



Department  
for Education

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

**April 2023**

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## **April 2023 updates**

This document has been updated to include additional information on the approval process and criteria for level 2 technical qualifications which will be approved for first teaching in September 2025.

## Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of the post-16 qualifications landscape from the academic year 2025-26, including changes to the funding approval process and criteria, the subjects that will be considered for funding and the implications for 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 and we are bringing on stream world-class T 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. This resulted in the removal of public funding approval from around 5,500 qualifications at levels 3, 2 and below. This work was completed in August 2022.

**Phase 2** of the reforms will focus on removing 16-19 funding from level 3 qualifications that overlap with T Levels. T Levels will provide a world-class technical education offer for students at level 3. They 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 2024.

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 2022, 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 Early Years. This was updated on 29 March 2023 to include qualifications that overlap with Health and Science T Levels. We will publish details of qualifications that overlap with waves 3 and 4 T

Levels, which are rolled out on or before 2024, this year<sup>1</sup>. Qualifications which overlap with these T Levels will have 16-19 funding approval removed from 1 August 2025. As the Catering T Level has been deferred beyond 2024, we will confirm implications for qualifications that overlap with the Catering T Level when we provide an update on the timetable for introduction.

**Phase 3** of the reforms concerns qualifications approved for funding from September 2025 onwards. To achieve our aims of a simplified, high-quality offer at level 3 and below, we have introduced a new integrated approval process, focused on setting quality criteria for all academic and technical qualifications at level 3 and below. This process began in January 2023 for level 3, and in April 2023 for level 2. 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 and below from 2025 onwards are those required to deliver 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 and level 2, 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 and qualifications at level 1 and entry level will need to be approved by DfE against quality and progression criteria.

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.

Reformed qualifications will, in future, be approved for three years, rather than one year as is presently the case, unless a change in circumstances necessitates an earlier review. This will 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 consideration by the three organisations involved in the assessment – DfE, IfATE and Ofqual.

As well as removing funding from qualifications which overlap with T Levels, the government has also decided not to fund alternative academic qualifications at level 3 in certain subjects from September 2025. This is because the subject is more suited to a technical qualification, there is already an associated A level, or because the qualification does not lead to good progression outcomes. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Business and administration; Legal, Finance and Accounting; Engineering and Manufacturing; Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care; Hair and Beauty; and Creative and Design.

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 at level 3 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.

The date for awarding organisations to register their intention to submit level 3 qualifications to be funded from September 2025 onwards was 10 February 2023. Awarding organisations are now receiving support and guidance while developing new qualifications or adapting existing ones. The submission window for level 3 will open in July 2023, following which all qualifications submitted for funding approval will be assessed. Qualifications which are in scope of the review but are not submitted for approval by 31 July 2023 will not receive funding approval from September 2025. DfE will communicate with providers in autumn 2023 regarding the subjects and routes in which qualifications have been submitted for funding approval, to support forward planning. DfE will then publish details of approved level 3 qualifications in May 2024. Awarding organisations will then have the opportunity to request a procedural review and any changes to the list of qualifications approved for funding from September 2025 will be published in July 2024. A more detailed timeline is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## **Level 2 and below**

This version of the Guide to the Landscape document has been updated in April 2023 to include additional information on the approval process and criteria for level 2 technical qualifications which will be approved for first teaching in September 2025. Future updates will give more information about the process and criteria for other level 2 and below qualifications which will be reformed in future approval cycles.

We are 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. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3 qualifications and apprenticeships and, for some, to employment at level 2. 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<sup>2</sup>. 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. 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. They are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, or have special educational needs or disabilities. It is vital that these students can access, and benefit from, high-quality provision that provides the support they need to unlock their potential and offers excellent progression opportunities. Our proposed landscape will serve all students better.

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 occupational standards, thereby ensuring they deliver the skills that employers need.

