



Department  
for Education

# **Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond**

**January 2023**

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## Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of the post-2025 qualifications landscape and funding approval process, including the timelines and implications on the availability of qualifications for teaching in England. It is aimed at awarding organisations, further education providers and other interested stakeholders. All the information on the steps and processes awarding organisations need to follow to submit qualifications for approval can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

This document is not a replacement for tailored support for students. In addition to careers programmes delivered through schools and colleges, we will publish detailed information, advice and guidance in relation to 16-19 study programmes as we build towards 2025 when the reforms to the qualifications system take effect.

The government is clear that the purpose of post-16 education is to support people to move into high-skilled jobs, either directly, or through progression into good quality higher education courses. We have already reformed A levels. Following successive reviews which highlighted the complexity and variable quality of the current system, the government is in the process of reforming post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below. This process is divided into three phases.

In **Phase 1**, we began streamlining the offer by removing funding from qualifications with sustained low or no publicly funded enrolments in England, which resulted in the removal of public funding approval from around 5,500 qualifications. This work was completed in August 2022.

At level 3 we are creating a world class technical education offer for students, through the introduction of T Levels. These are co-designed with employers and include an industry placement as a core component, so that students get hands-on experience in their chosen field. As of September 2022, 16 T Levels were available to study at over 150 providers in subjects including: Accounting; Construction; Digital; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health. Over 20 T Levels will be available from September 2023.

To allow T Levels to flourish, **Phase 2** will remove 16-19 funding from qualifications which overlap with T Levels. A qualification overlaps with a T Level if it is a technical qualification with similar outcomes to those set out in a standard covered by a T Level and aims to support students into employment in the same occupational area.

On 14 October, we published the list of qualifications which will have 16-19 funding approval removed from 1 August 2024 because they overlap with a T Level in Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; or Education and Childcare. We will publish the list of qualifications that overlap with the Health and Science T Levels once the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) current review of the outline content has concluded, anticipated to be in January 2023. These qualifications

will also have funding removed from 1 August 2024, meaning that the last publicly funded new starts for the qualifications on this list will be in the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

Qualifications which overlap with waves 3 and 4 T Levels (Legal, Finance and Accounting; Engineering and Manufacturing; Business and Administration; Hair and Beauty; Catering and Hospitality; Creative and Design; Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care) will have 16-19 funding approval removed from 1 August 2025, meaning that the last new starts will be in the 2024 to 2025 academic year. A provisional list of these qualifications will be published in spring 2023.

To achieve our aims of a simplified, high quality offer at level 3, we are now commencing **Phase 3** of the reforms, which will introduce a new integrated approval process, focused on setting quality criteria for all academic and technical qualifications. This process will run from autumn 2022 onwards. As a result of improving the quality of these qualifications, students, parents and educators will be assured that all qualifications approved for public funding at level 3 from 2025 onwards are those required for the skills of the future and will lead to good outcomes.

As part of this final phase, IfATE will take on responsibility for approving new and revised technical qualifications at level 3, requiring them to be linked much more closely to employers' needs and setting specific criteria that they will need to meet to improve quality and outcomes. Academic qualifications will need to be approved by DfE against quality and progression criteria.

As well as removing funding from qualifications which overlap with T Levels, the government has also decided not to fund academic qualifications in certain subjects from 2025. This is either because the subject is more suited to a technical qualification, or because there is an associated A level. This is a conscious choice by Ministers to further streamline the qualifications landscape and to ensure that wherever A levels and T Levels exist, students are channelled to these highest quality options. Some subjects where large academic qualifications have previously been permitted will now also be restricted to small qualifications (the size of one A level). This is where Ministers have decided these subjects would be better studied as part of a mixed programme, rather than on their own.

Our reforms do not constitute a binary choice between A levels and T Levels. We have listened to feedback and recognise the need for a range of additional qualifications. This includes small alternative qualifications designed to be taken as part of a mixed study programme that includes A levels, particularly in strategically important areas such as STEM and supporting the needs of the NHS. These alternative qualifications are an important part of how we will support diverse student needs, and deliver skills required by the economy in areas that A levels and T Levels do not cover.

