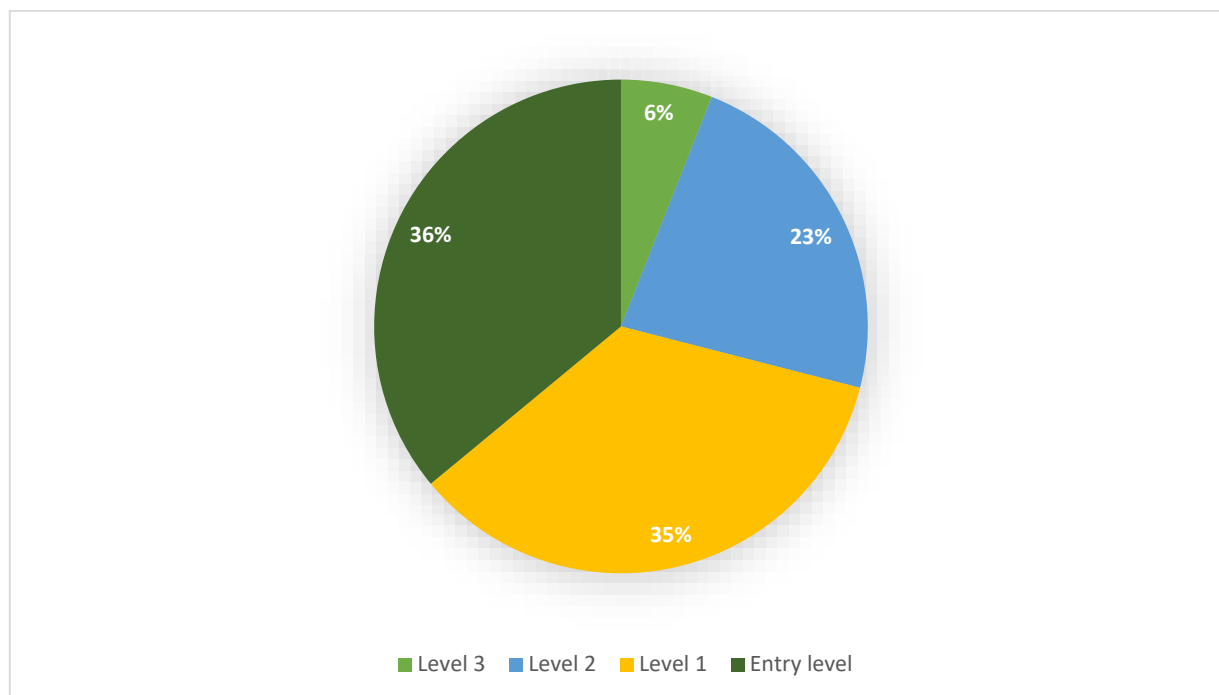


21. Figure 3 shows that 23% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 2, 35% at level 1 and 36% at entry level are students who receive Special Educational Needs (SEN) support or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This compares to 6% of enrolments at level 3<sup>21</sup> and 12% across the whole 16 to 19 cohort at level 3 and below.

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 19

**Figure 3: 16 to 19 year old enrolments who receive SEN support or have an EHCP**

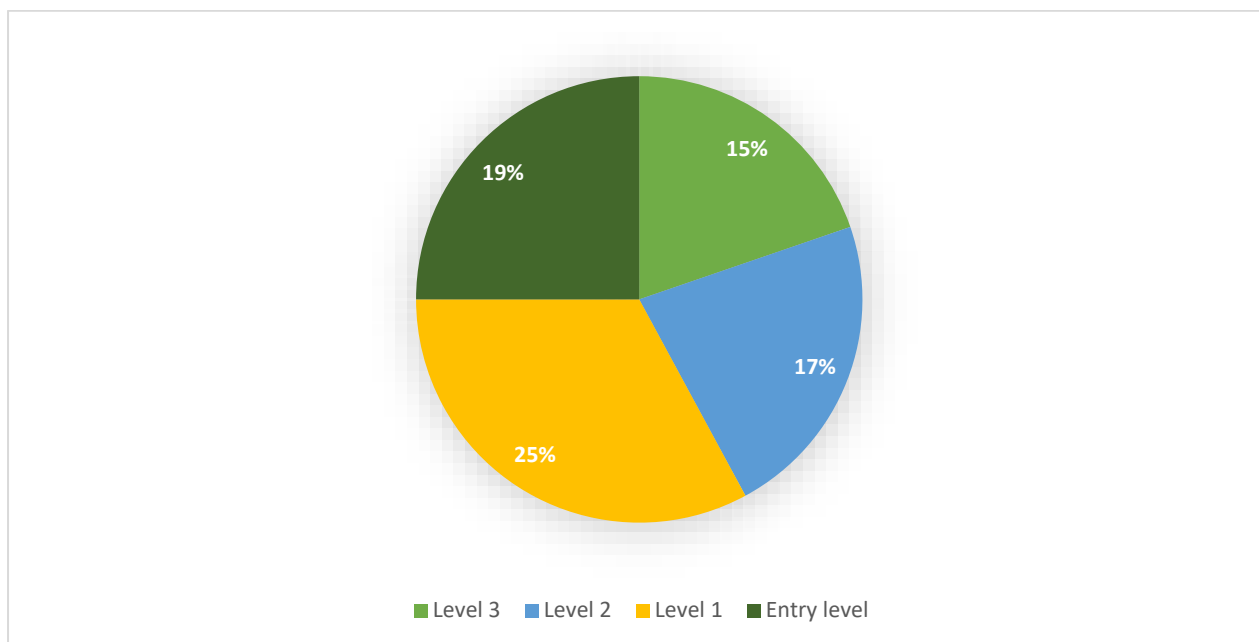


22. Figure 4 shows that adults studying at level 2 and below are more likely to have learning difficulties or disabilities than those at level 3 (17% of adult enrolments at level 2, 25% at level 1, and 19% at entry level, compared to 15% at level 3 and 18% across the whole adult cohort at level 3 and below.)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 19.

**Figure 4: Adults with learning difficulties**



## Headline summary of proposals

23. The current landscape at level 2 and below is extremely complex, with a high volume of qualifications on offer. Whilst we recognise the value of choice, this review aims to simplify the system so that it is easier for students, employers, awarding organisations and providers to navigate. It will also ensure that all qualifications in the new landscape are high-quality, giving students the skills and knowledge they need to achieve strong outcomes, whether they are progressing to higher levels of study, into employment or into an apprenticeship. Our proposals divide qualifications into groups according to their primary purpose<sup>23</sup>. This is in line with the approach taken at level 3 and makes it clear whether each qualification will lead to higher level study or to employment. Figures 7, 10 and 11 show what the proposed future qualifications landscape would look like at each level, while Figure 6 provides examples of the some of the possible progression pathways from each level. Providers and careers advisers will play a key role in delivering information, advice and guidance to prospective students to ensure they are directed towards a qualification that will meet their needs. The reformed system, where every qualification has a clear, distinct purpose, will make this easier.

<sup>23</sup> We acknowledge that there may be secondary outcomes, for example achievement of a qualification designed to lead to employment at level 2 may also prepare a student to access an apprenticeship

24. Our impact assessment estimates that 72% (c.1,530) of ‘in-scope’<sup>24</sup> level 2 qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds, 61% (c.1,290) of ‘in-scope’ level 2 qualifications for adults, and 57% (c.640) of ‘in scope’ level 1 and entry qualifications currently available may not fit into the future landscape. We recognise that this represents a significant reduction. Further details can be found in the summary below, in each chapter, and in the impact assessment published alongside this consultation. We believe that the new landscape, including GCSEs, FSQs and EDSQs, which are out of scope of the review, will offer a good choice of high-quality qualifications to meet student and employer needs and will be easier for students and employers to navigate than the current offer of around 8,000 qualifications<sup>25</sup>.

## Level 2 qualifications proposed for funding

25. The future level 2 qualifications landscape will bring changes for young people, adults, post-16 providers, employers and awarding organisations. In future, all technical provision, including work-based study such as apprenticeships and classroom-based study, will fit within a single framework built from employer-led occupational standards.
26. Every level 2 qualification in scope for funding in future should be high-quality, necessary, have a clear and distinct purpose and have clear progression routes. Level 2 qualifications should prepare students for further study or training at a higher level where possible, including technical qualifications and apprenticeships. They will also lead directly to employment in some routes.
27. To offer students clear progression pathways we are proposing that **eight distinct groups of qualifications** will be in scope for public funding at level 2 in the future, alongside GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs). Qualifications will be grouped according to whether they support progression to level 3 study, provide access to sustainable employment at level 2 or deliver English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). ESOL qualifications are addressed separately in Chapter 4. The eight groups comprise six groups that will be available to both young people and adults, plus two groups for adults only (although we ask in Chapter 1 whether we should also make one of these groups available to 16-19 year olds). Personal, Social and Employability qualifications are addressed separately below.

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<sup>24</sup> Out of scope of this impact assessment are GCSEs, FSQ, EDSQs, qualifications identified for removal as part of the low and no enrolments process, and Personal, Social and Employability qualifications.

<sup>25</sup> DfE (2020), ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2020

### **For young people**

28. Qualifications will continue to be delivered as part of a high-quality, effective study programme for 16 to 19 year olds.

29. We propose six groups of qualifications will be available to young people and will include

- Qualifications that support students to progress to level 3 technical qualifications which provide entry to an occupation, including T Levels (group 1)
- Occupational-entry qualifications supporting progression into employment in an occupation at level 2 (group 2)
- Specialist qualifications which enable students to build on an employer-led occupational standard and develop specialist skills and knowledge (group 4)
- Qualifications supporting students to develop cross-sectoral skills that add value across multiple occupational standards, such as stand-alone health and safety qualifications (group 5)
- Qualifications that have content that is substantially different from GCSEs and that support students to progress to level 3 academic qualifications, such as performing arts qualifications (group 7)
- English qualifications for speakers of other languages (group 8)

30. We consult on two options for young people aiming to exit to employment at level 2. The first is that they should take an occupational-entry qualification (group 2) which will give them a broad introduction to the occupational route and, in addition, the knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers have said are needed in particular occupations. These qualifications will align with employer-led standards, with occupational-entry competence being delivered through a single large qualification.

31. The second option is that young people have a choice between studying a group 2 qualification or studying two slightly smaller qualifications in two different occupational routes, with each qualification leading to a different occupation and each offering as much occupational competence as can be delivered in a classroom-based setting. This might be beneficial for those students who are unsure about the occupation and occupational route into which they want to progress. Due to their size, these medium-sized qualifications, which would otherwise be available only to adults (group 3 qualifications – see Chapter 3) would focus on the knowledge, skills and behaviours in



the associated employer-led standard and would not include the breadth of introductory content available in the larger group 2 qualifications.

32. In both cases, we propose that level 2 qualifications leading to employment should be taken as part of a high-quality two-year study programme which prepares young people for the world of work.
33. We also set out our proposals for having small to medium sized qualifications available for those looking to progress to further technical study at level 3 (group 1), for example to a T Level via the T Level Transition Programme, although these should aim to support progression rather than provide occupational competence.

### **For adults**

34. We want to ensure that high-quality qualifications are available to people of all ages. Therefore, all of the qualifications available for young people will also be available to adult learners.
35. However, we are proposing two additional groups that will be available for adults only including:
- Smaller occupational-focus qualifications supporting progression into employment in an occupation at level 2 (group 3)<sup>26</sup>
  - Qualifications where there is clear demand from employers and good prospects for progression, but no employer-led standard (group 6).
36. We know that some adults may struggle to access larger qualifications. We propose that qualifications in group 3 will focus on the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours for that occupation. They will be smaller than the occupational entry-level qualifications in group 2, as they will not include the breadth of route-wide content or transferable skills that are included in the larger qualification. They will therefore be a more accessible option for adults with more experience of work.

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<sup>26</sup> Note that we ask in chapter 1 whether we should also make these qualifications available to young people

## ***Impact Assessment***

37. We anticipate that, at level 2, the smallest qualifications will be most affected, particularly those qualifications which are unlikely to be able to provide a student with the knowledge, skills and behaviours contained in a relevant employer-led standard, or to provide them with broad content relevant to an occupational route. Some large qualifications will also be affected, particularly where they do not currently align to an employer-led standard or where there is no associated employer-led standard at level 2.

### **Level 1 and entry level qualifications proposed for funding**

38. We believe the main focus of study at these levels should be progression onto a level 2 qualification or higher, that provides entry into a skilled occupation, or progression to a work-based pathway (supported internships, traineeships or apprenticeships). Whilst the majority of students will be able to progress directly to reformed qualifications at level 2, we recognise that some students will need additional support in order to reach their end destination<sup>27</sup>.

39. Students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and adult learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) are overrepresented on qualifications at level 1 and entry level. Many of these students will need to begin their study at these levels and, for some, level 1 or entry level will be an ambitious aim. The reformed system will need to cater for a wide range of student need, experience and motivation in order to engage these students in learning so that they achieve to the best of their ability.

40. We propose that **five groups of level 1 qualifications** and **four groups at entry level** will be considered for public funding in the future. We propose that all groups should be available to both young people and adults. This includes English and maths qualifications and ESOL qualifications, which are addressed in Chapter 4. These groups are in addition to qualifications in digital skills and PSE skills, all of which are addressed in later chapters.

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<sup>27</sup> The Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment shows that the current distribution of EFSA funded enrolments at level 3 and below as follows:  
16-19 year olds: 72% at level 3, 20% at level 2, 6% at level 1 and 3% at entry  
Adults; 17% at level 3, 47% at level 2, 19% at level 1 and 16% at entry.

## **For young people**

41. Qualifications will continue to be delivered as part of a high-quality, effective study programme for 16 to 19 year olds and are grouped according to whether they support progression to a level 2 qualification, serve a role in occupational regulation, or deliver English and maths skills.

42. Five groups of qualifications will be available at **level 1** as follows:

- Pre-technical qualifications which support direct progression onto a level 2 technical qualification which in turn either provides entry into an occupation or progression to a level 3 technical qualification (group 9)
- Qualifications that serve as a prerequisite to employment (group 10)
- Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme (group 11)
- English and maths qualifications (non FSQ/GCSE) (group 12)
- English qualifications for speakers of other languages (group 13)

43. Four groups will be available at **entry level** as follows:

- Entry level 3 qualifications which lead directly to a level 1 pre-technical qualification (group 14)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme (group 15)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications in English and maths (non FSQ/GCSE) (group 16)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications in English for speakers of other languages (group 17)

44. At level 1 and entry level we are proposing to fund qualifications which support progression to higher levels of study, which we refer to as “pre-technical” (groups 9 and 14). We want these qualifications to support as many students as possible to progress to technical study at level 2 (and go on to higher levels wherever possible). We propose that these qualifications would fit into a suite of qualifications which are designed to support progression. For example, an entry level 3 qualification providing an introduction to hospitality and catering will lead directly onto a level 1 hospitality and catering qualification which, in turn, will support progression to a related level 2 qualification in hospitality and catering or professional cookery.

45. We recognise that there will be some students who need to exit below level 2. We do not believe that level 1 qualifications provide occupational-entry competence, and there are no employer-led occupational standards at this level. Students who exit with a level 1 qualification may be able to enter unskilled roles or will need additional on-the-job training to reach an appropriate level of competence in an occupation. For those students who exit at level 1 or below, study programmes will need to provide them with the life skills they need to enter paid employment and, for a minority, their main aim will be independent living; we set out more about how this will be achieved in Chapter 5 on PSE reform.

### **For Adults**

46. We know that, in general, adults are often motivated to take qualifications which provide occupation-specific skills and provide direct entry into employment. Those adults who are able to will therefore be better placed studying at level 2 and above: the levels where they can gain sufficient competence to enter an occupation.

47. At level 1 and entry level, it is currently more common for adults to take qualifications in PSE skills. There will be adults, including some of those with LDD, who will need to begin study at entry level or level 1 before progressing to higher levels. We therefore propose that all qualifications at level 1 and entry level that are available for young people should also be available to adults.

### ***Impact Assessment***

48. We expect vocational qualifications which do not support progression to a technical route at level 2 to be affected by our proposals, including those where there is no clear pathway to employment in occupations at either level 2 or level 3. We also propose not to fund qualifications that are too narrowly focused only on certain skills, such as plumbing or bricklaying, and do not provide a broad enough introduction to the occupational route, such as construction, to support progression to level 2. We do not believe this broad content can be delivered by very small qualifications, so we expect the smallest qualifications in these subject areas to be affected by these reforms.