Reformed qualifications at level 2 and below will be phased in over a four year period, starting in cycle 1 with reforms to level 2 technical qualifications in Construction; Education and Early Years; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science, to be funded from 2025 onwards. The date for awarding organisations to register their intention to submit level 2 qualifications in cycle 1 will be 5 June 2023. As at level 3, awarding organisations will receive support and guidance while developing new qualifications and adapting existing ones. The submission window for cycle 1 will open on 13 November 2023 and will close on 24 November 2023. DfE will publish details of qualifications approved for funding from August 2025 in July 2024. As at level 3, awarding organisations will have the opportunity to request a procedural review and any updates to the list of qualifications approved for funding will be published in September 2024. Qualifications that are in scope but have not been submitted or approved in cycle 1

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<sup>2</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. In future, personal, social and employability skills qualifications should be designed to meet national standards, to ensure greater consistency and quality.



will have funding removed from August 2025. Further details of how we will identify qualifications that will have funding removed can be found in the [Qualifications Funding Approval Manual 2025 to 2026](#)

### Scope of the review

All level 3 and below 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, following public consultation, will continue to be funded.

level 3	level 2 and below
AS and A levels	GCSEs
Access to HE Diplomas <sup>3</sup>	Higher Project qualifications
Advanced Extension Awards	Foundation Project qualifications
Core Maths qualifications	Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs)
Extended Project qualifications	Essential Digital Skills qualifications (EDSQs)
International Baccalaureate Diploma	Performing Arts Graded Examinations
Performing Arts Graded Examinations	
Technical qualifications in T Levels	

**Table 1: Qualifications out of scope of the review at level 3 and below**

Apprenticeships and the 14 to 16 offer (Key Stage 4) are also out of scope of the review. This is because apprenticeships are funded differently, using the apprenticeship levy, 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).

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<sup>3</sup> The Access to HE Diploma will continue to be regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

## Approval of qualifications from 2025

To ensure that all publicly funded qualifications at level 3 and below 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 and IfATE, building on earlier consultations around the policy principles.

Academic qualifications will, in future, need to meet quality criteria developed by DfE. Technical qualifications will need to meet occupational relevance and employer demand tests developed by IfATE. Both sets of qualifications will need to meet regulations set by Ofqual. At level 3, 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 provide feedback for consideration by DfE and IfATE when deciding whether a qualification should be approved.

DfE, IfATE and Ofqual will all have an important and complementary role to play in reviewing the qualifications, with DfE making the final decision on funding approval: DfE providing assurance of the quality and relevance of academic qualifications and all qualifications at level 1 and entry level, as well as overall oversight of 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 12 month approval periods. Reformed qualifications will, in future, be approved for three years, unless a change in circumstances necessitates an earlier review. 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.

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

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 – level 3 qualifications funded from 2025

In Cycle 1, we will approve level 3 alternative 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 Early Years
- Health and Science
- Engineering and Manufacturing<sup>4</sup>

Level 3 technical qualifications will be considered for approval in Cycle 1 where they cover occupations in the above routes<sup>5</sup>. For level 3 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 level 3 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 understand more easily 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 2.

Awarding organisations will have until 31 July 2023 to submit level 3 qualifications in cycle 1 routes and subjects that they wish to be considered for funding from 2025-26.

A list of level 3 qualifications that are approved for funding, and which will be available to teach from September 2025, will be published in May 2024. This list will be updated in

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<sup>4</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>5</sup> Not all categories of technical qualification will be open for approval in Cycle 1. Please see the IfATE website for more information

September 2024 to include any additional qualifications approved following procedural review.

Qualifications in scope for cycle 1 will not be funded for 2025 new starts if they have not been approved through this process. We will say more about the funding approval criteria that will be used to approve qualifications for the adult offers in autumn 2023, taking into account the outcomes of the funding and accountability reforms.

### **Cycle 2 – level 3 qualifications funded from 2026**

This cycle will cover everything at level 3 that is not covered in Cycle 1. This includes:

- other level 3 technical qualifications not included in the routes listed under cycle 1;
- alternative academic qualifications in sector subject areas associated with the remaining occupational routes; and
- alternative academic qualifications in sector subject areas that do not align to occupational routes, such as performing arts.

The process 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 May 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](https://www.gov.uk).