Qualifications which are approved for public funding will also have some specific requirements around titling, so that students and education professionals will be able to

identify those qualifications which have been approved for funding under this new, rigorous process. These requirements are set out in this guide.

Awarding organisations will only need to apply for approval every 3 years for a qualification to be considered for public funding, which will also provide greater certainty and stability to providers of further education. The process of submitting qualifications for approval will be clear, simple and accessible, with one submission on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) for the consideration of the three organisations involved in the assessment – DfE, IfATE and Ofqual.

The deadline for awarding organisations to register their intention to submit qualifications to be funded from 2025 onwards is 10 February 2023. After this awarding organisations will receive support and guidance while developing new qualifications or adapting existing ones. The submission window will open in July 2023, following which all qualifications submitted for funding approval will be assessed. Qualifications which are not submitted will not receive funding approval from 2025. DfE will publish details of qualifications approved for funding from 2025, in July 2024, meaning that education providers will be informed much further in advance than under the current system. A more detailed timeline is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## **Level 2 and below**

We are also reforming qualifications at level 2 and below to address the complexity and varied quality of the offer and to ensure that all qualifications support good outcomes for students.

On 18 October 2022, we published the government response to the level 2 and below consultation. This confirmed the direction of the reforms, including the qualification groups we will fund in future. 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. Level 2 and below qualifications will also need to meet new quality criteria to be approved for future funding. This will include a requirement for qualifications leading to skilled employment at level 2 to align to employer-led standards, thereby ensuring they are high quality and deliver the skills that employers need. We will provide an update in spring 2023 to reflect any variations to the approval process, and to confirm the approval criteria which will need to be met.

## **Scope of the level 3 review**

All level 3 qualifications which DfE approves for post-16 funding offers (including Advanced Learner Loans) are subject to review. The only exceptions are the following qualifications that we have already confirmed will continue to be funded following two public consultations.

## Out of scope

- AS and A levels
- Access to HE Diplomas<sup>1</sup>
- Advanced Extension Awards
- Core Maths qualifications
- Extended Project qualifications
- International Baccalaureate Diploma
- Performing Arts Graded Examinations at level 3
- Technical qualifications in T Levels

Apprenticeships, traineeships, and the 14 to 16 offer (Key Stage 4) are also not in scope of the review. This is because apprenticeships and traineeships are funded on a programme basis and while qualifications may be mandated or delivered as part of these programmes, they are not required to go through a separate approval process and are not funded on a stand-alone basis. As the review is focussed on post-16 provision, qualifications which may be approved pre-16 are not part of the review.

Mayoral combined authorities (including combined county authorities and county deals) and the Mayor of London have devolved adult education functions, funded by the adult education budget (AEB). They must also fund the statutory entitlement<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Access to HE Diploma will continue to be regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> Statutory entitlements include a first level 2 and/or 3 qualification for adults aged 19 to 23, to English and maths up to level 2, and essential digital skills for adults up to level 1.

## Approval of level 3 qualifications from 2025 - an overview and timeline

To ensure that all publicly funded qualifications at level 3 are needed, in demand and lead to good progression outcomes, we are introducing new criteria that all academic and technical qualifications will need to meet in order to be approved for funding from 2025. These criteria have been consulted on by DfE, IfATE and Ofqual, building on earlier consultations around the policy principles.

Academic qualifications will need to meet quality and progression criteria developed by DfE. Technical qualifications will need to meet occupational relevance and employer demand tests developed by IfATE. Overlap with A levels and T Levels will only be permitted in certain circumstances for 16-19 funding, which are set out in the rest of this guide. Ofqual will also provide feedback into the process, which will be considered by DfE and IfATE when deciding whether a qualification should be approved.

DfE, IfATE and Ofqual will all have a role to play in reviewing the qualifications, with DfE making the final decision on funding approval. Each organisation has an important and complementary role to play: DfE providing assurance of the quality and relevance of academic qualifications, as well as overall oversight on funding approval; IfATE harnessing employer expertise to ensure qualifications deliver skills that are needed in the economy; and Ofqual continuing to regulate qualifications on behalf of students of all ages. In order to minimise bureaucracy and avoid submission of the same information multiple times, we have developed an integrated approval process across the three organisations. Awarding organisations will submit qualifications on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). Awarding organisations will only need to submit each qualification once.