## **Figure 5. Summary of qualification groups in scope for funding**

Group	Description	Eligibility	Level
1	Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical provision	16-19 and Adults	2
2	Occupational-entry qualifications supporting progression to occupations at level 2	16-19 and Adults	2
3	Smaller occupational-focus qualifications supporting progression to occupations at level 2	Adults only <sup>28</sup>	2
4	Specialist qualifications	16-19 and Adults	2
5	Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills	16-19 and Adults	2
6	Qualifications supporting progression to recognised occupations where no standard exists	Adults only	2
7	Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study	16-19 and Adults	2
8	English qualifications for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	16-19 and Adults	2
9	Pre-technical qualifications supporting progression to level 2 technical provision	16-19 and Adults	1
10	Qualifications which serve as a prerequisite to employment	16-19 and Adults	1
11	Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme	16-19 and Adults	1
12	English and maths qualifications (non FSQ/GCSE)	16-19 and Adults	1
13	English qualifications for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	16-19 and Adults	1
14	Qualifications supporting progression to level 1 pre-technical provision	16-19 and Adults	Entry level 3
15	Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme	16-19 and Adults	Entry level 1,2,3
16	English and maths qualifications (non FSQ/GCSE)	16-19 and Adults	Entry level 1,2,3
17	English qualifications for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	16-19 and Adults	Entry level 1,2,3

<sup>28</sup> Note that we are consulting on whether these qualifications should also be available to young people

**Figure 6: Examples of possible progression routes for young people at level 2 and below**



## Supporting adults

49. Adults will generally need greater flexibility than young people: respondents to the call for evidence told us that many adults face additional barriers to engaging with full-time education such as employment or parenting responsibilities. They will also tend to have greater prior experience. Our starting point for adults is that they have available to them a similar offer as 16 to 19 year olds but with some additional technical qualifications to meet their needs, as outlined above.
50. In addition, the design and delivery of qualifications for adults should consider their different circumstances, commitments, experience and skills. In keeping with our reforms at level 3, and to ensure a consistent approach across all levels, we propose that technical qualifications for adults should allow for modular delivery of content and ensure robust assessment of an adult's level of competence. Evidence of prior learning and experience should be assessed against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the relevant employer-led occupational standard and, where appropriate, providers should take this into account to avoid repetition of learning.

## English, maths and ESOL qualifications

### **English and maths**

51. As set out in the call for evidence, we expect GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) to be the qualifications of choice for the majority of students. However, responses to the call for evidence indicated that alternative English and maths qualifications play an important role in delivering literacy and numeracy skills to some young people and adults who cannot yet access GCSEs or FSQs. They are particularly important for students with SEND.
52. However, while the benefits of these qualifications are clear for those at entry level and level 1, these qualifications at level 2 have had very little demand. The streamlining process for courses with persistently low or no enrolments will remove funding from most existing level 2 non FSQ/GCSE English and maths qualifications. This lack of take-up suggests that FSQs and GCSEs are the preferred option for learners at this level and alternative qualifications are not needed.

53. We therefore propose to continue to fund non FSQ/GCSE qualifications in English and maths at level 1 and below, for the small cohort who cannot access GCSEs and FSQs directly, and to remove funding approval from these qualifications at level 2.

54. We also propose that all alternative qualifications in English and maths should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and that we consider the need to update the standards as part of this process.

### **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

55. ESOL qualifications are designed for speakers of other languages who live in the UK. They aim to increase English language knowledge and proficiency for life, work or further study. We propose to continue to fund high-quality ESOL qualifications up to and including level 2.

## **Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) Qualifications**

56. For many young people, especially those with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>29</sup>, PSE provision is an integral part of their study programme. For those with low or no prior attainment, including adults furthest from the labour market, this study can represent their first step towards re-engaging with education and training. For some students, especially those who may not achieve at level 2 or above, these qualifications offer evidence of their achievements that, when recognised by employers, can enable them to compete for positions with their peers.

57. 68% of respondents to the call for evidence stated that PSE qualifications were not essential for adults on the basis that these skills should be embedded within other qualifications, non-regulated learning and work-based training such as apprenticeships and traineeships. However, many respondents recognised that in some circumstances, or for some students, regulated qualifications could offer an objective measure of progression and achievement.

58. We have concluded that for a number of students, including those with SEND and those with protected characteristics such as physical or mental disabilities, these qualifications will remain an essential part of their post-16 education. However, we believe that there

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<sup>29</sup> For example students receiving free school meals, care leavers, students in alternative provision and those living in the most deprived areas ([English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414222/english_indices_of_deprivation_2019.pdf))



is scope to streamline the complex system and significantly improve the quality, outcomes and recognition of these qualifications.

59. We propose to develop a set of national standards for PSE qualifications. These standards, similar to the Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ) standards<sup>30</sup>, would include core content, key skills and behaviours, and set out a clear continuum of skills development and progression across the levels. The standards, supported by comprehensive frameworks and supplemented, where necessary, by additional measures, would underpin qualification design, and in future, only qualifications designed to meet the requirements of the standards would be eligible to receive public funding.

60. We will consider responses to this consultation and then consult separately on the detailed implementation of our proposals for PSE qualifications.

## **Delivering Quality**

61. Independent approval and ongoing regulation are key to ensuring confidence in the quality of qualifications and it will remain a requirement that all qualifications which are approved for funding should be subject to Ofqual regulation.

62. As at level 3, all qualifications in scope of this review will have to meet new criteria to be approved for public funding. We are proposing that awarding organisations will have to put forward qualifications for future funding approval. The detail of the approvals process at level 2 and below will be set out following this consultation, subject to further discussions with Ofqual and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE). Existing qualifications that are not considered as part of this approvals process, or do not meet the new criteria, will not be approved for funding.

63. The Secretary of State will continue to be responsible for all decisions regarding which qualifications should attract public funding, to ensure that all qualifications align with the Government's ambitions for the post-16 education system. As such, there will be some funding approval criteria that qualifications will have to meet, over and above Ofqual's and IFATE's requirements.

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<sup>30</sup> [National standards for essential digital skills - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

## Delivery Timelines

64. We recognise the importance of introducing these reforms at a manageable pace, given the extent of change to the wider qualifications landscape, including at level 3. We expect this process will take place in a phased way from 2024 – 2027, starting with reform to qualifications in the Construction route at level 2, followed by other level 2 qualifications and finally, in 2027, level 1, entry level, ESOL and PSE qualifications. We understand that this remains a challenging timeline for providers and awarding organisations and we are keen to work with the sector to implement the reforms as smoothly as possible.

## Government response to consultation on level 2 digital skills

65. In the call for evidence we consulted on proposals to remove post-16 funding from level 2 ICT User qualifications and level 2 ICT Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs). We received 180 responses to our consultation. A summary of types of organisations that responded can be found in Chapter 8.

66. We have decided to proceed with this proposal and will remove post-16 funding approval from these qualifications for new starters from **August 2022**. This is because, following our essential digital skills reforms, these skills are now gained up to level 1 through new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) or, once introduced, through reformed digital FSQs.

## Scope of the consultation

67. This consultation covers qualifications at level 2 and below that are approved for funding for providers in England for their students aged 16 and over. This includes qualifications funded for adults through the Adult Education Budget (AEB).
68. We refer to 16 to 19 year old students as ‘young people’ and those aged 19 and over as ‘adults’ (to reflect the way these students are treated in funding and performance rules). We provide funding through the 16 to 19 funding formula for students up to the age of 25 when they have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. For adult residents of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) which have responsibility for adult education, the appropriate MCA or GLA can determine which qualifications they will fund apart from the statutory entitlements.
69. Therefore, qualifications in scope for the review may be offered in an MCA or GLA area. As we make decisions about our respective funded qualification offers, we will continue conversations with MCAs/GLA, so we have a mutual understanding of the impact across the country.
70. As previously announced, we will not be making any changes to GCSEs, Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) or Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) through this review. We set out our decision to defund level 2 ICT FSQs, along with ICT User qualifications, in Chapter 8. The remaining qualifications approved for funding for post-16 at level 2 and below cover a broad and diverse range of sector subject areas, serving academic and technical purposes. We do not propose to exclude any further qualifications at level 2 or below from the scope of this consultation.

## Chapter 1: Level 2 qualification groups proposed for funding

71. The future level 2 qualifications landscape will bring changes for young people, adults, post-16 providers, employers and awarding organisations. Every level 2 qualification approved for funding in future should be high-quality, necessary, have a clear and distinct purpose and have clear progression routes.
72. To offer students clear progression pathways we are proposing a total of **eight distinct groups of qualifications** will be considered for public funding at level 2 in the future. Qualifications will be grouped according to whether they support progression to level 3 study, employment or deliver English skills for speakers of other languages.
73. Every qualification will need to meet a high quality bar to secure public funding. A list of the qualifications or the subjects that will be funded in future is not being provided at this stage. This is because the final list will be dependent on the outcome of this consultation and the subsequent approvals processes. All qualifications will need to pass the new approvals process to be eligible for public funding.
74. Six of these groups contain qualifications that can be undertaken by both young people and by adult learners, with a further two groups for adult learners only. We have made clear under each group who the qualifications are designed for. Further information on our proposals regarding qualifications for adults can be found in Chapter 3: [Supporting Adults](#).

**Figure 7: Proposed Level 2 qualification landscape**

**Level 2 qualifications**

Level 2 qualifications should prepare students for further study or training at level 3 where possible, including apprenticeships. They will also lead directly to employment in some occupational routes.

**Technical**

Qualifications that provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours a student needs to progress to further technical study at level 3 or to skilled employment

**Group 1**

**Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications**

Technical qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical programmes (e.g. T Levels).

**Group 2**

**Qualifications enabling entry into occupations at level 2**

Technical qualifications providing contextual understanding of a route, transferable skills and occupationally-specific knowledge, skills and behaviours.

**Group 3**

**Occupational-focus qualifications**

Technical Qualifications which provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours a student needs to progress to skilled employment at level 2.

**Group 4**

**Specialist qualifications**

Technical Qualifications which support individuals to develop specialist skills and knowledge beyond an employer-led occupational standard.

**Group 5**

**Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills**

Technical qualifications which support employability by developing skills that are relevant across a number of different occupational standards.

**Group 6**

**Qualifications supporting progression to recognised occupations where no standard exists**

Technical qualifications leading to recognised occupations where there is clear demand from employers, but no standard exists.

**Academic**

Qualifications that support students to progress onto A Levels or other academic study at level 3. It also includes GCSEs which are out of scope of this review

**Basic Skills**

Qualifications delivering basic English and maths skills. It also includes FSQs which are out of scope of this review.

**Group 7**

**Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study**

Qualifications providing introductory content to a subject area where GCSEs do not provide preparation for level 3.

**Group 8**

**ESOL qualifications**

Qualifications that deliver English for speakers of other languages.

Key

Adults only

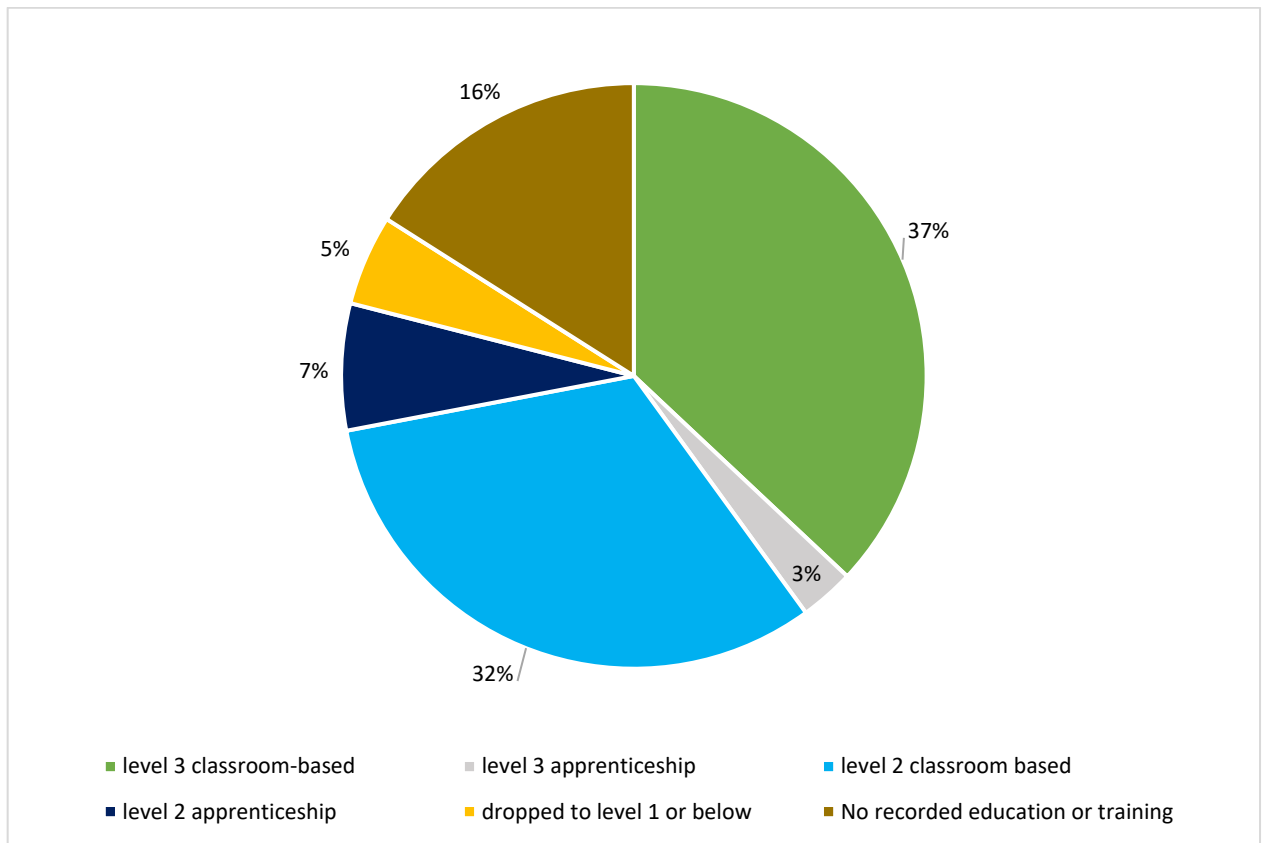
## Level 2 qualifications for young people

75. It is vital in a fast-moving and high-tech economy that technical education closes the gap between what people study and the needs of employers. We are building an integrated skills system, where the different elements are clearly linked and it is easy to see the progression routes through and between levels. All technical provision, including work-based study (such as apprenticeships and traineeships) and classroom-based study, will fit within a single framework built from employer-led occupational standards. This will enable clear progression points between level 2 provision and level 3 provision, for example a level 2 qualification leading to a level 3 qualification, to higher apprenticeships or Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) at level 4 and above.
76. Level 2 will play a crucial role in strengthening and growing post-16 technical and academic education as a whole. We must improve level 2 qualifications to support successful progression to level 3 study (technical or academic), an apprenticeship or into skilled employment at level 2.
77. We want all students to understand where each qualification will take them. This review is an opportunity to develop clear pathways for young people who start post-16 study at level 2, helping to reduce churn and drop out<sup>31</sup>. Figure 8 shows that, of those who studied classroom-based qualifications at level 2 at age 16, 40% progressed to level 3 after one year of study (37% to classroom-based study and 3% to apprenticeships). Another 32% remained on classroom-based study at the same level, 7% progressed to a level 2 apprenticeship, 5% dropped to level 1 or below and 16% had no recorded education or training.

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<sup>31</sup> Churn is defined as studying at the same level for three years, switching between academic and vocational study, or dropping to study at lower levels. At level 2, churn is 19% compared to 23% at level 3. For further information please see DfE (2019), 'Students and qualifications at level 3 and below in England'. Drop out here is defined as students who are not recorded in public funded education or training after the first year of further education, aged 17. At level 2, it is 16%. See DfE (2020) 'Qualifications at Level 3 and below, contextual information on enrolments and students'.

**Figure 8: Destinations for students studying at level 2 at age 16**



## Group 1: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical study

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund a group of high-quality qualifications at level 2 which **support students to progress to level 3 technical qualifications** (e.g. T Levels)

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Provide students with broad content relevant to a particular technical education route and prepare them for progression to a level 3 technical qualification in that route
- Be small to medium in size, less than half the size of a 16 to 19 study programme, with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults

### Example:

A small qualification in business administration, providing an overview of the management and administration route and relevant technical knowledge and skills for students looking to progress onto the management and administration T Level route.

