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Menu

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Further and higher education, skills and vocational training](#) > [Adult and community learning](#) > [National Skills Fund](#)

[Department
for Education](#)

Policy paper

National Skills Fund

Published 4 April 2022

Applies to England

Contents

[Overview](#)

[Free level 3 qualifications for adults](#)

[Skills Bootcamps](#)

[Further information](#)



Print this page

Overview

The National Skills Fund investments will help adults to gain the skills that are sought by employers. This will help them improve their job prospects, and support economic recovery.

The government is investing £1.6 billion through the National Skills Fund in the next 3 years. This includes up to £550m to expand Skills Bootcamps, and investment to expand the eligibility for free level 3 qualifications to more adults.

Free level 3 qualifications for adults

Adults in England have the chance to access their first level 3 qualification for free. There are over 400 qualifications available in areas such as engineering, social care, and accounting.

This offer is also available to adults in England who earn less than the National Living Wage annually (£18,525) or who are unemployed. This is regardless of their prior qualification level.

This offer is part of the government's long-term commitment to help everyone gain skills for life. Short or online courses are also available, to support adults to get the skills they need to boost their careers. Learners may be able to [get help to pay for childcare, travel and other costs](#).

All 19 to 23 year olds can access courses for free through their [legal entitlement to a first full level 3 qualification](#).

Sector subject areas and courses available

The qualifications can help adults improve their job prospects. They have good wage outcomes and can address skills needs in the economy, in a wide range of sectors.

The [list of qualifications included in the offer](#) provides more information. You can also find them by

selecting 'National Skills Fund: level 3 adult offer' in the [qualifications search service](#).

Qualifications are currently available in:

- accounting and finance
- agriculture
- building and construction
- business management
- childcare and early years
- digital
- engineering
- environmental conservation
- health and social care
- horticulture and forestry
- hospitality and catering
- manufacturing technologies
- mathematics and statistics
- medicine and dentistry
- public services
- science
- teaching and lecturing
- transportation operations and maintenance
- warehousing and distribution

We will keep the qualifications list and sector-subject areas under review. This will ensure that this offer responds to changing labour market needs.

Awarding organisations, Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority can suggest additions to the list through the qualifications funding approval process if they [meet the criteria](#). The Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority may also deliver additional qualifications in their areas as part of this offer. More information is available on their websites.

Funding arrangements for providers

Funding for the free level 3 qualifications will be routed via [Mayoral Combined Authorities and the](#)

[Greater London Authority](#) for residents in those areas of England.

Funding for the free level 3 qualifications for residents in all other areas of England will be routed via the adult education budget and administered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

More information on funding for free level 3 qualifications for 2021 to 2022 is available in the:

- [adult education budget \(AEB\) funding and performance management rules 2021 to 2022](#)
- [adult education budget funding rates and formula 2021 to 2022](#)

Funding uplift

The government supports providers to scale up the delivery of level 3 provision for adults. The following uplifts have been applied to the funding rates for all qualifications included in this offer:

- £600 per qualification uplift for qualifications of 360 guided learning hours or above
- £150 per qualification uplift for qualifications of 359 guided learning hours or below

Growth of provision

We want to enable providers to deliver these qualifications for adults, even if there is a higher demand than expected. There is additional funding available to support growth of this provision.

For providers funded by ESFA, we will fund delivery up to 110% at the end of the 2021 to 2022 funding year in line with the performance management rules set out in section 4 of the [adult education budget \(AEB\) funding and performance management rules 2021 to 2022](#).

Funding has been allocated to MCAs and GLA at a level which will support significant growth of provision.

Short courses

Eligible learners can take one short qualification (identified by category code 49) without exhausting their eligibility.

We expect this flexibility to be used where a learner could benefit from a more substantial qualification once they have completed a short qualification.

Course materials for providers

Jisc have published a [detailed reading list](#) for organisations delivering these level 3 adult courses.

Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps offer free, flexible courses of up to 16 weeks. They give people the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills and fast-track to an interview with an employer.

Training available

Skills Bootcamps are developed in partnership with employers, colleges, training providers and local authorities. They help people in England develop the skills that are in demand in their local area and get a better job.

Skills Bootcamps offer a range of courses, such as:

- digital skills, including marketing, coding or data analysis
- technical training in areas such as engineering, construction, or logistics (HGV driving)
- green skills, for instance, solar energy or agriculture technology

A [list of Skills Bootcamps](#) is available.

Eligibility

The courses are open to adults aged 19 over who are either in work, self-employed, unemployed or returning to work after a break. Skills Bootcamps are also open to serving prisoners due to be released within 6 months of completing a Skills Bootcamp, and those on temporary release.

Some Skills Bootcamps may have additional eligibility criteria.

Ofsted's role in Skills Bootcamps

Quality assurance is critical to ensure that Skills Bootcamps meet the needs of learners, employers and the economy. During 2022, [Ofsted inspectors will visit a sample of Skills Bootcamps providers](#) to carry out a review of the provision. They will apply the education inspection framework methodology to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

This will provide an independent overview of the quality of the training delivered through the Skills Bootcamps.

The role of Ofsted will continue alongside any expansion of the Skills Bootcamps programme in future years.

Further information

Information is also available for:

- people interested in taking one of these [free courses for jobs](#)
- employers about this offer and other [training and employment schemes](#)

Adults who claim Universal Credit

Adults who claim Universal Credit can apply for one of these free courses provided it will improve their chances of securing work.

Many claimants can currently take full-time training for up to 16 weeks and continue to claim benefits.

This extension will run until the end of April 2023, and the impact of this change will continue to be reviewed.

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