## What will not be funded

Table 2 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 alternative 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 alternative academic qualifications</b>	Subjects where there are A levels, with the exception of science, IT, art and design, music and sport <sup>6</sup> .	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>

**Table 2: 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 23.

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<sup>6</sup> A full list of the subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding approval is provided in Table 3.

# 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>7</sup>, less likely to repeat their first year or drop out of university<sup>8,9</sup>, and likely to earn higher wage returns following graduation<sup>10</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>11</sup> in which we will fund small AAQs reflects two key priorities:

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<sup>7</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>8</sup> Dilnot et al, (2022) ‘Educational Choices at 16-19 and University Outcomes’.

<sup>9</sup> Continuation rates 2010/11 – 2016/17 - Office for Students.

<sup>10</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>11</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 3 below.

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.

Subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding	Year of first teaching of approved qualifications
<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> <li>• Qualifications for music practitioners or the creative music industry</li> </ul>	2026
<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

**Table 3 – 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 3 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 alternative 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 2025 in SSAs where there are A levels (with the exception of those subjects such as Science which are listed in Table 3).

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 4. 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 4 – 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>12</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>13</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 alternative 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.

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 (see below).

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<sup>12</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>13</sup> To note, we have confirmed that Access to HE Diplomas will continue to be approved for funding.

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 additional regulatory requirements for these qualifications. In addition, Ofqual will review qualification materials as part of the approval process and provide feedback to DfE.

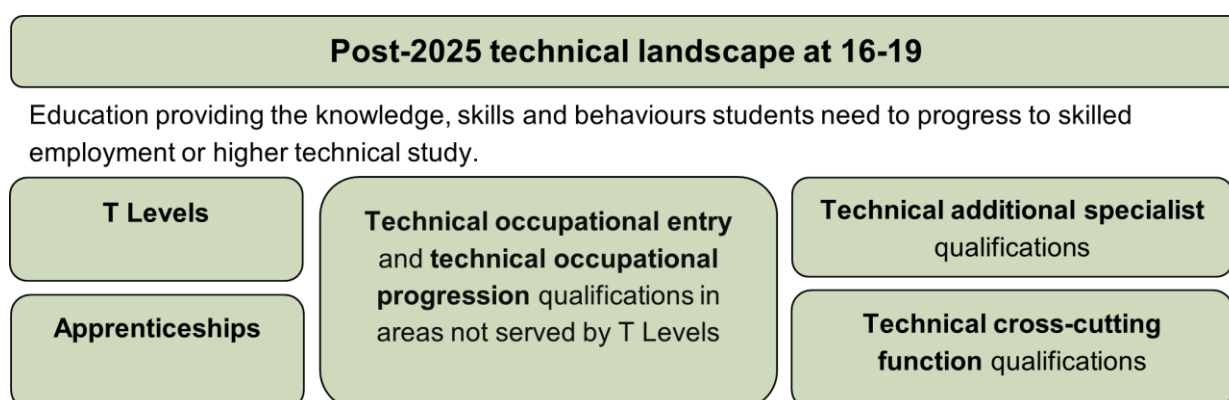
# Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications

## 1. Future funding of level 3 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>14</sup>



Technical qualifications will be approved by IfATE against criteria linked to their occupational standards<sup>15</sup>.

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

<sup>15</sup> Further information about IfATE's approval process can be found on [IfATE's website](#).

The approval of level 3 technical qualifications will take place in two cycles. The first cycle covers the following routes: Construction and the Built Environment, Digital, Education and Early Years, Engineering and Manufacturing, and Health and Science. Awarding organisations can submit occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications for funding approval in occupations in these routes that are not covered by T Levels. The deadline for submitting qualifications for approval in Cycle 1 is 31 July 2023. Once approved, these qualifications will be available for first teach in 2025.

All other qualification categories and routes will be subject to approval in cycle 2, to be first taught in 2026. Cycle 2 will cover all remaining routes. This includes -

- Technical occupational entry and progression qualifications, such as:
  - Occupations not covered by T Levels e.g. those in the Protective Services route, Transport and Logistics etc. Or;
  - Occupations in routes where there are T Levels, as long as the occupation is not covered by the T Level e.g. Education Technician (Education and Early Years route).
- Cross-cutting technical qualifications that allow students to develop skills that are relevant across occupations.