We are simplifying funding approval cycles, moving away from monthly application windows and granting funding for 12 month periods. In their place we will bring in less frequent applications and, over a period of time, we will move towards funding being granted for 3 year periods. This will provide more time for awarding organisations to make informed business planning decisions and will offer greater certainty and clarity for providers to plan their curriculums. Flexibility will be built into the system to allow for more agile funding decisions, for example, in response to an economic shock, or new or emerging skills priority.

Although there will be aspects of the integrated approval process which will be new, there will also be aspects that many awarding organisations will be familiar with. Where there are new approval areas to navigate, there will be support in place. We strongly encourage awarding organisations to engage with their centres as early as possible, regarding the qualifications which have and have not been submitted for funding approval. This will be key in supporting centres to plan and prepare, in advance of the list of approved qualifications being published.

The process of reviewing both new and existing academic and technical qualifications for funding from 2025 onwards will be phased across two cycles, set out below.

## **Cycle 1 – qualifications funded from 2025**

In Cycle 1, we will approve academic and technical qualifications in subjects in the following occupational routes that align with waves 1 and 2 of T Level roll-out:

- Construction and the Built Environment
- Digital
- Education and Childcare
- Health and Science
- Engineering and Manufacturing<sup>3</sup>

Technical qualifications will be considered for approval in Cycle 1 where they cover occupations in the above routes<sup>4</sup>. For academic qualifications, the subjects associated with each cycle that will be approved for funding are listed in “future funding of level 3 alternative academic qualifications”.

The government has decided to rule out certain subjects for approval as academic qualifications, either because they are more suited to a technical qualification, or because there is an associated A level or T Level. This is to help providers more easily understand the qualifications that may be approved for funding as we implement the policy established through our public consultations, and support curriculum planning. More information on the subjects where qualifications will not be considered for funding is included in table 1.

Awarding organisations will have until 31 July 2023 to submit qualifications in cycle 1 routes and subjects that they wish to be considered for funding from 2025-26.

A final list of qualifications that are approved for funding and which will be available to teach in the 2025 to 2026 funding year will be published in July 2024.

Qualifications in scope for cycle 1 will not be funded from 2025 for 16-19 new starts if they have not been approved through this process. We will say more about the funding

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<sup>3</sup> Though not a wave 1 or 2 T Level, as a priority sector it is important to ensure all qualifications in this sector are high quality.

<sup>4</sup> Not all categories of technical qualification will be open for approval in Cycle 1. Please see the IfATE website for more information



approval criteria that will be used to approve qualifications for the adult offers in spring 2023, taking into account the outcomes of the [funding and accountability reforms](#).

## Cycle 2 – qualifications funded from 2026

This cycle will cover everything not covered in Cycle 1. This includes:

- other technical qualifications not included in the routes listed under cycle 1;
- academic qualifications in sector subject areas associated with the remaining occupational routes; and
- academic qualifications in sector subject areas that do not align to occupational routes, such as performing arts.

The sequence for submitting qualifications for funding approval will be the same, but will take place one year later. The process will culminate in a list of qualifications which will be funded from the 2026 to 2027 academic year being published in July 2025.

A timeline showing the full list of qualification types and subjects in each cycle can be found at [Annex A](#). A breakdown of the approval process sequence for each cycle can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

### What will not be funded

Table 1 below sets out the subjects where qualifications will not be approved for public funding from 2025.

Qualification type	Subjects	Funded for 16-19	Funded for adults
<b>Large technical qualifications</b>	Occupations covered by T Levels	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Large academic qualifications</b>	Subjects where there are T Levels, such as science or business (see Annex B)	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
	Subjects better served by technical qualifications or apprenticeships such as transportation operations or warehousing and distribution	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>

<b>Small academic qualifications</b>	Subjects where there are A levels, with the exception of science, IT, art and design, music and sport <sup>5</sup> .	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
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**Table 1: occupations and subjects where qualifications will not be approved**

We will continue to fund a more diverse technical landscape for adults than at 16-19, recognising not all adults will be able to take a two-year T Level course. For more information, please see the section on future funding of technical qualifications for adults on page 18.