78. The reformed landscape at level 3 will mean that all qualifications at level 3 are relevant and high-quality. We know that some students will require additional support post-16 to enable them to progress to, and achieve at, this level.

79. The qualifications we propose for funding in this group will provide students with broad content specific to a particular technical education route and will prepare them for progression to level 3 study in that route, whether that be a T Level or another programme that exists alongside T Levels. They will be delivered over one academic year. They will not prepare students specifically for entry to employment and therefore will not need to be aligned to an employer-led occupational standard.

80. These qualifications will be small to medium-sized (less than half of a 16 to 19 study programme) with a proposed guideline size of 120-240 guided learning hours (GLH). This is to ensure they are of sufficient size to cover broad content relevant to a particular technical education route and prepare students for progression to a level 3 technical



qualification in that route, but not so large that it will crowd out other important elements of a broader one-year study programme. For example, a small qualification in business administration, providing an overview of the management and administration route and relevant technical knowledge and skills for students looking to progress onto the management and administration T Level route, might be delivered as part of the T Level Transition Programme.

81. The T Level Transition Programme<sup>32</sup> (TLTP) provides a high-quality route onto T Levels for students who would benefit from additional study time and preparation before they start their T Level. It provides a holistic package of preparation including English and maths, relevant technical knowledge and skills, work experience and preparation to support access to a T Level Industry Placement, alongside wider support and development to help students prepare for a T Level. We began a phased implementation of the programme from September 2020, in line with the roll-out of T Levels. T Level Transition Programmes in Education and Childcare, Digital, Construction and Health and Science have been launched in circa 70 providers across the country.
82. We have recently firmed up the programme to ensure the right balance between consistency in how students are prepared for a T Level and the flexibility the programme needs to support each student individually. In December 2021 we published guidance for providers delivering the programme from September 2022, which includes national technical outcomes for each of the first seven T Level routes. Providers can choose to deliver the national technical outcomes using an ESFA-approved qualification, non-qualification delivery or a combination of both, whichever they consider most appropriate for their students. We are considering whether the national technical outcomes should, in the future, form the basis of qualifications that support progression to T Levels. Achieving a technical qualification at level 2 is not a national pre-requisite for enrolling onto a T Level, but where a provider does include a qualification it should be small enough to allow sufficient time for all the other important components of the programme outlined in paragraph 81 above.
83. For technical routes that are not covered by T Levels, we propose that qualifications in this group should provide broad technical content relevant to that route. They should facilitate progression to, and achievement of, a level 3 technical qualification leading to an occupation in that route.

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<sup>32</sup> [T Level Transition Programme Framework for Delivery and national technical outcomes](#)

**Question 6:**<sup>33</sup>

i) Do you agree that we should fund qualifications that support progression to level 3 technical provision?

ii) Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH?

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<sup>33</sup> Questions 1 to 5 in the online survey ask for information from respondents such as their name, email address and the organisation they represent

## Group 2: Technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations at level 2 ('occupational-entry qualifications')

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund high-quality qualifications that support entry into an occupation at level 2 by providing as close to full occupational competence as is possible in a classroom-based setting.

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Align to an employer-led occupational standard at level 2.
- Ensure students who attain the qualification are sufficiently competent to enter relevant occupations without further substantive training.
- Include an appropriate blend of
  - suitable knowledge to support wider contextual understanding of the route
  - theory, concepts and core skills (such as communication, project management and teamwork) to support adaptability and practical application
  - the occupationally specific technical knowledge, skills and behaviours required to enter a specific occupation.
- Be substantial in size (more than half of a 16 to 19 study programme) and designed to be delivered to 16 to 19 year olds over two academic years, with a guideline minimum size of 540 GLH.
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults.

We are consulting on **two different options** for the main qualification offer that should be available to 16 to 19 year olds aiming to enter an occupation at level 2:

**Option A** – Group 2 qualifications only

**Option B** – Group 2 qualifications, plus the alternative of taking two medium sized occupational-focus qualifications (from group 3 – see Chapter 3) in different routes over two years, with a guideline size of around 350 GLH per qualification

### Examples:

**Option A:** One large qualification in social care that provides both context to the care services route and transferable skills as well as the occupationally-specific technical knowledge, skills and behaviours required to become a care worker in adult social care (aligned with the ‘adult care worker’ standard).

**Option B (Alternative):** Two smaller qualifications, one in early years education and the other in increasing participation in sport in the community, providing the occupationally-specific technical knowledge, skills and behaviours required to become an early years practitioner or a community activator coach. Given the smaller size of these qualifications, they will not cover the extensive introductory knowledge of the route that is provided by Group 2 qualifications.

84. While progression to level 3 is a desirable outcome for most students, for some level 2 is a rewarding and fulfilling achievement and can lead to a great career path. This might be because level 2 is an ambitious aim for that student, and/or because level 2 is the most appropriate route into a sustainable and fulfilling career. We believe that progression to skilled employment at level 2 can be achieved through high-quality study programmes and classroom-based qualifications that align to employer-led occupational standards.
85. The majority of respondents to our call for evidence agreed that technical qualifications should be aligned to employer-led occupational standards to ensure they are valued by employers. This ensures the content has greater relevance and parity with apprenticeships. It also helps students to understand what opportunities different pathways will provide and which occupations qualifications will prepare them for.
86. We know that in many industries, level 2 provides core skills that are critical to entry and progression. Respondents to our call for evidence highlighted fulfilling and sustainable employment opportunities at level 2.

### **Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, said:**

*“...the impression should not be given that level two is not a worthy destination or will not be fulfilling, within horticulture a lot of people only have a level 2 qualification and form successful careers”*

**The Institute of the Motor Industry said:**

*"...many sectors, such as the retail automotive sector require essential Level 2 knowledge and skills before starting a Level 3 [...] Level 2 is the typical entry route into the workplace for automotive technicians."*

**HABIA (hair and beauty industry authority) said:**

*"Although level 3 is the recognised full professional level for the hair/beauty sector there are also employment opportunities at level 2. The roles require a well-recognised robust level 2 'professional qualification' similar to a licence to practice"*

87. We propose to fund technical qualifications that enable entry into occupations ('occupational-entry qualifications') at level 2. Like qualifications at level 3 (e.g. T Levels), these qualifications will be aligned to employer-led occupational standards. They should deliver as many of the knowledge, skills and behaviours for that occupation as is possible to be taught in a classroom-based setting. Given this requirement, and the need to meet new quality criteria, we expect these qualifications to be larger and to look significantly different from existing qualifications.
88. We have analysed feedback to the call for evidence and undertaken targeted research with employers, providers and students to understand how these qualifications should be designed in the future. Feedback from employers (including SMEs) suggests that to ensure work readiness, and to give individuals the best chance of securing employment, high-quality, substantial technical qualifications are needed.
89. We propose a qualification that is substantial in size (more than half of a 16 to 19 study programme) and designed to be delivered to young people over two academic years as part of a wider study programme. We propose a guideline size of minimum 540 GLH for the qualifications so that they can include a breadth of content that delivers:
- **Occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours** - required for entry into an occupation
  - **Additional broad route-specific content** – which provides contextual understanding of the occupational route
  - **Transferable skills** – including communication, project management, and problem solving

90. We know from research we have undertaken with employers and providers that, in some sectors, it is currently typical for essential introductory content to be included in level 1 qualifications. This means that in these sectors, regardless of prior attainment, students are asked to start at level 1 before progressing to level 2. We think that for many students this is an unnecessary step. We are proposing, therefore, that the new “occupational-entry qualifications” (group 2) should include broad introductory content which provides contextual understanding of the occupational route in addition to containing as many of the knowledge, skills and behaviour as can be delivered in a classroom-based setting to prepare students for entry to an occupation in that route.
91. This means that many students will be able to start immediately on the level 2 occupational-entry qualification. Students who need more support will still be able to access level 1 qualifications as a stepping stone to level 2; we have set out further detail on the proposed level 1 qualifications offer in Chapter 2.
92. These qualifications will also be available to adults who would benefit from them, such as those changing careers. Please see Chapter 3: [Supporting Adults](#) for further detail on the qualifications we propose to make available to adult learners.

### **Meeting the needs of different groups of students**

93. Through our review of the call for evidence responses and other research, we also identified that young people taking level 2 qualifications to enter employment have different needs: some know what job they want to do, some know the sector they want to enter and others are uncertain about their career choice.
94. We are seeking views on **two different options** for the main qualification offer that should be available to 16-19 year olds aiming to enter employment in an occupation at level 2:

**Option A:** Group 2 qualifications only (as described in the previous section). For students who are clear on which sector or occupation they want a career in, or those who are uncertain but want to make a decision early in their study programme.

**Option B:** The choice between group 2 qualifications and an alternative approach which could be more suitable for students who are uncertain about their career choice (both sector and occupation). In this option, a student could take two medium-sized

'occupational-focus qualifications' from group 3 (currently proposed for adults only - please see Chapter 3 for more information on group 3 qualifications). They would be taken over two years as part of a wider study programme, with a guide size of around 350 GLH per qualification to fit within the two-year study programme. This option would be limited to those occupations where the full range of knowledge, skills and behaviours that could reasonably be achieved in a classroom-based setting can be delivered within around 350 GLH. This would lead to students achieving more than one qualification, each offering as much occupational competence as can be delivered in a classroom-based setting. However, due to their smaller size, group 3 qualifications would not contain the extensive introductory knowledge of the route that is contained in group 2 qualifications.

95. There will be fewer qualifications available to 16 to 19 year olds in group 3 than in group 2, as it won't be possible to achieve competence in all level 2 standards within the smaller number of guided learning hours. As an example, an existing qualification in steel fixing, which aligns with the 'steel fixer' standard, is 846 GLH so could not be covered by the smaller qualification size of around 350 GLH.

### **A two-year study programme**

96. For both options A and B, we are proposing that qualifications leading to employment at level 2 are taken over two academic years as part of a wider study programme. This is in line with statutory guidance which requires all young people to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. It also aligns with other European countries where equivalent training usually takes two years or longer (one to two years in Germany; two years in France and Norway; around two and a half years in Denmark; and two to three years in the Netherlands<sup>34</sup>) to ensure that young people leave with the skills they need to successfully move into the workplace.

97. We recognise many providers already deliver excellent study programmes at level 2. We propose to work with the sector to draw on effective practice and develop a national framework for delivering study programmes leading to employment at level 2. The framework will set out information and expectations around content and delivery of these study programmes which is informed by employers. It will go further than the current broad guidance whilst, at the same time, allowing schools, colleges and training providers some flexibility to put together the most appropriate and effective programmes

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<sup>34</sup> [International progression report good practice in technical education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

to meet the needs of specific students.

98. In addition to support for English and maths, we propose the study programme should include:

- **A diagnostic and guidance period:** During this period providers will help students to decide, or confirm, which classroom-based route(s) and qualification(s) to take.
- **Digital skills provision:** Digital skills for work are essential in most job roles and employers tell us they need individuals with digital skills. These skills would be delivered in the context of an occupational route.
- **Work experience:** High-quality work experience is a consistent feature of the most successful level 2 study programmes. It helps learners to develop specialist skills and knowledge for work, alongside realistic expectations of the demands of working life. It should be delivered in line with Gatsby benchmarks 5 (encounters with employers) and 6 (experience of the workplace) <sup>35</sup>.
- **Strong careers guidance:** Ongoing careers guidance and advice which reflects the realities of the job market, will help students make choices which are based on a genuine understanding of what would be required for them to be competitive in the job market.
- **Work-related learning:** Work-related learning which helps students develop core skills and attributes that are valued by employers e.g. listening, teamwork, time-keeping and completing work on time are a key characteristic of successful study programmes.
- **Essential skills development:** Research suggests supporting level 2 students to develop their personal/social skills and confidence is critical to ensuring successful progression.
- **Enrichment opportunities:** Enrichment will strengthen and broaden students' experience, building social capital and citizenship i.e. working together to make positive differences to the society in which they live. It will also motivate students

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<sup>35</sup> [Implementing the Gatsby Benchmarks \(goodcareerguidance.org.uk\)](https://www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk)



and encourage them to complete their programmes and move on to positive next steps.

- **Pastoral support:** Pastoral and development support should help students address their barriers to learning and support emotional and/or mental health difficulties.

99. We recognise the above components are very similar to those in other study programmes (e.g. T Level Transition Programme). As we develop the framework, we will need to consider which elements are distinct to a programme leading to employment at level 2 and where there might be opportunities for cross-teaching.

100. Although every study programme must have a very clear aim, we recognise that some students may take a different progression route from the one originally intended. For example, there may be students on the level 2 programme leading to employment who decide to progress onto level 3 rather than directly into employment. Equally, there may be students on the T Level Transition Programme who ultimately seek to step onto a level 2 to employment qualification (group 2) rather than a T Level.

101. We want to ensure that, while there is a clear purpose to qualifications and a focus for study programmes, alternative positive destinations are supported. Where circumstances change for students, there should be a smooth transition between programmes. We recognise that students moving from the T Level Transition Programme, for example, may have already covered some of the learning in the level 2 to employment programme, and we are exploring further how that prior learning can be recognised so that these students can complete the second programme in a condensed period of time.

102. We also recognise that some students may leave the programme part way through to access a work-based programme leading to positive outcomes such as an apprenticeship or traineeship. It is important, where an opportunity arises, that we support students to transfer from classroom-based provision to other work-based programmes, should they wish to do so. We say more about this on page 68.

**Question 7:**

- i) Do you agree that we should fund occupational-entry qualifications leading to employment at level 2?
- ii) Do you agree that these qualifications should include broad route-specific content as well as the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to enter an occupation?
- iii) Do you agree that these qualifications should be large in size (minimum 540 GLH)?

**Question 8:**

For 16 to 19 year olds aiming to enter employment in an occupation at level 2, do you agree that the main qualification offer that should be available is:

**Option A:** Group 2 qualifications only

OR

**Option B:** Group 2 qualifications **and** the alternative of taking two smaller occupational-focus qualifications from group 3 (around 350 GLH) in two different occupational routes?

Please give reasons for your answer.

**Question 9:**

- i) Do you agree that these qualifications should be delivered to 16 to 19 year olds over two academic years as part of a wider study programme leading to employment?
- ii) If you believe there are any groups of students or occupational routes for which a substantial qualification taken as part of a two-year study programme would be unsuitable, please provide details.

## Group 4: Specialist qualifications

### Summary of proposals:

- Mirroring the approach taken at level 3, we propose to fund a small range of qualifications that support individuals to develop specialist skills and knowledge that build on an aspect of an employer-led occupational standard to confer specialist competence

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Focus on specialist skills and knowledge which are not included in the level 2 occupational standard but are recognised by employers as adding value to an individual's career prospects by providing additional specialist competence
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults, who are working towards (or have already gained) entry-level competence in a level 2 occupation
- Be small to medium in size, with a guideline maximum of 200 GLH

### Example

A qualification in nutrition in early years and childcare settings, providing more specialist skills and knowledge in nutrition which go beyond that covered in the 'early years practitioner' standard.

103. We recognise that some individuals may wish to boost their career prospects by developing more specialist skills and knowledge. These qualifications build on the content covered by an employer-led occupational standard, enabling students to develop more specialist skills and knowledge than could be acquired through a level 2 occupational-entry qualification alone, helping to protect the skills supply in more specialist industries.

104. These qualifications must be designed to lead to skilled employment and must build on a subset of the content of a level 2 employer-led occupational standard or a level 2 qualification leading to employment by going into greater depth to give additional specialist competence in an occupation. For example, a qualification in nutrition in early years and childcare settings could provide specialist skills and knowledge in nutrition beyond that covered in the 'early years practitioner' standard. We expect these to be small to medium in size, with a guideline maximum of 200 GLH, as they will be smaller

than qualifications that cover an employer-led occupational standard in its entirety.

105. Individuals who take one of these qualifications will already need to be competent in an occupation (or be working towards competence). We would expect these qualifications to be appropriate for 16 to 19 year olds only if they are also taking, or have taken, a linked qualification that provides entry into an occupation.

**Question 10:** Do you agree that we should fund specialist qualifications at level 2?

If you agree, are there any examples of qualifications that you think might fall into this group?

## Group 5: Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund a small range of qualifications which support students to develop skills that add value across multiple occupations or sectors e.g. standalone qualifications focusing on health and safety or first aid.

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Perform a function/functions that are part of multiple occupational standards but do not result in occupational competence.
- Be small in size, with a guideline maximum of 150 GLH.

### Example

Qualifications in health and safety.