Level 3 qualifications which have not been submitted for approval (unless exempt from the review) will have funding removed on 31 July in 2025 (cycle 1) and 2026 (cycle 2). See page 9 for a list of Qualifications which are exempt from the process and are out of scope.

The table below outlines the qualification categories and routes where technical qualifications will be considered for funding approval and the first teach year.

<b>Occupational entry and additional specialist qualifications in these routes:</b>	<b>Year of first teaching of approved qualifications</b>
• Construction and the build environment*	2025
• Digital*	2025
• Education and Early Years*	2025
• Engineering and manufacturing*	2025
• Health and science*	2025
• Agriculture, environmental and animal care*	2026
• Business and administration*	2026
• Care services*	2026

• Catering and hospitality*	2026
• Creative and design*	2026
• Hair and beauty*	2026
• Legal finance and accounting*	2026
• Protective services	2026
• Sales marketing and procurement*	2026
• Transport and logistics	2026
<b>All other technical qualification categories in all the above routes, including occupational progression, cross cutting function and employer-proposed.</b>	

Those marked (\*) are routes where some of the standards are covered by T Levels. We will not consider occupational entry qualifications into these for 16-19-year-olds, unless it is an additional specialist qualification whether they are linked to T Levels or not.

Once an awarding organisation has submitted a qualification for funding approval, it will firstly be considered and approved by IfATE as a technical qualification and by Ofqual to ensure it meets the regulatory requirements, 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 May 2024. We will, however, communicate with FE providers in autumn 2023 regarding in which routes technical qualifications have been submitted, to support forward planning.

## 2. Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications for adults

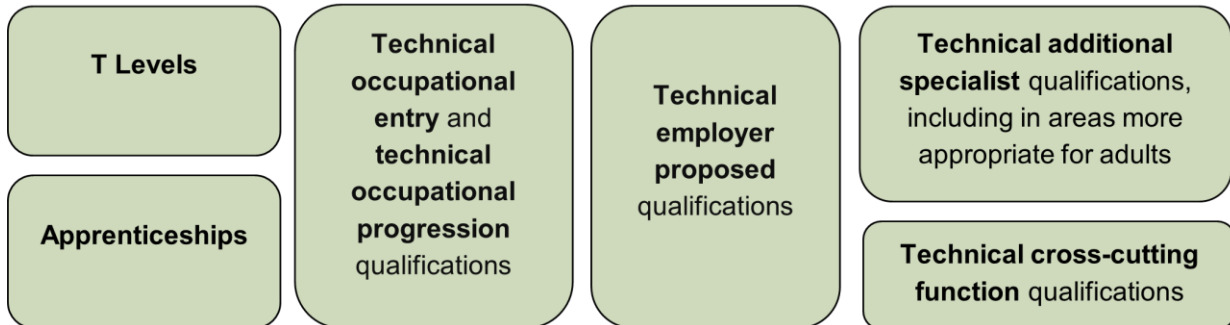
The level 3 technical qualifications listed in the previous section will also be funded for adults and, in addition, we will fund some further qualifications for adults only:

- **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.

### 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.





## **Accountability and post-16 performance measures at level 3**

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.

## Approval of qualifications at level 2 and below from 2025 - an overview and timeline

As at level 3, we are introducing new criteria that all in scope qualifications at level 2 and below will need to meet in order to be considered for funding from September 2025 onwards. The process for reviewing both new and existing qualifications at level 2 and below will be phased in over a four year period, from 2025 to 2028 (cycles 1-4), starting with the approval of technical qualifications at level 2. A full timetable for delivery of reformed qualifications at level 2, level 1 and entry level can be found in Annex A. The split between cycles 1 and 2 for level 2 technical qualifications is shown below.