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<sup>5</sup> A full list of the subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding approval is provided in Table 2.

## Future funding of level 3 alternative academic qualifications

Qualifications are defined as being academic if their primary purpose is to support students to progress into higher education. A levels are world class qualifications and provide the best preparation for higher education in most academic subject areas. This is evidenced by data showing that students who take A levels are more likely to progress to higher education<sup>6</sup>, less likely to repeat their first year or drop out of university<sup>7,8</sup>, and likely to earn higher wage returns following graduation<sup>9</sup> after controlling for prior attainment. That is why A levels will continue to be at the core of 16-19 academic study programmes.

As set out in our July 2021 policy statement, the government recognises the need for other large and small academic qualifications in a limited range of subjects. By “large” we mean the size of 2 or 3 A levels and by “small” we mean up to the size of 1 A level. The diagram below sets out the types of large and small qualifications the government will fund for 16 to 19 year olds and/or adults. Qualifications approved in this range will be known as **Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)**.

### Post-2025 academic landscape at 16-19 and for adults

Qualifications that support students to progress onto and achieve high quality further education and higher education academic courses.

**A/AS levels**

**Small qualifications** (up to the size of an A level) alongside A levels

**Large qualifications** (the size of 2 or 3 A levels) taken as alternatives to A levels

#### 1. Small alternative academic qualifications

The approach we have taken to determining the range of subjects<sup>10</sup> in which we will fund small AAQs reflects two key priorities:

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<sup>6</sup> SFCA (2019): Consultation response from the Sixth Form Colleges Association to the Department for Education’s Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England.

<sup>7</sup> Dilnot et al, (2022) ‘Educational Choices at 16-19 and University Outcomes’.

<sup>8</sup> Continuation rates 2010/11 – 2016/17 - Office for Students.

<sup>9</sup> BTECs, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome (LEO) dataset’. Note, this data relates to older style BTEC qualifications, and as such findings may not hold for more recent and reformed academic alternative qualifications to A levels.

<sup>10</sup> We are using the term ‘subjects’ to refer to specific subjects within the overall sector subject area (SSA). For example, computing is a subject that sits within the SSA ICT practitioners. For more information about qualification descriptions, including SSA classifications and for a full list of SSAs, please refer to guidance published by Ofqual at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/types-of-regulated-qualifications/qualification-descriptions>.

- To ensure that as many students as possible benefit from A levels.
- To ensure that AAQs complement and enhance the A level offer, helping to support students into high-quality degree courses in subjects valuable to the economy.

The range of subjects where we will approve small AAQs for funding (and which can be studied alongside A levels) will be focused on:

- those that are strategically important (such as STEM and those supporting the NHS); and
- those that are less well-served by A levels (including some subjects where there are A levels, reflecting feedback to our consultation about the value of alternative qualifications in certain subject areas, particularly in creative arts areas).

These are set out in Table 2 below.

<b>Subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding</b>	<b>Year of first teaching of approved qualifications</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applied science</li> <li>• Medical science</li> </ul>	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering and engineering principles or technology</li> </ul>	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and social care</li> </ul>	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information technology</li> <li>• Computing</li> </ul>	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjects which support progression to degrees in healthcare professions allied to medicine, dentistry, and nursing</li> </ul>	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniformed protective services</li> <li>• Policing</li> </ul>	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British sign language studies</li> </ul>	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art, craft and design</li> <li>• Sound engineering</li> <li>• Animation and visual arts</li> </ul>	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing, production, and creative arts</li> <li>• Music performance, production and technology</li> </ul>	2026

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualifications for music practitioners or the creative music industry</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative digital media production</li> <li>• Digital games, film and video production</li> </ul>	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport, exercise science, and physical activity</li> <li>• Sporting excellence and performance</li> </ul>	2026

Please note that in order to be approved for funding, qualifications in subjects that feature in this table will also need to meet the criteria set out in the funding approval manual for alternative academic qualifications.