106. We propose to fund a small range of qualifications that focus on a range of cross-sectoral skills that are transferrable across multiple occupational standards and offer a discrete set of knowledge and skills that are valued by employers, for example standalone qualifications in health and safety. These qualifications are too narrow to form the core aim of a 16 to 19 study programme but could be taken as part of a wider study programme, for example the T Level Transition Programme.

107. We would expect the large occupational-entry qualifications in group 2 to include all necessary content, including health and safety elements where needed. However, we believe that standalone cross-sectoral qualifications could still be helpful for some young people as part of a study programme aiming to progress them to level 3 technical study. We expect these qualifications to be small in size, with a guideline maximum of 150 GLH, as they will only include a limited set of knowledge and skills rather than provide full coverage of an employer-led occupational standard.

**Question 11:** Do you agree that we should fund qualifications at level 2 that develop cross-sectoral skills for young people?

If you agree, are there any examples of qualifications that you think might fall into this group?

108. We propose to only fund technical qualifications that meet the criteria for groups 1, 2, 4 or 5 for 16 to 19 year olds. This means that we would not fund, for example, a qualification within a particular occupational route that would only provide competence if taken in combination with other qualifications in these groups. We want to make sure there is a clear offer for students that focuses on ensuring they gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to enter their chosen occupation. A large occupational-entry qualification from group 2 (or two medium-sized qualifications from group 3 if we proceed with option B on page 35), which are aligned to employer-led occupational standards, will serve students better.

## Group 7: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund a group of high-quality qualifications that support progression to specialist academic qualifications at level 3, which are offered as an alternative to A levels. We also propose to fund qualifications that develop additional or complementary skills within a broader level 2 study programme.

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Provide introductory content in a specialist subject area, thereby supporting progression to a level 3 academic qualification which is in the same specialist area and is offered as an alternative to A levels.
- Include content that is substantially different from GCSEs.
- Be small to medium in size (less than half of a 16 to 19 study programme), with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH, so they can be delivered as part of a broader study programme that prepares students for further academic study and allows time for GCSE resits where needed.
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults.

OR

- Be a small, graded qualification in performing arts or
- A Higher Project Qualification.

109. Most students taking a level 2 study programme with the aim of progressing to academic level 3 (in particular students wanting to take A levels) will take GCSEs. However, as we set out in our plans for reform of level 3 qualifications<sup>36</sup> there are some level 3 academic qualifications that provide a specialist route into higher education, for example large qualifications in performing arts. We therefore propose to fund qualifications at level 2 that support progression to the equivalent specialist qualifications at level 3.

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<sup>36</sup> Reforms to post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

### Question 12:

- i) Do you agree that we should fund qualifications to support progression to specialist level 3 academic qualifications?
- ii) Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small-medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH?

110. We also propose that we should continue to fund a specific, limited set of well-recognised, small qualifications that offer additional and complementary skills as part of a level 2 study programme. These are limited to qualifications that are designed to be taken alongside a student's main study programme and do not form the core aim. We propose to exclude the following qualifications from further consideration for defunding, thereby removing them from the scope of this review, but they will still be subject to regulation by Ofqual:

- **Performing arts graded qualifications:** These are small, performance-focused qualifications. They must be in the area of music, dance, drama and communication, and musical theatre. These qualifications support students to progress to a higher level, with the aim of gaining a mastery of practical performance skill that is recognised by specialist institutions in the field of performing arts. Maintaining the availability of these qualifications will support a broad and balanced education that will help young people to learn creative skills, widening their horizons.
- **Higher Project Qualifications:** These qualifications do not form the core aim of study but enhance the main study programme by allowing students to extend their depth of knowledge of a particular topic and develop independent study skills. The skills within a higher project qualification are complementary to, and support achievement of, the broader study programme. Higher Project Qualifications must meet the Qualification Level Conditions<sup>37</sup> specified by Ofqual and may be used in both academic and technical study programmes.

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<sup>37</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/797950](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/797950)

**Question 13:**

- i) Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 2 performing arts graded exams in their current form?
- ii) Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 2 Higher Project Qualifications in their current form?

111. We are proposing that we will not give funding approval to academic qualifications that do not meet the criteria for group 7, including:

- Qualifications that do not align with, or support progression to, an equivalent specialist qualification at level 3 (as we believe that GCSEs, where available, are the best preparation for academic study at level 3).
- Large qualifications that would not allow time in the study programme for GCSE resits and/or other activity needed to prepare for further academic study (this would include all qualifications that would take up more than half the guided learning hours of a 16 to 19 study programme).

**Study Programmes**

112. Students who have the potential to progress to academic level 3 with additional support will need high-quality level 2 provision to help them reach level 3. Students in countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, Finland and Singapore have the option of an additional year to support progression from lower to upper secondary education. Currently in England some students will already resit GCSEs in their first year of post-16 study before progressing to level 3 academic study, but there is no consistent approach among providers.



**Gatsby Foundation said:**

*“Transition should be made available for students seeking to progress to an academic study programme at level 3, and who need additional preparation to do so successfully.*

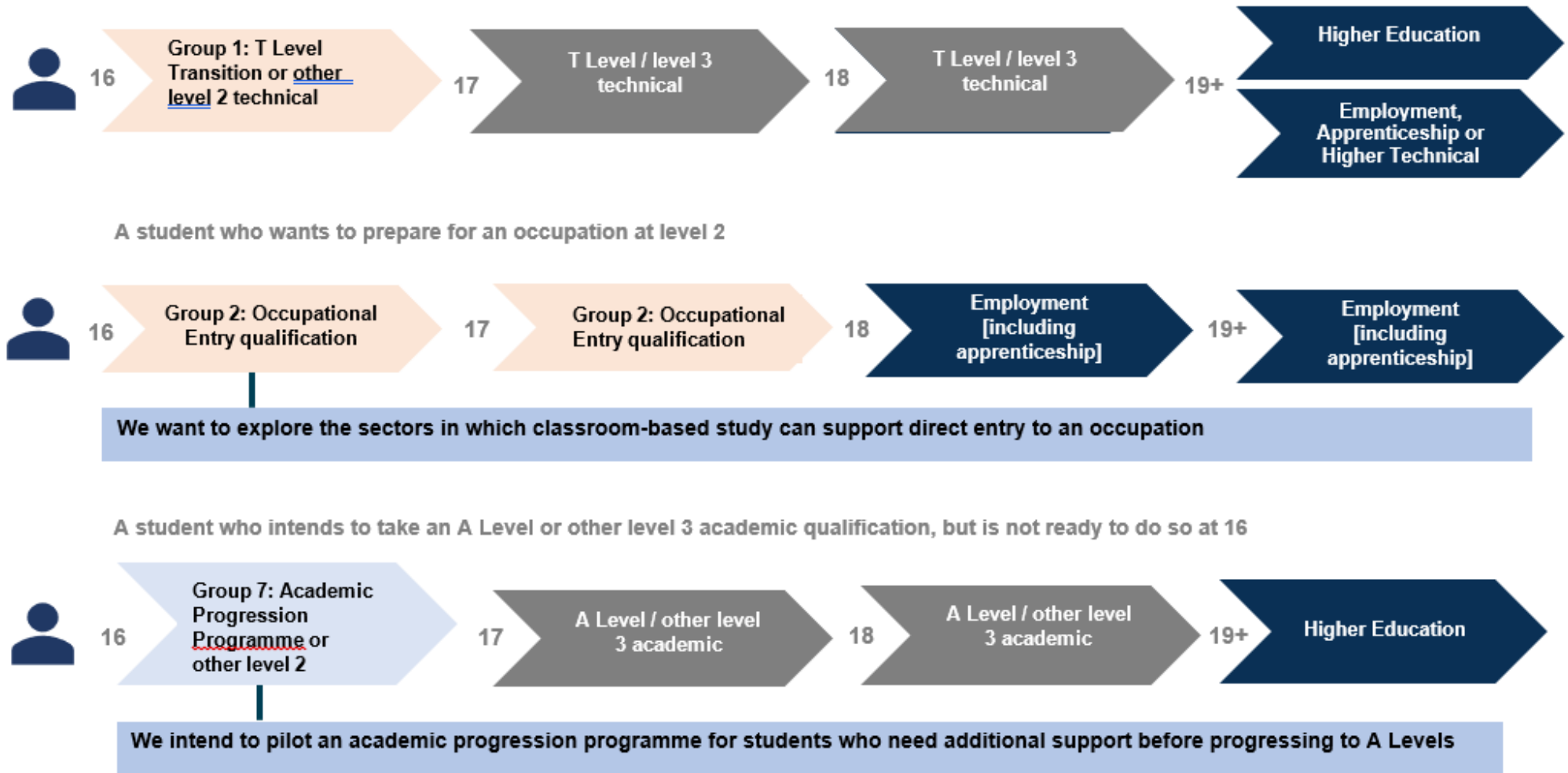
*Forms of transition support are well-established internationally, with a range of models that work as part of a country’s post-16 education and training system – from opportunity to improve general education outcomes to preparing for technical pathways”.*

113. We asked in the call for evidence whether a new form of transition programme would be the best way to support progression for 16 to 19 year olds who want to study at level 3 but are not quite ready to progress at the end of Key Stage 4 and do not plan to take a T Level. A small majority of respondents (56%) were in favour of a new form of transition. Other respondents had some reservations, stating that the current level 2 offer already served this purpose and a new programme might be confusing for providers and students.

114. To test whether there is a gap in provision, we will work with providers to pilot an Academic Progression Programme with the aim of improving progression to level 3. This will be targeted at students who want to take an academic programme at level 3 but who are not ready to do so immediately upon entering post-16 education and therefore need to begin study at level 2. The Academic Progression pilot could help to support a diverse range of students and could be of particular benefit to students with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have the potential to study at higher levels but face barriers to progression that are not experienced by other students.

115. This pilot will help us test whether there is a gap in provision, or whether extra provision will complicate the landscape where the existing level 2 provision is sufficient. As with any pilot, whether it is extended into a programme will be subject to evaluation. In line with responses to the call for evidence, regardless of whether or not the pilot is extended, students will still be able to resit GCSEs (or take other level 2 academic qualifications that meet the criteria for Group 7) as they do now.

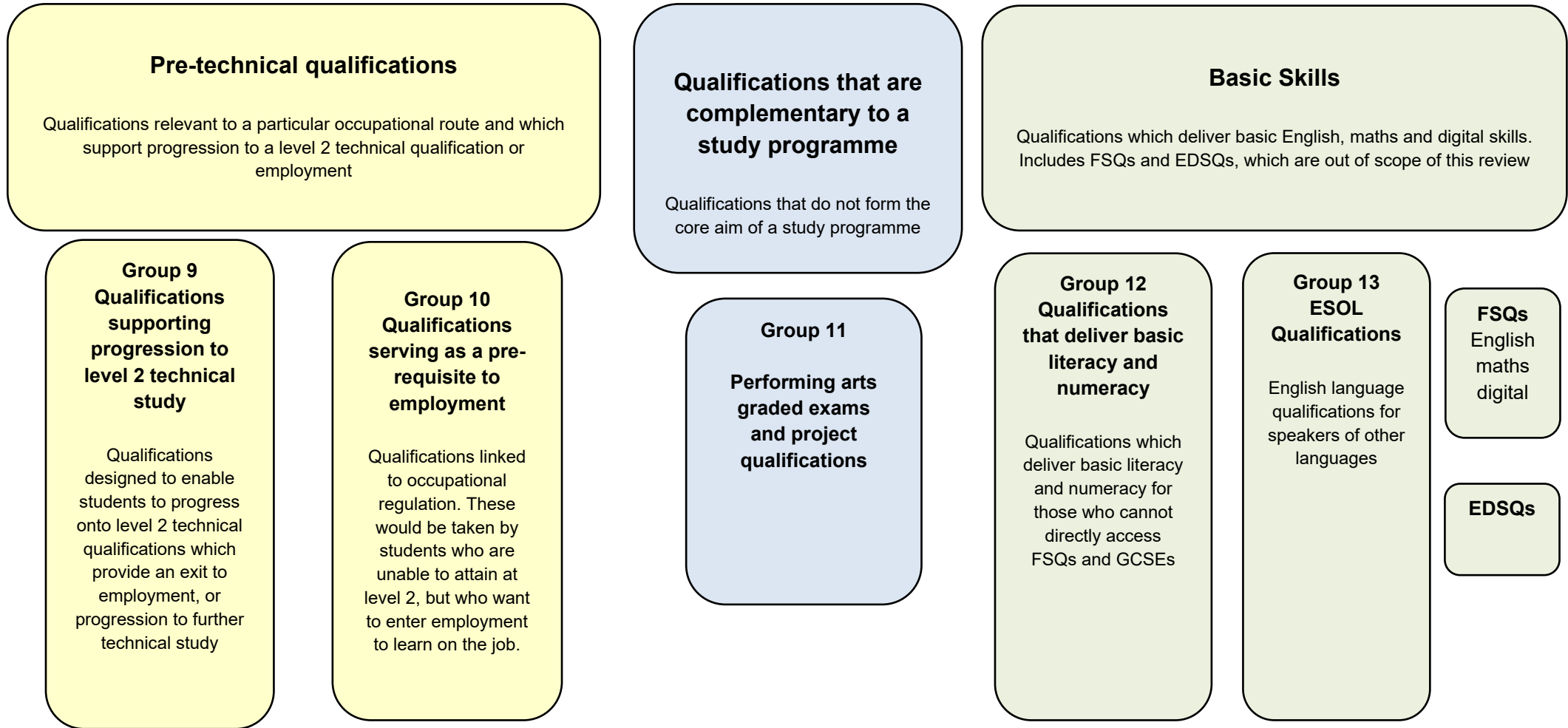
Figure 9: Examples of future level 2 pathways taken by 16 to 19 year olds



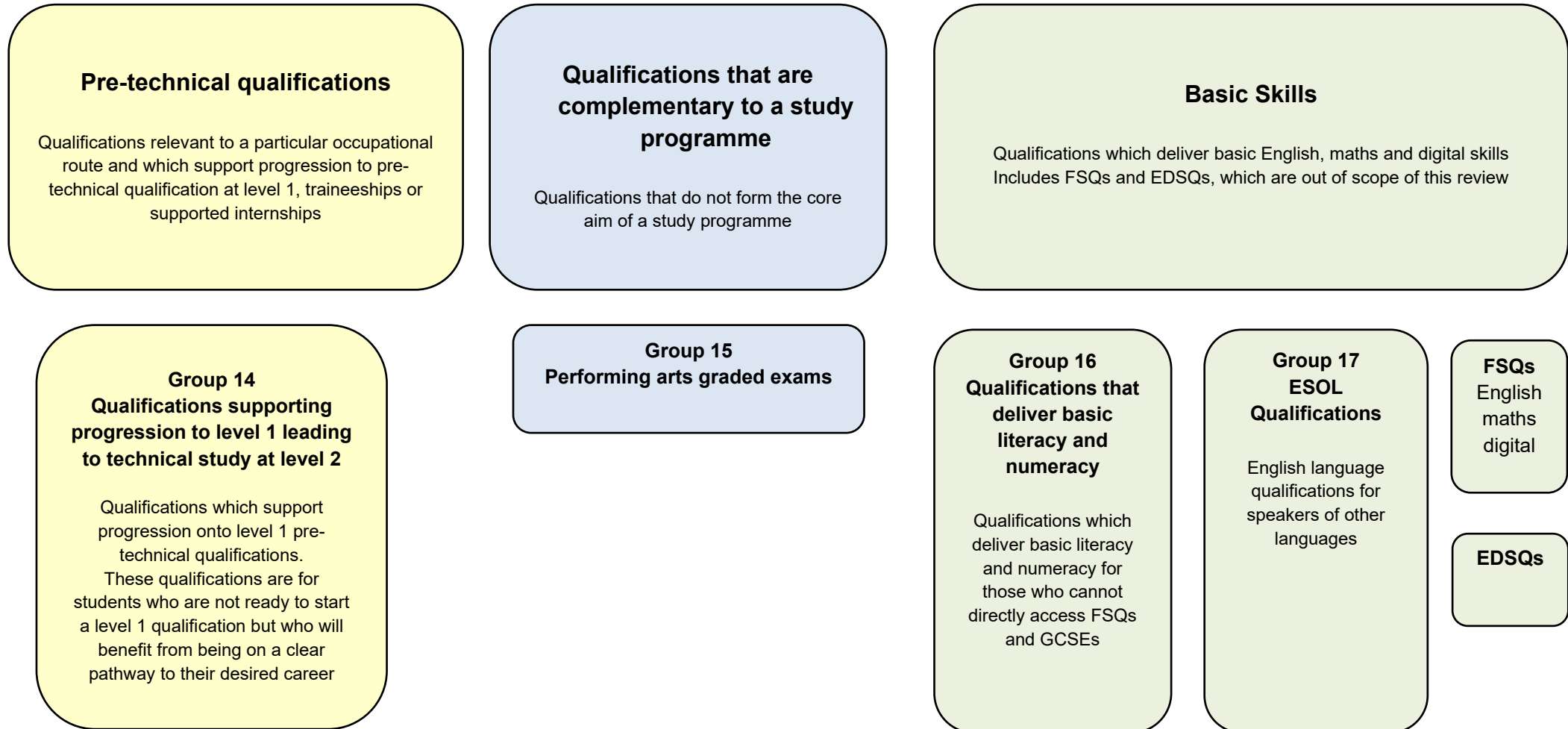
## Chapter 2: Level 1 and entry level qualification groups proposed for funding

116. As with our approach at level 2, our proposals for approving qualifications for funding at level 1 and entry level are in line with the principles that we set out in the [review of post-16 qualifications at level 3: \*purpose, progression, necessity and quality\*](#). We will consider these principles as part of the funding approval process.
117. We want to ensure there are coherent pathways for students, with clarity about which programmes and qualifications will help them progress to further study and which will support direct entry into employment. This is particularly important for students at entry level and level 1 who may face additional challenges pursuing their study and career aims.
118. From responses to the call for evidence and discussion with stakeholders, we do not believe there are skilled employment opportunities at level 1. We want all students to be able to enter skilled employment where possible and we therefore believe the ultimate focus of study at these levels should be progression onto a level 2 or above qualification that provides entry into an occupation or progression through a work-based pathway (supported internships, traineeships or apprenticeships). We propose to fund qualifications that meet this purpose alongside qualifications that could support students as part of a broader study programme. We propose that, in total, **five groups of qualifications at level 1** and **four groups of qualifications at entry level** should be considered for public funding in the future, all of which will be available to both young people and adults. This includes groups comprising English and maths qualifications and ESOL qualifications, which are addressed in Chapter 4. Our approach to PSE qualifications is set out separately in Chapter 5. Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) and Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) are out of scope of the review at these levels.