### Cycle 1 – level 2 technical qualifications funded from 2025

In cycle 1, we will consider for funding level 2 technical qualifications leading to employment in the following occupational routes:

- Construction and the Built Environment
- Education and Early Years
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Health and Science

We have not included the digital route at level 2 as there are currently no recognised level 2 occupations in digital and, therefore, no employer-led standards at this level. The digital pathway at level 2 will be supported by qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical study. These level 2 progression qualifications will be considered for approval in cycle 2.

Awarding organisations will have until 24 November 2023 to submit level 2 technical **occupational entry** and **additional specialist** qualifications in cycle 1 routes that they wish to be considered for funding from September 2025.

A 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. This list will be updated in September 2024 to include any additional qualifications approved following procedural review.

During the transition from existing qualifications to reformed or new qualifications, we want to ensure that using SSAs does not create gaps or insufficient coverage in provision, because some existing qualifications in the SSAs listed for cycle 1 may be in scope of the next funding approval cycle. This is particularly important at level 2, where we are considering qualifications for approval in a staggered way, with qualifications leading to employment (technical qualifications) considered first, and qualifications supporting progression to higher levels of study in the same SSAs considered in the following year. Details of how we will address this in the process for removing funding

approval from qualifications in cycle 1 can be found in the Qualifications Funding Approval Manual:2025 to 2026.

A detailed timeline for the approval of post-16 qualifications at level 2 for 2025 can be found on [GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk).

### **Cycle 2 – level 2 qualifications funded from 2026**

Cycle 2 will include level 2 **occupational entry** and **additional specialist** technical qualifications leading to employment in routes other than those considered in cycle 1. In cycle 2 we will also consider **cross-cutting skills** and **employer-proposed** qualifications.

The process for submitting level 2 technical qualifications for funding approval will be the same as for cycle 1. Further details of specific submission dates for cycle 2 will be published in the autumn. The process will culminate in a list of qualifications which will be funded for the 2026 to 2027 academic year being published in May 2025.

Cycle 2 will also include qualifications supporting **progression to level 3** technical and academic study in level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2025 – see Annex A for further detail. We will give more detail on the routes/subjects in scope when we launch cycle 2.

### **Cycle 3 – level 2 and below qualifications funded from 2027**

Cycle 3 will include Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical and academic study in level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2026

It will also include all qualifications at level 1 and entry level and all PSE qualifications.

We will give more detail when we launch cycle 3.

### **Cycle 4 – level 2 and below qualifications in English, maths and ESOL**

The government's consultation response initially indicated that we would introduce reformed qualifications in English, maths and ESOL skills for life for first teaching from September 2027 (cycle 3) following a process to consider updates to the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. We have decided to postpone consultation on changes to the national standards to summer 2023 with a view to introducing reformed qualifications for first teaching from September 2028. This will enable us to better understand the potential implications of the Prime Minister's ambition for all students to study maths until the age of 18. We think it is important to fully understand the needs of post-16 learners before making changes to maths qualifications. This will ensure that the right qualifications are available to meet the needs of all students.

# Future funding of level 2 technical qualifications

## Future funding of level 2 technical qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

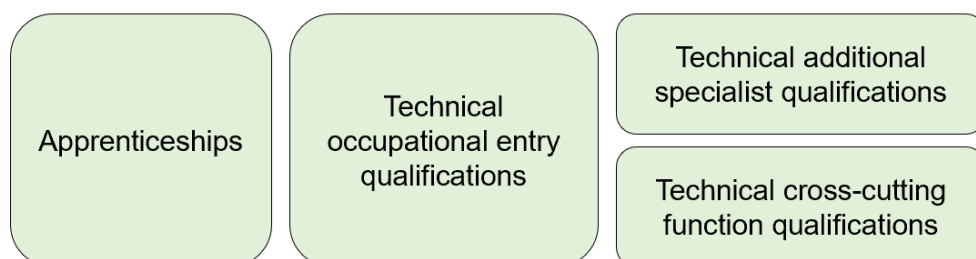
As at level 3, the government's aim is to deliver high quality technical qualifications at level 2 that are aligned to employer-led occupational standards and meet the needs of business and industry. This will ensure qualifications deliver the skills students need to enter a skilled occupation at level 2.