**Table 2 – subjects where small AAQs will be considered for funding approval and their first teaching year.**

We do not expect to approve small AAQs for funding if they are in subjects not listed in Table 2 above. However, we will consider exceptional cases for small AAQs if they are in sector subject areas (SSAs) where there is no A level. In these cases, the awarding organisation will need to provide strong evidence as to the need for an academic qualification, i.e., a clear case that it is needed to support progression to higher education courses that deliver strong graduate outcomes.

Funding approval will not be given to small AAQs from August 2026 in SSAs where there are A levels (with the exception of those subjects such as Science which are listed in Table 2).

Small qualifications that are out of scope for the approvals process will continue to be available. These are: Core Maths, Extended Project Qualifications, Advanced Extension Awards, and Performing Arts Graded Examinations.

## 2. Large alternative academic qualifications

Large AAQs (equivalent to at least 2 A levels) will be considered for public funding from 2026 in subjects where:

- there are no T Levels;
- there is a need for a **large** qualification enabling entry to more specialist areas of higher education such as performing arts; and
- there is a clear and direct progression link into higher education.

The range of specific subjects where we will consider funding large AAQs is listed in the right-hand column of Table 3. If a subject is not listed here, it will not be considered for funding, either because it is more suited to technical study, or because a T Level exists. For example, while we will consider a large AAQ in sport, we will not fund large AAQs in personal training and fitness instruction, which are part of the same sport, leisure and

recreation sector subject area. This is because a subject such as personal training and fitness instructing is best served by technical qualifications as these will be designed to provide the skills required for a specific occupation. An awarding organisation designing a qualification in personal training and fitness instructing would, therefore, need to submit this for approval as a technical qualification, under the level 3 occupational standard for personal trainer.

Sector Subject Area (SSA)	Subjects where large alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding from 2026
Performing arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing arts</li> <li>• Production arts</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Music technology</li> <li>• Music performance and production</li> </ul>
Sport, leisure and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport</li> <li>• Sport and exercise science</li> <li>• Sport and physical or outdoor activity</li> </ul>
Crafts, creative arts and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art and design</li> <li>• Art, design and media or communication</li> <li>• Fine and applied art</li> </ul>

**Table 3 – subjects where large AAQs will be considered for funding.**

We do not expect to approve large AAQs in other sector subject areas. The only exceptions will be where there is a new or emerging skills priority, and there is a clear need for large academic qualifications to support the skills pipeline into those sectors. Such qualifications will only be considered for funding if they lead to higher education and are not in sector subject areas that are associated with T Level routes.

The International Baccalaureate Diploma is out of scope for the approval process and will therefore continue to be available.

### 3. Study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds

Our clear expectation outlined in study programme guidance will be that most students taking small approved AAQs will also be studying two A levels, reflecting the central role of A levels and their recognised rigour and quality. There will be some flexibility where this is not appropriate; for example, for students on a part-time study programme, for

students with special educational needs and disabilities, or those with exceptional circumstances.

However, specific funding rules will prevent study programmes that consist entirely of small AAQs. The evidence shows that students taking study programmes consisting entirely of non-A level qualifications in order to progress to higher education generally experience worse outcomes at university<sup>11</sup>. We want to ensure that all students taking these qualifications benefit from the improved outcomes that a mixed study programme which includes A levels can bring.

Finally, where multiple small academic qualifications are included alongside A levels, specific funding rules will stipulate that these must be in different subjects.

Students taking large approved AAQs equivalent in size to three A levels will not typically take additional qualifications. In some cases, an individual student may wish to study an A level alongside their qualification, but this is not likely to be common. We do not plan to develop funding rules about the combination of other qualifications with these large AAQs.

#### **4. Academic qualifications for adults**

Alongside A levels and Access to HE Diplomas<sup>12</sup>, adults who want to progress into higher education will have access to the same range of AAQs at level 3 as 16 to 19 year olds. This is because these qualifications offer the best preparation to progress onto, and successfully complete, higher education courses. Access to HE Diplomas support adults who may not have traditional qualifications to progress into higher education.