**Figure 10: Proposed level 1 qualifications landscape**



**Figure 11: Proposed entry level landscape**



119. The majority of students will be best served by the reformed qualifications offer at level 3 or level 2 and starting at higher levels will enable them to achieve their study and career goals as quickly as possible. However, we recognise that some students will need additional support in order to reach their end destination and will need to begin their study at level 1 or entry level and for others level 1 or entry level will, in itself, be an ambitious aim.
120. Students with SEND are overrepresented on qualifications at level 1 and entry level. 35% of 16 to 19 year old students at level 1 and 37% at entry level receive SEN support or have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, compared to 23% at level 2 and just 6% at level 3. 16 to 19 year old students are also more likely to come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, with 36% at level 1 and 37% at entry level compared to 31% at level 2 and 18% at level 3<sup>38</sup>.
121. Respondents to the call for evidence stated that key factors in determining whether a student should start at level 1 or entry level included prior attainment, initial diagnostic assessments and assessments from the school at which they were previously studying. There were also a number of responses telling us that, for some educational routes, students were expected to start at level 1, regardless of prior attainment, in order to learn the basic skills before developing technical skills at level 2 and above.
122. At entry level, respondents told us that understanding the needs of students with SEND (or LLDD for adults) was an important factor in determining that this level of study was suitable:

**Activate Learning said:**

*“Students usually start at entry level if they have more profound learning difficulties and disabilities with low level achievement or little or no previous educational experience (some asylum seekers and refugees for example who may have had limited educational opportunities in their country of birth or students who have experienced very disrupted learning pre-16)”*

123. One of the core aims of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below is to have a system that engages students of all backgrounds and abilities. It is vital that there is an appropriate offer for level 1 and entry level students which meets their needs

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<sup>38</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment

but does not limit their ambition and ultimately supports them to reach a positive destination. It will need to cater for a wide range of student need, experience, and motivation to engage these students in learning so that they achieve to the best of their ability.

**The Federation of Awarding Bodies said:**

*“Good outcomes at entry-level are not just focused on the development of academic or workplace progression. A special school [working with one of the Federation’s awarding organisation members] noted that good outcomes at entry level for their learners were developing the skills needed for each learner to progress onto the next stage in their life, which could include a focus on behaviour, emotional and social needs, cognition, communication, sensory and physical (e.g. through occupational therapy) development.”*

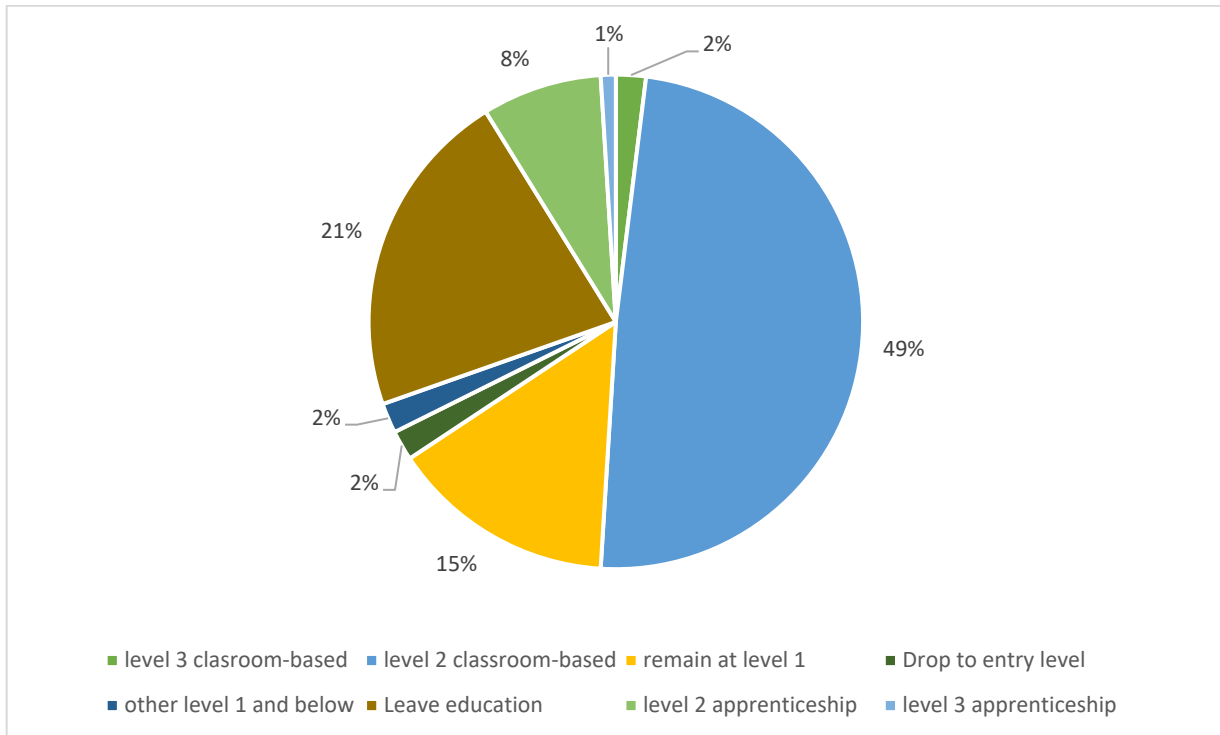
## Level 1 and entry level qualifications for young people

124. As we set out in the call for evidence, progression rates are currently variable for students at level 1 and entry level. Figure 12 shows that 60% of those studying level 1 in their first year of further education progress to study at level 2 or above in their second year (50% to level 2 classroom-based study, 8% to a level 2 apprenticeship, 2% to level 3 classroom-based study and 1% to a level 3 apprenticeship). A further 15% stay at level 1, 2% drop to entry level, 2% study other unspecified study below level 2 and 22% leave education<sup>39</sup> (of which 5% go into sustained employment).

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<sup>39</sup> [Qualifications at level 3 and below: contextual information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

**Figure 12: Destinations for students studying at level 1 at age 16**

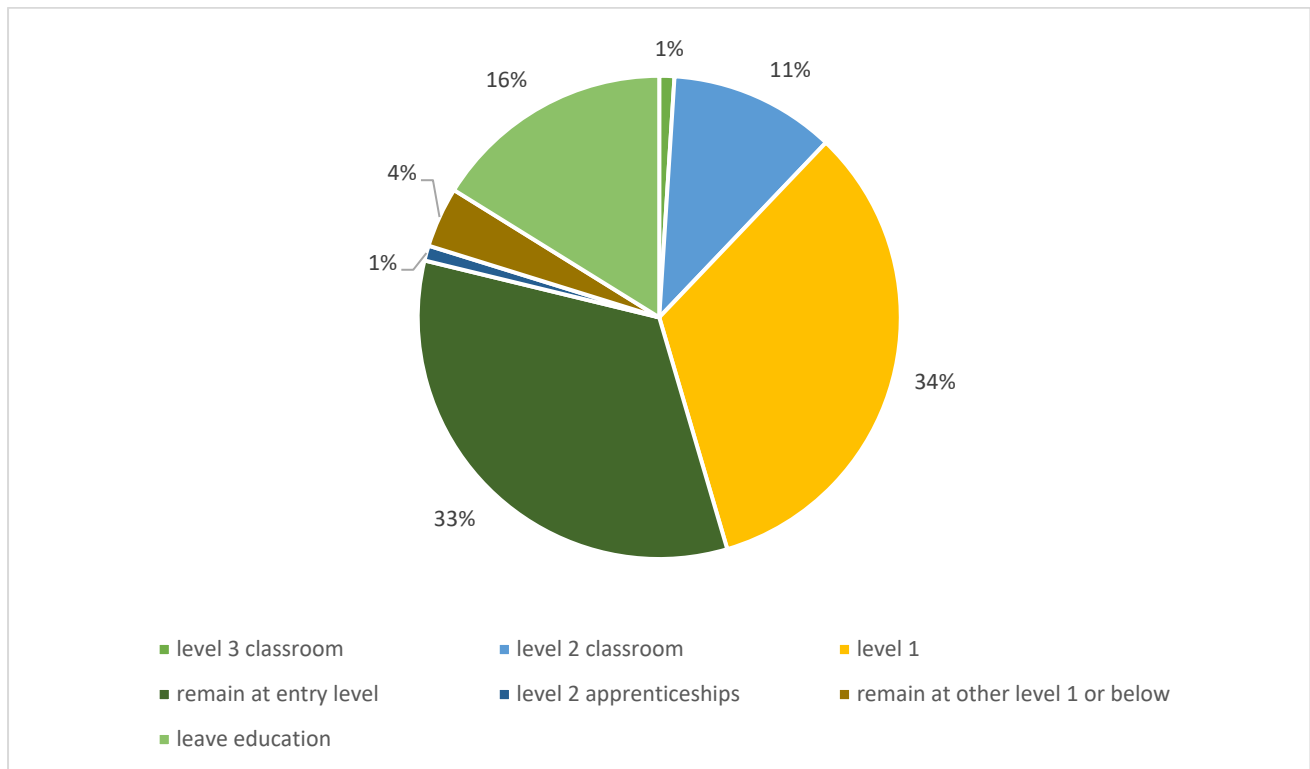


Note: percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding

125. For those who study at entry level at age 16, 33% progress to level 1 study, 11% to level 2 classroom-based study and 1% to level 2 apprenticeships (figure 13). 1 % progress to level 3 apprenticeships and 16% leave education. Another 33% remain at entry level, though this will include students who have progressed within entry level, for example from entry level 1 to entry level 2. 4% remain at other level 1 and below study.



**Figure 13: Destinations for students studying at entry level at age 16**



Note: percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding. Of those students remaining at entry level, some may have progressed between the sub levels.

126. While there will be additional challenges for some of these students to overcome, and progression may take longer than those at higher levels, we were also told in the call for evidence that the system is not being ambitious enough for these students, in particular those with SEND.

127. If qualifications are to achieve the intended outcomes for students, they will need to be taken as part of a broader study programme which is tailored to meet the needs of students. Through the call for evidence we were told that four factors were important in ensuring good outcomes are achieved and we will consider these factors in the development of future study programme guidance for level 1 and entry level students:

- Content and knowledge to build academic and personal development
- Work placements to build experience
- Specialist staff to deliver teaching
- Appropriate assessments

## Group 9: Level 1 pre-technical qualifications

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund level 1 qualifications which
  - support progression onto a level 2 technical qualification that provides direct entry into a level 2 occupation, or
  - support progression, potentially via a level 2 qualification, to a level 3 qualification which provides entry to a level 3 occupation

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Be small to medium in size, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults

### Example

A level 1 qualification providing an overview of the catering and hospitality route, as well as some introductory technical skills.

128. We want to create coherent progression pathways for students at level 1, with a clear focus to their study and a clear line of sight to relevant study at higher levels that provides entry into an occupation. We therefore propose to fund level 1 qualifications that focus on progression, supporting students to gain some introductory technical skills and an overview of the occupational route.

129. We expect these qualifications to be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH, so that they can be taken as part of a broader one-year 16 to 19 study programme, with other elements also playing an important role in addressing barriers to progression. This would include basic skills (English, maths, digital) and PSE qualifications. We propose there should be some flexibility in size for pre-technical qualifications, with the potential for some qualifications of different sizes within the same occupational route to meet the diverse needs of students at this level. However, each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and we would not anticipate high volumes of qualifications of different sizes.

130. These qualifications will need to be designed so there is a clear progression route into a relevant programme at level 2, either the level 2 programme leading to employment or a programme serving progression to level 3 technical study. We

anticipate there may be some overlap in content between level 1 pre-technical qualifications and level 2 technical qualifications, however the content at level 2 should develop greater depth and complexity. Where appropriate, we would encourage providers to recognise prior learning to enable students who have successfully completed level 1 to enter the second year of a level 2 occupational-entry qualification in the same occupational route (figure 14).

131. While we expect most students will progress through the classroom-based route, for some an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship will better support their career progression. We want to make it as easy as possible for these students to enter such work-based pathways where appropriate.

132. We also recognise that some students may not be able to progress to level 2, and, for them, level 1 will be their highest achievement. Although we do not think there are skilled employment opportunities at level 1, we want to ensure that all students who leave education with level 1 as their highest aim are given the best chance to prepare for the world of work. We think that a pre-technical qualification at level 1, when combined with employability skills delivered either through the study programme or a PSE qualification, should give these students some basic skills and knowledge to prepare them for entry to paid employment.

**Question 14:**

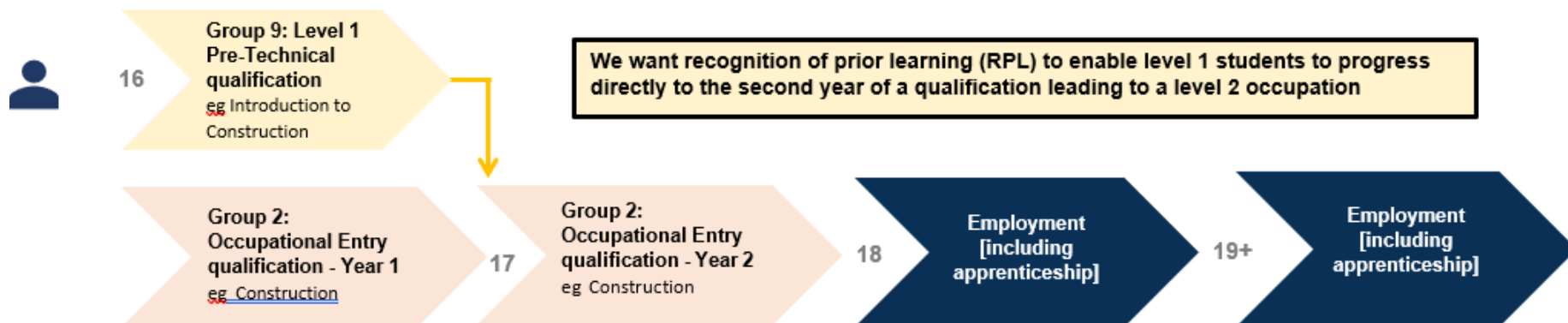
- i) Do you agree that we should fund level 1 pre-technical qualifications which focus on progression to level 2 and provide an introduction to the relevant occupational route?
- ii) Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH?

Figure 14: Examples of future level 1 progression pathways taken by 16 to 19 year olds

A student who intends to progress to higher levels of study



A student who wants to prepare for an occupation at level 2



## Group 10: Level 1 qualifications which may serve as a prerequisite to employment

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund a small number of qualifications which may serve as a prerequisite for employment, including those which are linked to occupational regulation in certain routes.