Unlike level 3, there are no T Levels at level 2. There are three main types of level 2 technical qualifications that will be funded in the future:

- **Technical occupational entry:** qualifications that aim to support a student to enter a skilled role;
- **Technical additional specialist:** qualifications that allow a student to develop additional knowledge and competencies and specialise within a sector. These qualifications build on the knowledge in a technical occupational entry qualification e.g. nutrition in early years, building on the early years practitioner standard.
- **Technical cross-cutting function:** qualifications that allow students to develop skills that are relevant across occupations.

Post-2025 technical landscape for 16-19 year olds

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours students need to progress to skilled employment at level 2



Level 2 technical qualifications will be approved by IfATE against criteria linked to their occupational standards. Full details of the criteria can be found on the IfATE website.

These qualifications will also need to meet Ofqual's regulatory requirements for level 2 and below qualifications leading to employment.<sup>16</sup>

Level 2 technical qualifications will be approved for funding in two cycles, with cycle 1 commencing approval for qualifications in Construction and the Built environment, Education and Early years, Engineering and Manufacturing and Health and Science, and cycle 2 commencing approval for qualifications aligned to standards not covered in cycle 1.

At level 2, technical occupational entry qualifications may be of two different sizes, each serving a slightly different purpose as set out in the IfATE criteria:

- i. Smaller qualifications which align to the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the relevant employer-led occupational standard,
- ii. Extended versions of these qualifications which include additional introductory sector knowledge, to support wider contextual understanding of the route, and transferable employability skills.

Once an awarding organisation has submitted a qualification for funding approval, it will firstly be considered for approval by IfATE before it is considered for funding approval by the department. Decisions on which qualifications will be funded from 2025 within cycle 1 will be made available in July 2024.

Technical qualifications which do not go through the new approvals process will not receive funding approval in future, unless they have been exempted from the review – see list of qualifications, on page 9, that are out of scope of the review.

### **Study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds**

Our clear expectation, which we will outline in the 2025 study programme guidance, will be that most students aiming for employment at level 2 will take either

- one extended technical occupational entry qualification, or
- two smaller occupational entry qualifications that are in different occupational routes.

This is because employers have told us that young people with limited or no work experience will benefit from the additional content that is embedded in the extended

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<sup>16</sup> Ofqual launched its consultation on regulating level 1 and 2 qualifications leading to employment in January 2023 - [Consultation on regulating level 1 and 2 qualifications designed to lead to employment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-regulating-level-1-and-2-qualifications-designed-to-lead-to-employment) Updated regulations for these qualifications will be shared with awarding organisations by June 2023.

qualifications. It will give them a broader understanding of the sector in which they will be working as well as providing relevant transferable skills. This should lead to better outcomes for the students.

Students who are not sure which route they want to pursue will be able to take two of the smaller qualifications in different occupational routes, leading to two separate qualifications. This will give these students more time to decide which occupation they want to specialise in.

### Future funding of level 2 technical qualifications for adults

All of the level 2 technical qualifications listed in the previous section will also be funded for adults.

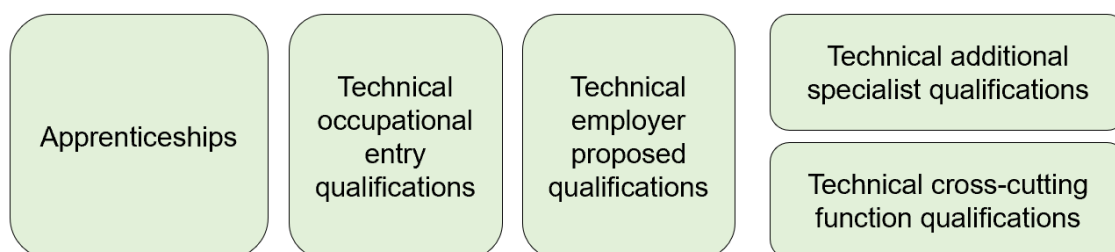
Adults will be able to choose whether to take a single small occupational entry qualification, aligned to an occupational standard, or an extended occupational entry qualification which includes additional introductory sector knowledge and employability skills. This decision is likely to depend on their existing knowledge and experience of the occupational route and their personal circumstances.