#### **5. Criteria and requirements for academic qualifications**

To be approved for funding as an AAQ, qualifications will need to meet criteria as set out in the Funding Approval Manual on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). This includes new criteria to ensure the qualification:

- supports progression to higher education;
- has an appropriate title;
- is necessary; and
- meets mandatory content requirements.

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<sup>11</sup> SFCA (2019): Consultation response from the Sixth Form Colleges Association to the Department for Education's Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England. Dilnot et al, (2022) 'Educational Choices at 16-19 and University Outcomes'. Continuation rates 2010/11 – 2016/17 - Office for Students. BTECs, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome (LEO) dataset'. Note, this data relates to older style BTEC qualifications, and as such findings may not hold for more recent and reformed academic alternative qualifications to A levels.

<sup>12</sup> To note, we have confirmed that Access to HE Diplomas will continue to be approved for funding.

This is alongside existing criteria which awarding organisations will be familiar with, to ensure that the qualification:

- is within a specified sector subject area;
- is an appropriate size;
- meets Ofqual's regulatory requirements which are higher than before (see below).

It is vital that AAQs command the confidence of students, parents, employers and educators as reliable and valid measures of knowledge and skills achieved. That is why Ofqual have introduced new regulatory requirements on these qualifications. In addition, Ofqual will review qualification materials as part of the approval process and provide feedback to DfE.



# Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications

## 1. Future funding of technical qualifications at 16-19

The government's objective is to deliver a high quality and stable technical education system, based on occupational standards developed by employers. This will ensure that the skills needs of business and industry are better served and that clear progression pathways are created, delivering the outcomes students need, either to enter into a skilled job, or to progress within a skilled career.

T Levels will form the core of the technical offer at level 3 and will cover most occupations that a student might train for at 16-19. In addition to T Levels, there are three main types of technical qualification that will be funded in the post-2025 landscape. These will be known as:

- **Technical occupational entry and technical occupational progression:** qualifications that aim to support a student to enter into, or to progress within a role. These qualifications will only be funded at 16-19 where they do not overlap with a T Level;
- **Technical additional specialist:** qualifications that allow a student to develop additional knowledge and competencies and specialise within a sector. These qualifications will build on knowledge covered by a T Level or other occupational entry qualification, e.g. low-carbon construction design, building on the Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction T Level;
- **Technical cross-cutting function:** qualifications that allow students to develop skills that are relevant across occupations.<sup>13</sup>

### Post-2025 technical landscape at 16-19

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours students need to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.

T Levels

Technical occupational entry and technical occupational progression qualifications in areas not served by T Levels

Technical additional specialist qualifications

Apprenticeships

Technical cross-cutting function qualifications

Technical qualifications will be approved by IfATE against criteria linked to their occupational standards<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Please note this is a change from what was in the [policy statement 14 July 2021](#)

<sup>14</sup> Further information about IfATE's approval process can be found on [IfATE's website](#).

Technical qualifications will be approved for funding in two cycles. We will invite qualifications to be submitted for funding approval in cycle 1 in the following routes<sup>15</sup>: Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; Education and Childcare; Health and Science; and Engineering and Manufacturing. Qualifications approved under these routes will be funded from 2025. We will invite qualifications aligned to routes and standards not covered in cycle 1 to be considered for funding approval in cycle 2. These qualifications will be funded from 2026.

Once an awarding organisation has submitted a qualification for funding approval, it will firstly be considered and approved by IfATE as a technical qualification, before it is considered for funding approval by DfE. As with academic qualifications, decisions on which technical qualifications will be funded from 2025 within cycle 1 will be made available in July 2024.

Technical qualifications which are not submitted for approval will not receive funding approval in future, unless they have been exempted from the review – see the list of qualifications that are out of scope of the review on page 6.