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Be necessary due to being linked to occupational regulation
- Be available to 16 to 19 year olds and adults
- Be small, with a guideline maximum size of 100 GLH

### Example

Qualifications could include health and safety qualifications that could help to secure a CSCS card to access work in the on-site construction pathway

133. There are some qualifications that may act as a prerequisite for employment in certain occupations. These may be linked to occupational regulation, helping individuals gain access to employment where they may be able to then learn on the job and become competent in an occupation, for example qualifications in health and safety.

134. We expect these qualifications to be small, with a guideline maximum size of 100 GLH. We believe that securing a level 1 qualification which acts as a prerequisite for employment could benefit younger students who fail to achieve at level 2, or who want to access an apprenticeship. These qualifications can also help adults to access an apprenticeship as they demonstrate, for example, that they can work safely in the workplace. These qualifications are too narrow to form the core aim of a 16 to 19 study programme but could be taken as part of a wider study programme, for example as part of the T Level Transition Programme where they could be taken alongside a level 2 qualification from group 1.

**Question 15:** Do you agree that we should fund level 1 qualifications which act as a prerequisite to employment?

## Group 11: Level 1 qualifications which are complementary to a study programme

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund a small number of qualifications that are designed to be taken alongside a student's main programme of study but do not form the core aim of a study programme

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must be:

- Designed to be taken alongside a student's main programme of study
- Available to 16 to 19 year olds and adults

### Example

Qualifications in this group are limited to level 1 performing arts graded qualifications and Foundation Project Qualifications.

135. In line with our approach at level 2, we propose to retain funding approval for a limited group of small qualifications, in their current form, that offer additional and complementary skills as part of a 16 to 19 study programme at level 1, or potentially for use by students at higher levels. These are qualifications that are intended to be taken alongside a student's main study programme and do not form the core aim. We propose that these qualifications will be excluded from further consideration for defunding and will thereby be removed from the scope of this review, but they will still be subject to ongoing regulation by Ofqual. These qualifications are:

- **Performing arts graded qualifications:** small, performance-focused qualifications in the area of music, dance, drama & communication and musical theatre. These qualifications allow students to progress onto higher levels with the ultimate aim of gaining a mastery of practical performance skill that is recognised by specialist institutions in these fields. We propose continuing to fund these at lower levels so that post-16 students who have not had access to opportunities in performing arts are able to still develop their skills at a later stage.

- **Foundation Project Qualifications:** as with their equivalents at level 2 and level 3, these qualifications allow students to develop additional skills as part of a study programme. Foundation Project Qualifications allow students to be stretched and develop study skills through different study methods. Foundation Project Qualifications must meet the Qualification Level Conditions specified by Ofqual.

**Question 16:**

- i) Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 1 graded qualifications in performing arts in their current form?
- ii) Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 1 Foundation Project Qualifications in their current form?

## Group 14: Entry level pre-technical qualifications

**Summary of proposals:**

- We propose to fund entry level 3 qualifications which lead directly to a level 1 pre-technical qualification

**To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:**

- Be high-quality and equivalent to entry level 3
- Be small to medium in size (less than half the size of a 16 to 19 study programme), with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults

**Example**

A qualification providing an overview of the hair and beauty occupational route and providing a taster of different occupations within that route.

136. For students who study at entry level we believe that qualifications should engage them and support progression to higher levels. We propose that these qualifications

would fit into a suite of qualifications that support progression to level 1 and level 2, with the entry level 3 qualification leading directly onto a level 1 qualification in that occupational route. The ultimate aim should be to put students on a clear pathway that leads to achieving an occupational-entry qualification at level 2 and above through subsequent study. Students should also be supported by these qualifications to take alternative positive progression routes, including direct progression onto a traineeship or supported internship.

137. These qualifications should provide an overview of an occupational route, such as hair and beauty or catering and hospitality, and may provide a taster of different occupations within that route. We would expect these qualifications to be small to medium size i.e. less than half the guided learning hours of a study programme, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH. This is to ensure there is sufficient content to provide an overview of an occupational route, while allowing time in the study programme for other components such as English/maths and wrap-around support. We propose there should be some flexibility in the qualifications offer, with the potential for qualifications of different sizes (but not exceeding half the guided learning hours of a study programme) within the same occupational route, to meet the diverse needs of students at entry level.

138. We propose to fund route-specific qualifications at entry level 3 as we believe this level is the natural step before progressing onto similar route-specific level 1 qualifications. Having these qualifications at entry level 3 will allow for a clear quality bar and a more focused progression route to technical study (via a related level 1 qualification). In Chapter 5, we seek views on whether there should be qualifications at entry levels 1 and 2 that offer students the opportunity to explore a broad range of different occupational routes, supporting their decision-making and eventual progression onto the technical route.

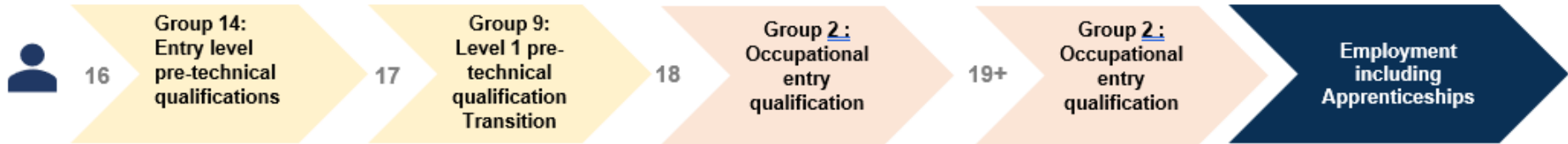
**Question 17:**

- i) Do you agree that we should fund entry level 3 pre-technical qualifications that support progression to level 1 study?
- ii) Do you agree that, for 16 to 19 year olds, qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH?



Figure 15: Examples of future entry level progression pathways taken by 16 to 19 year olds

A student who intends to progress to higher levels of study



A student with an EHCP who requires support to prepare for sustainable, paid employment



## Group 15: Entry level qualifications which are complementary to a study programme

### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund qualifications at entry level which allow students to develop additional skills and are complementary to a study programme. These are performing arts graded examination qualifications

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Be entry level performing arts graded qualifications
- Be available to both 16 to 19 year olds and adults

139. We propose that entry level students will be able to take a specific set of qualifications that offer additional and complementary skills as part of a 16 to 19 study programme, and do not form the core aim. These are **performing arts graded qualifications** - small, performance-focused qualifications in the areas of music, dance, drama and communication, and musical theatre. They support students to develop the foundations of practical performance skills and progress to equivalent qualifications at higher levels. These are qualifications that are intended to be taken alongside a student's main study programme. We propose that these qualifications should be excluded from further consideration for defunding, and thereby removed from the scope of this review, but they will still be subject to ongoing regulation by Ofqual.

**Question 18:** Do you agree that we should continue to fund entry level graded qualifications in performing arts in their current form?

140. At level 1 and entry level, we propose that we will not fund vocational qualifications linked to occupational routes, for example construction, that do not meet the criteria for groups 9 and 14. For example:

- We would not fund qualifications at these levels that are too narrowly focused only on certain skills, e.g. plumbing or bricklaying, and do not provide a broad enough introduction to the construction route to support progression to level 2. The focus at

entry level and level 1 should be on supporting progression to level 2 (and beyond), where the knowledge, skills and behaviours for skilled employment can be developed. These qualifications should allow students to gain a broad introduction to an occupational route, energise and enthuse students and support the development of basic skills, including English and maths.

- We would not fund qualifications that are too large to allow space for other elements of a study programme for 16 to 19 year olds, or too small to provide a comprehensive introduction to the route.
- We would not fund qualifications in vocational areas where there is not a clear pathway to employment in occupations at either level 2 or level 3.

141. For level 1 and entry level academic qualifications, we are proposing that we will not fund academic qualifications at these levels that are in the same subjects as GCSEs (apart from English, maths and digital). For example, we would not fund non-GCSE qualifications in foreign languages or humanities subjects at level 1 or entry level. GCSEs are designed as level 1/level 2 qualifications and provide high-quality academic study in these subjects.

## Successful transitions from classroom-based qualifications to other programmes including apprenticeships

142. Every classroom-based qualification approved for funding in the future must offer clear progression routes to higher study or sustainable employment as part of a coherent technical education system. Apprenticeships and traineeships are a recognised and valued route to skilled employment.
143. We know that many students studying at level 2 and below are still developing their knowledge, skills, behaviours and aspirations. It is important, where an opportunity arises, that we support students to transfer from classroom-based provision to other work-based programmes, should they wish to do so. Transitions to apprenticeships need to be timely as providers will need to consider any learning already undertaken. Apprenticeship funding should not be used to pay for, or accredit, existing knowledge, skills and behaviours and the apprenticeship must still meet the minimum duration of 12 months with 20% off the job training. This will be particularly important for those students who are transferring from qualifications aligned to employer-led occupational standards.

**The Sheffield College said:**

*“Classroom-based alternatives to apprenticeships provide learners with the opportunity to interact with and learn from their peers, and building and maintaining friendships with peers is crucial for students’ mental health. Classroom-based alternatives may also provide learners with the opportunity to receive a higher level of pastoral support if they need it.”*

144. For students with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) transition to a supported internship provides a structured and supported route into paid employment and should be encouraged where this is deemed to be the most suitable route for the student.
145. Whilst we support and encourage smooth transitions to other programmes it is essential that we retain the option of both classroom-based and work-based learning. For some students, classroom-based learning will be the most appropriate route. Of those who are more suited to work-based learning, some may not be ready to enter the

workplace immediately and will need to study in the classroom initially. Furthermore, in some areas of the country and some industries, there are insufficient apprenticeship opportunities to meet demand. For these reasons a viable and sustainable classroom-based offer is needed.

## Chapter 3: Supporting Adults

146. The best way to improve people’s life chances is to give them the skills to succeed. Adult skills are vital to economic recovery, levelling up, growing productivity and improving the skills pipeline in key growth sectors, in both the short and long term. It is therefore essential that we create a qualification landscape which provides adults with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life.
147. Many respondents to the call for evidence cited the benefits of level 2 qualifications for adults. These included improved earnings as well as providing valuable knowledge and skills development for those returning to work, entering work for the first time or those aiming to upskill within a current or new occupational route. Respondents also told us level 2 qualifications motivate the lowest-skilled, lowest-paid, most disadvantaged individuals and that they are an essential building block to help them move onto higher levels of study. They also provide adults with access to apprenticeships.
148. We have already outlined, in Chapters 1 and 2, the changes we are proposing to the level 2 and below qualifications landscape for 16 to 19 year olds. However, we want to ensure good qualifications are available to people of all ages. This is why, in the Skills for Jobs White Paper, the Prime Minister introduced the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to allow everyone to access the education and training they need throughout their lives by funding a range of high-value level 3 qualifications<sup>40</sup> for any adult who has not already achieved a full level 3 qualification.
149. We should also note that adults with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) are much more likely to study qualifications below level 2. On average, at level 2 and below, 19% of adult enrolments in 2019/20 were taken by those with LDD<sup>41</sup>. Consequently, this is part of the educational system which is essential to improving life chances and social mobility. It is therefore crucial that the system is flexible enough to support the full range of adults to develop the skills that they need to progress.

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<sup>40</sup> [List of free level 3 qualifications available to eligible adults - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>41</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment

## Technical qualifications for adults: Design and Delivery Principles

150. Respondents to the call for evidence stated the design and delivery of qualifications for adults must consider their different circumstances, commitments, experience and skills. Respondents told us that completing a full programme at level 2 may be challenging and that qualifications need to be appropriately sized for adults to take them alongside their employment. Respondents also suggested different modes of study would be helpful, such as online and weekend learning as well as condensed programmes that contribute to adults upskilling in the area/s needed. They told us that adults need flexible and modular delivery of qualifications that they can fit around existing responsibilities such as work or caring, and that recognising their prior learning is essential.

151. We therefore propose that the principles for delivery of technical qualifications for adults at level 2 should align with those we are adopting at level 3, namely:

- Modular delivery of content
- Recognition of prior learning and experience
- Appropriate assessment of occupational-entry competence

152. Qualifications designed to deliver entry-level competence against employer led occupational standards will be expected to meet these principles, and we propose to work closely with Ofqual and IFATE, in consultation with awarding organisations and providers, to set out the qualification design requirements and the principles that underpin them.

### Modular Delivery

153. Respondents to the call for evidence told us that adult learners are often returning to education after a lengthy period away from study. They often had to (re)learn how to learn and build their social capital and self-confidence and taking a full programme of study in one go is often too challenging. Respondents told us that, to reach level 3, adults often preferred longer, flexible pathways of “bite-size” blocks that could fit around their other work or family commitments. We therefore propose that substantial qualifications that will be open to adult learners should be designed in such a way as to facilitate modular delivery.

**HOLEX (Adult Community Education) said:**

*“Many adult learners have low prior attainment and have been out of learning for many years. Their need to learn may be driven by the need for employment, recent redundancy, and/or the need for retraining for a new career pathway. Learning is usually balanced with other serious adult responsibilities, and adults often face significant barriers to learning”*

## Recognition of prior learning

154. For those adults who have undertaken previous study, or who can evidence relevant experience in an occupational route, this should be acknowledged and repetition of learning should be avoided. We therefore propose that prior learning and experience should be assessed against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the relevant occupational standard and, where appropriate, providers should take this into account, noting that learners would be expected to demonstrate aptitude in any assessments.

## Assessment of occupational competence

155. We want to avoid the issues associated with awards being made purely on the basis of accumulated credit, where individual skills are assessed discretely and in isolation, as this risks students being unable to draw together the necessary skills to demonstrate a suitable level of occupational competence. To ensure students achieving these qualifications have acquired occupational-entry competence, we will work with Ofqual and IFATE to ensure the content of these qualifications is assessed in an appropriate way. We will engage with relevant stakeholders, including awarding organisations, providers and employers so that qualification design and assessment reflects the requirements of different industries and occupations. Providers will play an important part in delivering these principles and we will work with them to ensure the principles are delivered in a way that meets the needs of adults whilst being sustainable for providers.

**Question 19:** Do you agree that the design and delivery principles outlined in paragraphs 150 to 155 will ensure that level 2 technical qualifications are accessible to adults?



## Level 2 qualifications for adults

156. Wherever possible, we want the same qualifications to be available to both young people and adults, thereby avoiding the need for alternative qualifications. However, we recognise that, in some cases, additional qualifications will be necessary to meet the specific needs of adult learners.
157. In Chapter 1 we set out the different groups of qualifications in the technical and academic routes that we are proposing to fund for young people at level 2. Our starting point is that the same qualifications should also be funded for adults, but for adults technical qualifications should meet the delivery principles that we have outlined in paragraphs 150 to 155.
158. The groups that we propose to fund for both young people and adults are as follows:
- **Group 1: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications.** Adults will be able to access these high-quality qualifications which support progression to level 3 technical qualifications. These qualifications will provide broad content specific to a particular occupational route. Whilst they are not themselves designed to provide entry into an occupation, they will prepare adults for progression to a level 3 qualification that does provide entry into an occupation e.g. T Levels<sup>42</sup>.
  - **Group 2: Technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations at level 2 ('occupational-entry qualifications').** Adults will be able to access qualifications which provide entry into a level 2 occupation. For example, the care services sector recruits a high number of adults who are required to have a relevant level 2 qualification, as a minimum, to work as an adult care worker. These larger qualifications will be suitable for those adults looking to get a broad overview of an occupational route and develop transferable skills to facilitate transfers between occupations. This could include adults who are new to an occupational route, having changed career or having been previously unemployed. It may also be the preference of younger adults who have less experience of work and more capacity to study larger qualifications.

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<sup>42</sup> T Levels are currently available to 16 to 19 year olds, but we want as many people as possible to benefit from these high-quality programmes. We are exploring how T Levels can be extended to adults and this includes the types of flexibility that could be introduced for 19+ learners.

- **Group 4: Specialist qualifications.** Adults will be able to access qualifications which develop specialist skills and knowledge that build on an employer-led occupational standard.
- **Group 5: Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills:** Adults will be able to access a small number of qualifications which focus on a range of skills that are transferrable across multiple occupational standards and offer a discrete set of knowledge and skills that are valued by employers. We believe these qualifications are relevant for adults who are already in the workplace and want to progress in their career.
- **Group 7: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic qualifications.** We think some adults could benefit from accessing qualifications which support progression to level 3 academic qualifications that sit alongside A levels. These qualifications should provide introductory content to a subject area and support progression to a level 3 academic qualification other than A levels (such as qualifications in performing arts, where GCSEs do not provide comparable preparation).