In addition, we will fund the following qualifications for adults only:

**Technical employer-proposed qualifications:** occupational entry qualifications where no standard currently exists for the proposed occupation, and where it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed, but there is evidence of demand from employers. We will consider these qualifications in cycle 2.

### Post-2025 technical landscape for adults

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours students need to progress to skilled employment at level 2



## **Future funding of level 2 progression qualifications**

As set out in the government's response to the consultation at level 2 and below, we will also consider for funding in cycles 2 and 3, qualifications which support progression to further study at level 3. This will include level 2 qualifications that support progression to technical qualifications at level 3, including progression to T Levels and to other level 3 technical qualifications that are not delivered as part of a T level programme. It will also include qualifications that support progression to large Alternative Academic Qualifications and mixed programmes of small Alternative Academic Qualifications and A levels.

We will update this document to reflect the latest information on cycle 2 approvals in autumn 2023, alongside the update to the 2026-27 qualifications funding approval manual.

## **Future funding of level 1 and entry level qualifications, English and maths qualifications and personal, social and employability (PSE) qualifications**

All qualifications in scope at level 1 and entry level will be considered for funding in cycle 3, with reformed qualifications being available for teaching from September 2027. Cycle 3 will also include PSE qualifications at level 1 and entry level.

We will consult further on the draft national standards for PSE qualifications in winter 2023, before confirming the funding approval process for cycle 3.

We will update this section to reflect the latest information on cycle 3 approvals alongside the update to the 2027 to 2028 funding approval manual.



## **Future Funding of English and maths Qualifications**

English and maths qualifications at level 1 and entry level and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL Skills for Life) at level 2, level 1 and entry level will be considered for funding in cycle 4, with reformed qualifications being available for teaching from September 2028.

We will consult further on the draft National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in summer 2023, before confirming the funding approval process for cycle 4.

We will update this section to reflect the latest information on cycle 4 approvals alongside the update to the 2028 to 2029 funding approval manual.

## **Accountability and post-16 performance measures at level 2 and below**

Technical occupational entry qualifications and technical additional specialist qualifications approved for funding at level 2 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.

## 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 Early Years; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science.</p>	<p>Employer proposed and occupational progression qualifications in: Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; Education and Early Years; 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><b><u>Technical qualifications</u></b></p> <p>Level 2 technical qualifications<sup>17</sup> in Construction and the Built Environment; Education and Early Years; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science in the following qualification groups:</p> <p>Technical occupational-entry qualifications for young people and adults</p> <p>Technical additional specialist qualifications</p>	Level 2 technical qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of these categories, but are not approved through the reform process
September 2026  (Cycle 2)	<p><b><u>Technical qualifications</u></b></p> <p>Level 2 technical occupational entry qualifications and technical additional specialist qualifications in all other occupational routes.</p> <p>Technical cross-cutting function qualifications.</p> <p>Technical employer-proposed qualifications for adults only.</p> <p><b><u>Academic and other non-technical qualifications</u></b></p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications in routes reformed in 2025</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to all wave 1-4 T Levels</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 AAQs in academic subject areas reformed in 2025</p>	Level 2 qualifications in the subject areas which are in scope but are not approved through the reform process (except those scheduled for first teaching in 2027)

<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 any occupational entry or additional specialist qualifications in digital at level 2.

<p>September 2027</p> <p>(Cycle 3)</p>	<p><b><u>Academic and other non-technical qualifications</u></b></p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications in routes reformed in 2026</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 AAQs in academic subject areas reformed in 2026</p> <p>All qualifications at level 1 and entry level</p> <p>All PSE qualifications</p>	<p>All remaining level 2 and below qualifications</p>
<p>September 2028</p> <p>(Cycle 4)</p>	<p><b><u>Essential Skills qualifications</u></b></p> <p>All English, maths (level 1 and entry level) and ESOL Skills for Life (level 2, level 1 and entry level) qualifications</p>	<p>All remaining English, maths and ESOL qualifications</p>

## 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 Early Years	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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