## 2. Future funding of technical qualifications for adults

The technical qualifications listed in the previous section will also be funded for adults and, in addition, we will fund some further qualifications for adults only:

- **Technical occupational-entry qualifications in T Level areas:** these qualifications will support entry to occupations that are served by T Levels e.g. construction (as well as occupations that are not served by T Levels).
- **Technical employer proposed qualifications:** occupational entry qualifications where no standard currently exists for the aligned occupation, but where it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed.
- **Technical additional specialist qualifications more appropriate for adults:** these would include qualifications which may only be suitable for adults (such as those that are essential to certain safety critical industries).
- **T Levels for adults:** In September 2022, DfE commenced a two-year pilot to explore whether T Levels should be made available to adults. The findings will inform ministers' decision whether to offer T Levels to adults from September 2025 and would be subject to HM Treasury agreement.

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<sup>15</sup> Not all categories of technical qualification will be open for approval in Cycle 1. Please see [IfATE's website](#) for more information

## Post-2025 technical landscape for adults

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours to upskill or retrain to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.

**T Levels**

**Apprenticeships**

**Technical occupational entry and technical occupational progression qualifications**

**Technical employer proposed qualifications**

**Technical additional specialist** qualifications, including in areas more appropriate for adults

**Technical cross-cutting function** qualifications

## **Accountability and post-16 performance measures**

Alternative academic qualifications, occupational entry qualifications, and additional specialist qualifications approved for funding at level 3 will be eligible for inclusion in 16-18 performance measures. Full details of the process for adding qualifications to the performance tables, performance points and the approach to discounting will be published in due course.

The position at level 2 will also be confirmed in due course.

## Post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below

Alongside our reforms to level 3 qualifications, we want to improve post-16 study at level 2 and below. 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. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3 qualifications, apprenticeships, traineeships, and for some, directly into employment. The [review at level 2](#) includes all funded qualifications, with the exception of GCSEs, Essential Digital Skills qualifications and all three subject areas of Functional Skills (English, maths and digital).

At present, the level 2 and below qualifications landscape is complex to navigate, with a high volume of qualifications on offer. In May 2020, there were around 8,000 qualifications approved for funding at level 2 and below, the majority being technical or vocational qualifications. We have already made progress in streamlining the landscape by removing funding for nearly 3,700 of these qualifications, which have had low or no publicly funded enrolments in each of the last three funding years. Whilst many of the remaining qualifications are of a high standard, the large quantity available makes it difficult for students, employers, and providers to know which qualifications are high quality and will lead to good outcomes.

In 2020 we consulted on our proposals for the groups of qualifications we will fund at level 2, level 1 and entry level. These qualifications will also need to go through an approval process and meet quality and other criteria in order to be funded in future. On 18 October 2022, we published the government response to the level 2 and below consultation, which confirmed the direction of travel set out in the consultation and confirming that we would fund all the qualification groups we had set out<sup>16</sup>. The consultation response also set out the changes we have made following the consultation.

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<sup>16</sup> We said that:

- At level 2, qualifications should either support progression to further study or work-based training at level 3, or lead directly into skilled employment in sectors and occupations where level 2 skills are needed.
- As at level 3, the majority of technical qualifications at level 2 should be aligned to employer-led occupational standards – the same standards that already underpin T Levels and apprenticeships.
- For learners studying at level 1 and entry level, the focus for most people should be either progression onto a technical qualification at level 2 or 3 that leads to employment in a skilled occupation, or progression to a work-based pathway such as an apprenticeship, or supported internship.
- Basic skills qualifications in English, maths and digital, as well as ESOL qualifications would also continue to play a vital role.
- We recognised that some learners will go into employment without reaching level 2, and that a small minority will be aiming first and foremost for independent living. We proposed that in future, personal,

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. These qualifications are also more likely to be taken post-16 by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or with special educational needs or disabilities. It is more vital than ever that these students can benefit from high-quality provision that provides the support they need to unlock their potential and benefit from great progression opportunities. Our proposed landscape will serve all students better.

We will update this document to reflect the latest information on level 2 and below alongside the update to the funding manual in spring 2023.

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social and employability skills qualifications should be designed to meet national standards, to ensure greater consistency and quality.

## Study programmes

We will publish detailed information, advice and guidance in relation to 16-19 study programmes as we build towards 2025 when the reforms to the qualifications system take effect. This will support students and providers to choose the right qualifications to ensure that every young person undertakes a high quality, coherent study programme that is appropriate to their career and study aspirations.