159. We set out the English and maths qualifications we propose to fund for young people and adults at level 2 in Chapter 4, and our approach to PSE qualifications in Chapter 5.

**Question 20:** Do you agree that we should fund the following level 2 qualification groups for adult learners:

Group 1: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical study

Group 2: Occupational-entry qualifications

Group 4: Specialist qualifications

Group 5: Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills

Group 7: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study

## Qualifications available to adults only

160. In addition to the above, we believe that some qualifications are required specifically to meet the needs of adult learners. We therefore propose that the following groups of qualifications should also be available for adults.

### Group 3: Occupational-focus qualifications for adults

#### Summary of proposals:

- We propose to fund qualifications at level 2 which provide adults with entry into a particular occupation and will not need to be delivered as part of a study programme. They will be smaller than the substantial entry-level competence qualifications in group 2, as they will have less focus on route-wide content and transferable skills, and therefore will be a more accessible option for adults. We ask, on page 42, question 8, whether these qualifications should also be available to 16 to 19 year olds in certain circumstances.

#### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Be focused on providing technical content which is aligned to an employer-led occupational standard and provides entry into a level 2 occupation, with only a small proportion of the qualification dedicated to route-wide content.
- Be of medium size, smaller than the group 2 occupational-entry level 2 qualifications.
- Be available to adults only. (Subject to question 8 on page 42)

#### Example:

A medium sized qualification in hair and beauty providing the occupationally specific technical knowledge, skills and behaviours required to become a nail technician (aligned with the 'nail services technician' standard).

161. Some adults will already have experience of the workplace and may struggle to access larger qualifications even where the principles that we have set out for adult technical qualifications are applied. We therefore propose in group 3 to fund medium-sized qualifications, specifically for adults. These qualifications will focus on providing entry into an occupation and will not include the full route-wide content or transferable

skills that are included in group 2; any route-wide content should only comprise a small proportion of a qualification. Additional qualifications such as essential skills in English, maths and digital could be taken alongside these qualifications where needed. We believe this additional group is necessary to cater for adults with more experience of work and for whom their personal circumstances and wider family or work commitments may make it difficult to study a large qualification.

162. Qualifications in group 3 will need to align with the relevant employer-led standard and deliver as many of the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours for the occupation as can be achieved in a classroom-based setting.

**Question 21:**

- i) Do you agree that we should fund occupational-focus qualifications at level 2 for adults?
- ii) Do you agree that these qualifications should be medium sized, with a guideline size of 200-540 GLH?

## Group 6: Technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations without employer-led occupational standards

### Summary of proposals:

- Mirroring the approach taken at level 3, we propose to fund a small range of level 2 qualifications where there is clear demand from employers and good prospects for progression, but no employer-led standard.

### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Support progression into sustainable level 2 occupations where an employer-led occupational standard does not exist
- Be available to adults only

### Example:

A qualification providing the technical knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to become a hospital porter.

163. Feedback to the call for evidence indicated that level 2 is a recognised point of entry for a variety of job roles, some of which may not, at this point in time, have occupational standards on IFATE's occupational maps. Identification of these qualifications may indicate the need for an occupation to be added to IFATE's maps, ensuring the availability of qualifications in areas that are valuable to employers. In some cases, it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed. IFATE is exploring how this is implemented through the occupational maps and approval process.

164. In line with our reforms at level 3, we propose to fund these qualifications for adults only.

### Question 22:

- i) Do you agree that we should consider requests to fund level 2 qualifications for occupations for which an employer-led occupational standard does not currently exist?
- ii) Are you aware of any occupations that are in demand by employers but where an employer-led occupational standard does not currently exist?
- iii) Do you agree that these qualifications should be available to adults only?

## Level 1 and entry level qualifications for adults

165. We recognise that adults have different circumstances from 16 to 19 year olds and may have different motivations that will affect their learning goals and the qualifications they choose. Adult learners may be more motivated to take qualifications that provide occupationally specific skills and provide direct entry into employment.

166. As with 16 to 19 year olds, we believe most adults who are able to will therefore be better placed studying at level 2 and above, i.e. the levels where they can gain sufficient competence to enter an occupation. Below level 2, it is currently more common for adults to take qualifications in Personal, Social and Employability skills. However, there will be adults, including some of those with LDD, who will need to begin study at entry level (including sub levels) or level 1 before progressing to higher levels. To meet the needs of these adults, we propose that the qualifications we have previously proposed for 16 to 19 year olds should also be made available for adults:

- a. **Group 9: Level 1 pre-technical qualifications.** Adults will be able to access level 1 qualifications which lead directly onto level 2 qualifications that provide entry into occupations at level 2. These qualifications will provide an overview of the occupational route as well as some introductory technical skills, with a focus on progression to further study. We would expect these qualifications to be small to medium size, depending on the route.
- b. **Group 10: Level 1 qualifications that act as a prerequisite to employment.** These may be linked to occupational regulation, helping adults gain access to

employment where they may be able to then learn on the job in order to become competent in an occupation, for example qualifications in health and safety.

- c. **Group 11: Level 1 qualifications providing additional and complementary skills.** These are performing arts graded qualifications: small, performance-focused qualifications in the area of music, dance, drama and communication, and musical theatre. These qualifications allow students to progress onto higher levels with the ultimate aim of gaining a mastery of practical performance skill. These will be available for those adults who would benefit from taking them.
- d. **Group 14: Entry level 3 pre-technical qualifications.** For adult students who need to begin at entry level, we propose there should be qualifications that engage them and support progression to higher levels. These qualifications would lead directly onto a level 1 qualification, aligned to an occupational route, as part of an eventual progression route to occupational competence at level 2 and above. These qualifications should provide an overview of the route and may provide a taster of different occupational areas. We would expect these qualifications to be small to medium size.
- e. **Group 15: Entry level qualifications providing additional and complementary skills.** Performing arts graded qualifications at entry levels 1, 2 and 3 will also be available for adults looking to gain foundation knowledge and progress onto higher grades to develop their practical performance skill.

**Question 23:** Do you agree that we should fund the following qualification groups at level 1 for adult learners:

Group 9: Level 1 pre-technical qualifications supporting progression to level 2 study

Group 10: Level 1 qualifications serving as a prerequisite to employment

Group 11: Level 1 graded qualifications in performing arts and level 1 project qualifications

**Question 24:** Do you agree that we should fund the following qualification groups at entry level for adults:

Group 14: Entry level 3 pre-technical qualifications supporting progression to level 1

Group 15: Entry level performing arts graded qualifications

## Chapter 4: Level 2 and below English, maths and ESOL qualifications (non FSQ/GCSE)

### Groups 12 & 16: English and maths qualifications

#### Summary of proposals:

- We propose continuing to fund at level 1 and entry level (including sub levels) high-quality English and maths qualifications that deliver basic literacy and numeracy for those who cannot directly access FSQ and GCSE.
- We propose to remove funding at level 2 for non-GCSE/FSQ English and maths qualifications.
- We propose to consider the need for updating the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

#### To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:

- Be developed against National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
- Be designed to support those who cannot access FSQ / GCSE

#### Example:

An entry level or level 1 qualification in English or maths skills that builds confidence and ability for learners who need support to access an FSQ/GCSE.

167. English and maths qualifications from entry level to level 1 provide an alternative for learners who cannot access GCSEs or Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs). There are currently 583 English and maths qualifications in scope<sup>43</sup> for funding at Level 2 and below with around 22,000 enrolments in 2019/20. 72% of these learners are aged 19 and over and 34% of those have SEND needs<sup>44</sup>.

168. The call for evidence highlighted the importance of these qualifications at lower levels in delivering literacy and numeracy skills to learners with SEND and other barriers to FSQ/GCSE.

<sup>43</sup> Note, this excludes FSQs, ESOL, GCSE and IB qualifications

<sup>44</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment



**HOLEX (Adult Community Education) said:**

*“They have shorter exams/tests and learning broken down into more accessible units. This allows for gradual progress and preparation for the longer, bigger FSQ and GCSE assessments”*

169. These qualifications at level 2 have had very little demand. The streamlining process for courses with persistently low or no enrolments will remove funding from most existing level 2 non-FSQ/GCSE English and maths qualifications. This lack of take-up suggests that FSQs and GCSEs are the preferred option for learners at this stage and alternative qualifications are not needed.

170. We therefore propose removing funding approval for English and maths (non FSQ/GCSE) at level 2.

171. We propose continued funding approval for English and maths qualifications at level 1 and below to serve those learners who cannot directly access FSQs or GCSEs.

**Question 25:**

- i) Do you agree we should remove funding at **level 2** for non-GCSE/FSQ **English** qualifications?
- ii) Do you agree we should remove funding at **level 2** for non-GCSE/FSQ **maths** qualifications?

**Question 26:**

- i) Do you agree we should continue to fund **level 1 and entry level English** qualifications for learners who cannot access FSQs/ GCSEs?
- ii) Do you agree that we should continue to fund **level 1 and entry level maths** qualifications for learners who cannot access FSQs/GCSEs?

172. The call for evidence strongly confirmed the need for the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Some respondents also suggested updates to ensure real

world changes, e.g. developments in digital technology, are reflected. We want to understand in more detail the specific changes that are needed and the benefits for learners.

**Question 27:**

- i) Do you agree all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in **English** should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy?
- ii) Do you agree all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in **maths** should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy?

**Question 28:** Do you agree that we should consider updating the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy before adding them to the regulation criteria?

## Groups 8,13 & 17: ESOL qualifications

**Summary of proposals:**

We propose to continue to fund high-quality ESOL qualifications at level 2 (group 8), level 1 (group 13) and entry levels 1,2 and 3 (group 17). Qualifications named ESOL Skills for Life are in scope of this review. ESOL International qualifications are out of scope.

**To be in scope for funding these qualifications must:**

Continue to meet the requirements of the National Standards for Adult Literacy.

**Example:**

Qualifications in reading, writing, speaking and listening, designed to support speakers of other languages within the UK to develop their English language skills for work, further learning or everyday life.

173. ESOL qualifications at level 2 and below are offered in separate awards for each skill (speaking/listening, reading, writing) and an overall certificate at each level (entry level 1, entry level 2, entry level 3, level 1 and level 2). There are currently 200 ESOL qualifications approved for funding (20 qualifications across 10 awarding organisations), with around 151,000 enrolments in 2019/20<sup>45</sup>.

174. Responses to the call for evidence indicated strong support for the current qualification structure. ESOL is designed for speakers of other languages who are resident in the UK to increase English language knowledge and proficiency for life, work or further study. Individuals in this cohort are mobile and learners have vastly different learning needs, ranging from no prior education to post-graduate education. The split between levels and skills allows learners to achieve skill level qualifications to support life and work and use those qualifications interchangeably between awarding organisations and colleges as they move for employment or to settle.

**HOLEX (Adult Community Education) said:**

*“ESOL qualifications allow learners to build vital foundations before progressing into employment and further social and civic integration. The breakdown into levels, especially the 3 entry levels, enables learners to make sustained and steady progress”*

175. Ofqual is researching how awarding organisations approach the development and delivery of ESOL qualifications and comparability between qualifications and awarding organisations. This may inform decisions around the regulatory approach and funding criteria set by the Department.

**Question 29:**

Do you agree that we should continue to fund ESOL qualifications at each of the following levels:

- (i) Level 2
- (ii) Level 1
- (iii) Entry level (including sub levels 1,2 and 3)

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<sup>45</sup> Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below Government consultation: Impact Assessment

## Chapter 5: Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) Qualifications




176. For many young people, especially those with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds, PSE provision is an integral part of their study programme. For those with no prior attainment, including adults furthest from the labour market, this study can represent their first step towards re-engaging with education and training.
177. Through the call for evidence, we explored how providers deliver PSE skills to adults and if a qualification was essential. 68% of respondents stated that qualifications were not essential, with 32% stating that they were essential. Those responding that they were not essential argued that these skills should be embedded within other qualifications, non-regulated learning and work-based training such as apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships. While stating that qualifications were not always essential, many could recognise that in some circumstances, or for some students, regulated qualifications could offer an objective measure of progression and achievement. They can also support providers in the delivery of high-quality programmes.
178. The majority of respondents who stated that these qualifications were essential cited specific groups of students for whom such qualifications are important, including those with SEND, from disadvantaged backgrounds, with behavioural or mental health issues, adults with no prior attainment, ESOL learners, care leavers, those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and those who are, or at risk of, homelessness.
179. Many providers stated that qualifications can help them to plot pathways into further education, design and deliver high-quality study programmes, and effectively monitor progression. For some students, especially those who may not achieve at level 2 or above, these qualifications offer evidence of their achievements that, when recognised by employers, can enable them to compete for positions with their peers.
180. Through the call for evidence, we also explored whether employers recognised PSE qualifications. Most employers stated that they do not recognise stand-alone employability qualifications, citing that they were not always representative of the actual skills possessed by a prospective employee. However, most employers recognised the value of skills such as teamwork and communication, with many actively seeking and assessing a candidate's ability through applications and interviews.

181. From the responses to the call for evidence, and after further engagement with employers and key stakeholders, we have concluded that, for a number of students, these qualifications will remain an essential part of their post-16 education. However, we believe that there is scope to streamline the complex system, and significantly improve the quality, outcomes, and recognition of these qualifications.
182. This provision has the potential to transform lives, with personal and social development provision preparing students for adulthood and equipping them with the skills required to live independently and engage with society. Employability provision can support those undertaking technical study and those furthest from the labour market, including adults, to develop the skills needed for the workplace.
183. While these skills are clearly needed by students, over time PSE qualifications have proliferated leading to a system that has few progression routes and is difficult to navigate, making it harder for students and providers to make informed choices. With no clear markers of quality in the system, it can be difficult for employers to recognise the skills that have developed in these qualifications.
184. To address these issues, we propose to develop a set of national standards for PSE qualifications. These standards, similar to the standards underpinning Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ)<sup>46</sup>, would include core content, key skills and behaviours, and set out a clear continuum of skills development and progression across the levels. The standards, supported by comprehensive frameworks, would underpin qualification design, and in future, only qualifications designed to meet the requirements of the standards would be in scope for funding approval.
185. Where necessary, the standards will be supplemented by additional measures, such as detailed consideration of the qualification designs that awarding organisations propose in relation to the standards, as well as the associated assessment processes. Given the diversity of this cohort, we will also consider the flexibilities required to meet the different needs of students.

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<sup>46</sup> [National standards for essential digital skills - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

**We intend to develop standards for qualifications that deliver:**

	<p><b>Personal and Social Development</b></p> <p>We anticipate this standard would include content designed to improve a student's communication and interpersonal skills, develop confidence and resilience, prepare them for further study and progression, and prepare them to engage with the local community and wider society.</p>
	<p><b>Employability Skills</b></p> <p>We anticipate this standard would include content designed to prepare a student to find and secure employment, such as job searches, CV writing and interview skills, and to teach the essential skills for the work environment, such as workplace communications, teamwork and problem solving, health and safety at work, and employee rights and responsibilities.</p>
	<p><b>Independent Living and Life Skills</b></p> <p>We anticipate this standard would include content designed to prepare a student for adulthood and independent living, such as managing physical and mental health, relationships, maintaining a home, tenant rights and responsibilities, independent travel skills, and financial management skills.</p>

**Question 30:**

Do you agree that we should develop national standards and set broad core content at level 1 for:

- i) Personal and social development
- ii) Employability skills
- iii) Independent living and life skills

**Question 31:**

Do you agree that we should develop national standards and set broad core content at Entry level (including entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3) for:

- i) Personal and social development
- ii) Employability skills
- iii) Independent living and life skills

**Question 32:**

Do you agree the national standards set out above will cover the range of skills needed by students?

Do you believe there is a need to develop additional national standards? If so, please tell us what the standard should contain and which students it would benefit?

**Question 33:** Thinking specifically about employability skills:

- (i) As an employer, do you currently recognise or value any qualifications in employability skills? If so, how do you recognise them and what aspects of these qualifications do you value?
- (ii) Will the proposed national standards make a difference to the way these qualifications are perceived, valued or recognised by employers?
- (iii) If so, what difference will they make and how would employability qualifications aligned to standards be used by employers in the future?

186. Recognising the diverse needs and abilities of students undertaking PSE qualifications, and to ensure none are disadvantaged by these reforms, we propose to work closely with employers and providers, convening expert panels to develop the standards. It is our intent that the panels will bring together representatives from further education, SEND, alternative provision, adult education providers, local authorities, employers and other education experts, drawing on their combined knowledge of designing and delivering qualifications and study programmes.

