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Guidance

Post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below from spring 2023

Updated 25 July 2023

Applies to England

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Introduction

In addition to the reforms taking place at level 3, we are also improving 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 or, for some, directly into employment at level 2.

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.

Reforms to qualifications at level 2 and below will be phased in over a 4 year period. The first reformed qualifications will be available for teaching from September 2025, with further qualifications being approved for teaching from 2026, 2027 and 2028.

Our reforms will start with some qualifications leading to employment (technical qualifications) in 4 occupational routes at level 2. Further details of the approvals process and the detailed criteria these qualifications will need to meet in order to be considered for public funding can be found in [Guide to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England](#). Detailed guidance for awarding organisations can be found in the April 2023 update of the [Qualifications Funding Approval Manual: 2025 to 2026](#).

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to signpost awarding organisations and providers to information that is currently available and which they may find helpful to prepare for the reforms at level 2 and below. It will be updated regularly to reflect new information as it becomes available.

General information

Government consultation

In March 2022, the government published its consultation on the [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below](#). This set out initial proposals for the reforms to qualifications at level 2, level 1 and entry level.

Government consultation response

In October 2022, the government published its [response to the consultation on reforms to post 16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England](#).

This response confirms details of the groups of qualifications that the Department for Education (DfE) will fund in future and includes a full timetable for implementation across the 3 year period (page 50). We will start, in cycle 1, by considering 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

Ministerial letter

[Secretary of State letter to Ofqual on level 2 qualifications](#), outlines the minister's intentions with regard to qualifications reform at level 2 and below.

Technical qualifications leading to employment at level 2

Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape for 2025 and beyond

[Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below](#) outlines the changes that are being introduced and sets out, at a high level, the process for approving level 3 technical and alternative academic qualifications.

It has been updated in April 2023 to include detailed criteria and approval processes for level 2 technical qualifications leading to employment in the 4 occupational routes listed above.

Qualifications funding approval manual: 2025 to 2026

[Qualifications funding approval manual: 2025 to 2026](#) is for awarding organisations and contains the detailed criteria and process for approving qualifications for funding for the 2025 to 2026 academic year.

The April 2023 update includes details of the approvals process for level 3 technical and academic qualifications and the detailed criteria and approval processes for level 2 technical qualifications.

IfATE approvals categories

To ensure technical qualifications meet employers' needs, IfATE will be responsible for approving them in line with the powers granted through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act. Qualifications approved by IfATE will then be eligible for the department to consider for funding.

IfATE has published the [categories and process against which it will approve level 3 and level 2 technical qualifications](#). This page outlines the statutory tests that will be applied as part of the approvals process.

As at level 3, technical qualifications leading to employment at level 2 will, in future, need to align to relevant employer-led occupational standards.

IfATE has also published on its website a [list of occupational standards at level 2](#) that will be in scope for 2025.

Ofqual consultation on qualifications leading to employment

Awarding organisations offering these qualifications, and the qualifications themselves, will be expected to comply with Ofqual's existing regulations and any additional rules Ofqual deem necessary to ensure the quality of these qualifications.

In January 2023 Ofqual launched [Consultation on regulating level 1 and 2 qualifications designed to lead to employment](#), a consultation on their proposed approach to regulating qualifications leading to employment at level 2 and below. This consultation closed on 20 March 2023.

Qualifications supporting progression to higher levels of study

Qualifications at level 2 that support progression to higher levels of study will be reformed for first teaching from September 2026. This includes qualifications that support progression to T Levels, level 3 technical qualifications that are not delivered as part of a T Level programme, large alternative academic qualifications and mixed programmes of A levels and small alternative academic qualifications.

Government consultation on qualifications supporting progression to T Levels

DfE sought views on future qualifications that support progression to T Levels.

The department intends that the content of these qualifications will be based on the national technical outcomes (NTOs) developed for the T Level foundation year. It sought feedback on how the NTOs should be used in developing these qualifications. This consultation closed on 6 April 2023.

The department published its [response to the consultation](#) on 13 July 2023 in addition to the revised NTOs.

Ofqual consultation on regulating qualifications supporting progression to T Levels

In January 2023, Ofqual launched [Regulating level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels](#), a consultation on their proposed approach to regulating qualifications supporting progression to T Levels. This consultation closed on 6 April 2023.

Ofqual consultation on regulating qualifications supporting progression to higher levels of study

In March Ofqual launched its consultation [Regulating level 2 and below qualifications supporting progression to higher levels of study](#), on their proposed approach to regulating qualifications that support progression to higher levels of study.

This consultation closed on 25 May 2023.

Ofqual consultation on draft conditions, requirements and guidance for progression qualifications

In July 2023 Ofqual launched its consultation [DRAFT Qualification level conditions for progression qualifications](#), which set out Ofqual's regulatory requirements for awarding organisations offering Progression Qualifications.

This consultation is open until 14 September 2023.

Personal Social and Employability (PSE) qualifications

PSE qualifications will be reformed for first teaching from September 2027. The government's consultation response committed to developing national standards for PSE qualifications, involving a broad range of stakeholders in their development including:

- employers
- educators and representative bodies, including those from the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) community

Panels of experts have been convened to lead on the development of these standards under the broad themes of employability and independent living.

The skills of personal and social development have been embedded into both panels. This approach has been taken because personal and social development is required to be successful both in the workplace and in independent life. The first panel meetings have taken place.

DfE will consult in winter 2023, once the standards have been developed, to ensure PSE provision is considered in full prior to implementation.

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.

DfE have decided to postpone consultation on changes to the national standards until 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.

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