Work experience and non-qualification activities will continue to be an important part of the study programmes for all students. These will complement the other elements of the study programme and support the student to progress to further or higher education, or into skilled employment.

## Annex A: key dates

### Level 3 key dates

Decisions announced:	July 2024	July 2025	July 2026
Teaching commences:	September 2025	September 2026	September 2027
Alternative academic qualifications (large and small)	<p>Small AAQs in: ICT practitioners, Health and social care, Science, Medicine and dentistry, Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine, Engineering.</p> <p>Small AAQs by exception in: Building and Construction, Child development and well-being, Direct learning support, Teaching and lecturing.</p>	<p>Large and small AAQs in all SSAs that were not part of Cycle 1, including those which do not align to an occupational route such as Performing arts.</p>	<p>Business as usual approvals for alternative academic qualifications in any SSA.</p>
Technical qualifications	<p>Occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications in: Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; Education and Childcare; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science.</p>	<p>Employer proposed and occupational progression qualifications in: Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; Education and Childcare; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science.</p> <p>Occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications in all other routes.</p> <p>Cross cutting qualifications.</p>	<p>Employer proposed and occupational progression qualifications in all remaining routes.</p> <p>Business as usual approvals for any technical qualifications in any route.</p>



## Level 2 and below key dates

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding approval removed from
September 2025 (Cycle 1)	<p>Level 2 qualifications<sup>17</sup> in Construction and the Built Environment; Education and Childcare; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science. in the following qualification groups:</p> <p>Group 2 - Occupational-entry qualifications for young people and adults</p> <p>Group 3 – Occupational-focus qualifications for adults</p> <p>Group 4 – Specialist qualifications</p>	Level 2 qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of groups 2-4, but are not approved through the reform process
September 2026 (Cycle 2)	<p>All other level 2 qualifications in groups 2 to 6 (technical groups)</p> <p>Group 1 and Group 7 qualifications (which support progression to level 3) relating to level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2025, and relating to all wave 1-4 T Levels</p>	Level 2 qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of groups 1-7 (except those scheduled for first teaching in 2027), but are not approved through the reform process
September 2027 (Cycle 3)	<p>Group 1 and Group 7 qualifications relating to level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2026</p> <p>All qualifications at level 1 and entry level in groups 9 to 17</p> <p>All English, maths (level 1 and entry level) and ESOL (level 2, level 1 and entry level) qualifications</p> <p>All PSE qualifications</p>	All remaining level 2 and below qualifications

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<sup>17</sup> Level 3 will have digital qualifications in the earlier phase, however, there are no level 2 standards in digital and so there cannot be group 2,3,4 qualifications in digital.

## Annex B – How we have defined alignment with T Levels for large Alternative Academic Qualifications

We know providers want to understand how these changes will affect their curriculum offer, and the range of qualifications they currently offer to students. An important part of this is understanding what we mean when we say we will not fund large Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in sector subject areas associated with T Level routes.

The table below shows the SSAs we have associated with each T Level route. We recognise that individual qualifications within an SSA may also be associated with other T Level routes, but each SSA is only included once. This reflects the T Level route it is most closely associated with, or that will be introduced latest. This means we will not approve large AAQs for funding in the SSAs in the table below.<sup>18</sup>

<b>T Level route</b>	<b>Sector subject areas associated with this route</b>
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal care	Agriculture
	Animal care and veterinary science
	Environmental conservation
	Horticulture and forestry
Business and Administration	Administration
	Business management
Catering and Hospitality	Hospitality and catering
Construction and the Built Environment	Building and construction
Creative and Design	Manufacturing technologies
	Media and communication
Digital	ICT practitioners
Education and Childcare	Child development and well-being
	Direct learning support
	Teaching and lecturing
Engineering and Manufacturing	Engineering
Hair and Beauty	Service enterprises
Health and Science	Health and social care
	Medicine and dentistry
	Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine
	Science
Legal, Finance and Accounting	Accounting and finance
	Economics
	Law and legal services
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	Marketing and sales
	Retailing and wholesaling
	Warehousing and distribution

<sup>18</sup> List is subject to revision if new T Level routes or pathways are introduced.



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