187. We believe developing standards that qualifications are designed against will significantly improve the qualification offer, simplify choices for providers, and deliver better outcomes for students. However, we recognise that this cohort can have complex and often challenging needs. Our intent is to build flexibility into the standards and qualifications, ensuring that they meet the needs of the individual student whilst delivering the essential skills needed for life and work.

188. We expect that, in the future, many providers will continue to offer PSE qualifications, however we recognise the vital role non-regulated provision plays for some students. We therefore see a role for non-qualification (non-regulated) provision that enables broader learning programmes and innovative skills provision to be

developed, thus supporting individuals for whom qualification-based provision is not appropriate. The next consultation on funding and accountability in further education will set out more detail on future funding arrangements for non-regulated provision.

189. We set out in Chapter 2 that entry level pre-technical qualifications should be at entry level 3 as this is the natural progression point onto level 1 study. We know that some students at entry level 1 and 2 can also benefit from provision that allows them to explore a range of industries and occupations, supporting their decision-making and eventual progression onto the technical route. We welcome views on whether it is necessary to have standalone qualifications (often referred to as 'pre-vocational') to deliver this content, or if this could be built into PSE qualifications at entry level 1 and entry level 2, or otherwise delivered as non-qualification provision.

**Question 34:** Is it necessary to have standalone qualifications at entry level 1 and entry level 2 that provide students with an opportunity to explore industries and occupations?

190. We will consider responses to this consultation as we continue to develop our proposals. We will then consult further, setting out our plan to reform PSE qualifications and providing more detail on the development of national standards. We will also consider the future role of pre-vocational qualifications as part of that consultation.



## Chapter 6: Delivering quality

191. We believe that all students have the right to access high-quality qualifications. We are proposing to implement new processes that will ensure all qualifications approved for public funding at level 2 and below are high-quality.

### The approach at level 3

192. As set out in our response to the second stage consultation on level 3 qualifications, Ofqual, IFATE and ESFA will be implementing a new approvals process for level 3 qualifications. This will establish an approach that is coherent and ensures funded level 3 qualifications have a distinct purpose, are truly necessary in the new simplified system, support meaningful progression, and are high-quality. It will be underpinned by the extension of IFATE's powers proposed through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill. For technical qualifications, IFATE will lead an approvals process, setting criteria for the various technical qualification categories alongside T Levels. For academic qualifications, ESFA will set criteria to ensure all qualifications approved for funding are necessary alongside A levels. Ofqual will provide advice about quality to both organisations. ESFA will continue to have overall responsibility for funding decisions, based on its own criteria, and for technical qualifications will only fund those that have been approved by IFATE.

### Level 2

193. At level 2, we also expect there to be a new approvals process. The principles of the Qualifications Review – that all post-16 qualifications should be necessary, have a distinct purpose, be high-quality and support progression to positive outcomes – will inform the design of these processes. Subject to the outcome of this consultation, and further discussions with Ofqual and IFATE, we will publish further details on the approvals process for level 2 qualifications. We will work with Ofqual and IFATE, where relevant, to ensure that any new process does not place unjustifiable additional burdens on awarding organisations, employers or other key stakeholders.

## Quality reforms to technical qualifications

194. In line with the proposed extension of their powers through the Skills Bill, we would expect IFATE to lead the approvals process for the following groups of technical qualifications at level 2:

- Qualifications preparing for a related level 2 occupation (groups 2 and 3)
- Specialist Qualifications that develop additional skills and knowledge beyond the requirements of the level 2 standard (group 4)
- Qualifications developing cross-sectoral skills (group 5)
- Qualifications enabling entry into occupations without employer-led occupational standards (group 6)

195. Beyond this, roles and responsibilities in the approvals processes at level 2 are subject to further design and development with IFATE and Ofqual and will be confirmed in the consultation response.

196. A number of responses to the call for evidence suggested that some occupations may not currently be represented on the occupational maps at level 2. As at level 3, we want to ensure the availability of qualifications in occupations that are valuable to employers, but where an employer-led occupational standard has not been developed. Identification of these qualifications may indicate the need for an occupation to be added to IFATE's maps, ensuring the availability of qualifications in areas that are valuable to employers. In some cases, it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed. IFATE is exploring how this is implemented through the occupational maps and approval process.

## Mandatory qualifications in apprenticeship standards

197. In some cases, apprenticeships require the successful completion of additional qualifications (mandatory qualifications), as well as completion of the End Point Assessment (EPA). These qualifications can be at level 2 or below. As at level 3, we will continue to work with IFATE to ensure that the mandatory qualification policy and the outcome of the post-16 qualifications review align, to meet the needs of apprentices, employers, and industry.

198. IFATE will put in place consistent criteria and make judgements about qualifications in apprenticeships and for classroom-based study. As part of this, how well a

qualification meets employer needs is a critical consideration and IFATE will draw on all available evidence, from both the approvals process and the process to mandate qualifications in apprenticeships, as it works with employers on approvals decisions.

199. As per IFATE's usual processes, occupational standards are reviewed as part of route reviews or specific revision requests. This process includes the review of any mandatory qualifications. Where a qualification does not meet the mandatory qualifications policy, IFATE will work with employers to ensure the apprenticeship meets their needs.

## **Delivery of qualifications in traineeships**

200. Traineeships are a focused, flexible skills development offer that last between 6 weeks and 12 months. They allow young people and adults who have little or no work experience to follow a work-based programme of training designed to help them develop the skills and experience needed to secure apprenticeships and other sustainable employment. From 2021 we have also piloted Occupational Traineeships that aim to support progression into a target apprenticeship or occupation. The content of the Occupational Traineeship is aligned with the relevant occupational standard(s) and ideally reflects employer recruitment criteria for live apprenticeship or job opportunities.

201. While qualifications are not an essential component of the traineeship framework for delivery, in some cases providers may wish to include a qualification as part of the traineeship offer. We will continue to consider what qualifications may be needed within traineeships, including in the Occupational Traineeships as the pilots complete, and we will take this into account in our final approval criteria.

## **Level 1 and entry level**

202. We are exploring with Ofqual and IFATE the most appropriate approvals process or processes for qualifications at level 1 and entry level. As at other levels, this will be informed by the principles of purpose, necessity, quality and progression. Subject to the outcome of this consultation, we will publish further details on the approvals process at these levels.

## Approval for public funding

203. Ofqual and IFATE will play a part in the approvals process to ensure that qualifications are high quality and (for technical qualifications) meet employers' needs. Awarding organisations offering publicly funded qualifications will need to continue to meet Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition. However, the Secretary of State will continue to be responsible for all decisions regarding which qualifications should receive public funding, to ensure that all qualifications align with Government's ambitions for the post-16 education system. As such, there will be some funding approval criteria that qualifications will have to meet, over and above Ofqual's and IFATE's requirements.
204. Scrutiny from Ofqual and IFATE, where relevant, will be a pre-requisite for funding approval, but review by Ofqual and IFATE will not automatically confer funding. The Secretary of State will reserve the right to fund qualifications not reviewed by Ofqual or IFATE, should this be required to ensure continued coverage of provision or to ensure qualifications align with Government priorities. The proposals in this consultation do not have an impact on overall funding rates.
205. We have described above the types of qualifications we propose to approve for funding. The descriptions of these groups of qualifications will form a core part of the funding approval criteria and we expect final criteria to be based on, but not necessarily limited to, these descriptions. We will work with Ofqual and IFATE to confirm the detail of the approvals process.

## Approval for inclusion in school and college performance tables

206. The Department for Education has responsibility for maintaining the lists of qualifications included in 16 to 19 performance tables. The new funding approval process at level 2 will ensure that all qualifications are high-quality but, as at level 3, while funding approval will be a pre-requisite for inclusion in performance tables, this alone will not be sufficient. The Department will consider other factors, including the fit with the Government's broader policy priorities. The final decision on which qualifications should be included in performance tables will continue to lie with the Secretary of State for Education.
207. As now, we do not currently expect level 1 and entry level qualifications to be included in the performance tables.

## Chapter 7: Delivery Timelines

208. We propose to introduce the first group of reformed qualifications for teaching from September 2024. However, given the extent of change to the wider qualifications landscape, we recognise the importance of introducing these reforms at a manageable pace, and we will keep this timetable under review during the consultation period. In setting the timetable for level 2 and below reform, we have taken into account the timetable for rolling out T Levels and wider reforms to level 3 qualifications and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). Following introduction of the first reformed qualifications in 2024, we propose that further reformed qualifications at level 2 (except ESOL and PSE) should be introduced in two stages, some for first teaching in September 2025 and others in 2026. We will work with Ofqual and IFATE to establish which qualifications will be reformed in each year, taking into account responses to this consultation, and confirm this in our consultation response.

209. We will seek to approve and defund qualifications in line with the following timetable:

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Defund
September 2024	<p><b><u>Level 2 Qualifications in Construction:</u></b>            Group 2 - Occupational-entry qualifications in construction for young people and adults            Group 3 – Occupational-focus qualifications in construction for adults</p>	Construction qualifications at level 2, which are in scope of groups 2 and 3, but are not approved through the reform process
September 2025 or September 2026	<p><b><u>All other level 2 qualifications in groups 1 to 7:</u></b>            Group 1- Qualifications supporting progression to technical level 3 provision            Group 2 – Occupational-entry qualifications in all other routes            Group 3 – Occupational-focus qualifications in all other routes            Group 4 – Specialist qualifications            Group 5 – Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills            Group 6 – Qualifications supporting progression to occupations where no standard currently exists            Group 7 – Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study</p>	All other level 2 qualifications (excluding ESOL and PSE)
September 2027	<p><b><u>All qualifications at level 1 and entry level in groups 9 to 17:</u></b></p>	All remaining level 2 and below qualifications

	<p>Group 9 - Qualifications supporting progression to level 2 technical provision</p> <p>Group 10 - Qualifications which serve as a prerequisite to employment</p> <p>Group 11 - Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme at level 1</p> <p>Group 14 – Qualifications supporting progression to level 1 study</p> <p>Group 15 - Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme at entry level</p> <p><b><u>All English, maths and ESOL qualifications:</u></b></p> <p>Group 8 – ESOL qualifications at level 2</p> <p>Group 12 – English and maths qualifications at level 1</p> <p>Group 13 – ESOL qualifications at level 1</p> <p>Group 16 – English and maths qualifications at entry level</p> <p>Group 17 – ESOL qualifications at entry level</p> <p><b><u>All PSE qualifications</u></b></p>	
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**Question 35:** What support is needed to smooth the implementation of the proposed reforms to level 2 and below qualifications?

## Next steps for the review

210. This review provides an opportunity to reassess the existing qualifications at level 2 and below that are available for post-16 students and to build a system which will deliver the best possible outcomes for every student.
211. Subject to views offered in response to this consultation, and further development work with Ofqual and IFATE, we will publish final policy documents and associated impact assessments later in 2022.

## General and equalities impact assessments

212. We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all young people and adults in the education system. It is important for us to consider carefully the possible impacts that changes proposed in this consultation could have on different groups. This will help us not only to identify and mitigate any negative impacts, but also to make the most of the potential positive impacts.
213. An initial equalities and general impact assessment is set out in the document published alongside this consultation. To help inform the development of the full assessments which will accompany our response to this consultation, we would welcome views on the key issues that should be considered and factored into our assessments.

**Question 36:** Do you have any concerns regarding the potential impact that the principles and proposals outlined in this consultation may have on students with SEND or those with a protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

**Question 37:** Are there any additional impacts that you think should be included in the general impact assessment which will accompany our response to this consultation?

## Chapter 8: Government response to consultation on Level 2 digital skills qualifications

214. In the post-16 Level 2 and below call for evidence we consulted on proposals to remove post-16 funding from level 2 digital skills qualifications. The consultation received 180 responses. A summary of types of organisations who responded can be found below.

### Summary of responses

215. We asked: **Do you agree that we should remove funding approval from level 2 ICT FSQ and level 2 ICT User qualifications?**

	Total	Percent
No	135	75%
Yes	45	25%

216. The types of organisations who responded are set out below:

Organisation type	Number of responses
FE College	45
Adult or community learning provider	34
Independent training provider	14
Mainstream school or academy with post-16 provision	9
Local authority	7
Awarding organisation	6
Charitable organisation	5
Large employer	5
Representative body	4
Sixth form college	4
SEND provider	3
Trade union	3
Mayoral combined authorities	2
Apprenticeship provider	1
Individual	1
Small or medium sized enterprise (SME)	1



University Technical College	1
Other type of organisation	35

217. Three quarters of responses disagreed with defunding all proposed digital skills qualifications at level 2. The main issues raised in the consultation were that these qualifications are essential for preparing learners for employment and that there is an increasing demand for digital skills, noting that technology in the workplace is rapidly changing and creating new roles and responsibilities. Some noted that qualifications are vital in a digital world that requires digital ability in all areas of daily life, while others noted that these qualifications were needed for learners without prior digital skills. Some of those who disagreed recognised these qualifications needed to be updated to align with advancements in technology, noting that they contain content better suited to lower-level study. A respondent highlighted that ICT FSQs help develop the skills for learners within the refugee and asylum communities who have low digital literacy.

218. A quarter of respondents agreed with our proposal. Many stated that these digital skills are retained elsewhere in level 1 qualifications and other level 2 qualifications. Some noted that the introduction of new level 1 qualifications such as Essential Digital Skills Qualifications provide up to date content that leaves little merit in retaining these level 2 qualifications. Some respondents called for new digital skills qualifications that meet the current and future demands of digital literacy.

## Government response

219. We have decided to proceed with the proposal to remove funding approval from level 2 ICT FSQs and ICT User qualifications for new starters from August 2022. We recognise the views raised around the importance of digital skills in preparing learners for the workplace, and the need for the skills that these qualifications offer. However, we do not agree with the view that these qualifications, which cover broad or basic digital skills to prepare learners for general employment, should be publicly funded at level 2. This is because our digital skills reforms mean that these general, basic digital skills for the workplace are now gained at entry level and level 1.

220. Our response to the ‘Improving Adult Basic Digital Skills’ consultation in 2019 concluded that level 1 provides the essential digital skills needed for adults to operate effectively in day-to-day life. It also stated that, due to advances in the ease and use of digital devices and applications, many skills classified at level 2 should be re-classified at level 1 or below. Our essential digital skills reforms mean that those with low digital

skills should study new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) or, once introduced, reformed FSQs up to level 1, and that basic digital skills provision should not be funded beyond this. No compelling evidence was received via the consultation that there is a need for general digital skills at level 2 that are not now covered through our reformed offer up to level 1.

221. Taking feedback from our consultation into account, we will provide awarding organisations with a notice period during which they can submit evidence that their ICT User qualification supports entry to specific level 2 occupations. If sufficient evidence is not received, then these qualifications will have funding approval removed for new starters from August 2022. There will be no further consultation on these proposals. Any qualifications that retain funding approval following this process will still be subject to the level 2 and below qualifications review and, as a result, may still be defunded or need to be re-designed as part of the reform process.
222. This process will not apply to ICT FSQs at level 2. Our reforms to FSQs mean we are replacing a qualification offer at five levels (entry level 1-3, level 1 and level 2) with an offer at two levels (entry level and level 1) that is higher quality and based on updated standards. ICT FSQs at level 2 will have funding approval removed for new starters from August 2022.
223. The decision to remove public funding approval from all level 2 ICT User qualifications and level 2 ICT FSQs will have a significant impact on the digital qualifications landscape, as up to 83 qualifications will have funding approval removed: 76 ICT User qualifications and 7 ICT FSQs. Level 2 qualifications in ICT Practitioner SSA were not in scope of our consultation question and will be subject to the wider Qualifications Review that is being consulted on in this document.
224. The removal of public funding approval from level 2 ICT User qualifications and level 2 ICT FSQs impacts new starters who would otherwise have studied these qualifications if they were funded. We have assessed the impact of this decision on students with protected characteristics. Responses to our consultation that referred to the potential impact on these groups informed our final decision. This analysis is included in our equality impact assessment, published alongside this consultation response.

## Conclusion and next steps

225. We are grateful to all those who responded to the consultation. Our decision completes our essential digital skills reforms and supports Government's wider ambition to streamline the qualifications landscape, ensuring only high-quality qualifications are available to learners that equip them with the full range of digital skills for life, work and further study.

226. We will continue to work with employers, providers and students on this fast-moving agenda to ensure we have the digital skills that the economy needs.



Department  
for Education

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