

[Home](#) ▾ [Education, training and skills](#) ▾ [School curriculum](#) ▾ [Exam regulation and administration](#)
▾ [Regulating post-16 vocational and technical qualifications at levels 2 and 3](#)



Open consultation

Introduction and consultation details

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Applies to England

[Contents](#)

[Foreword by Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, Chief Regulator, Ofqual](#)

[Proposals at a glance](#)

[Audience](#)

[Consultation arrangements](#)

[Introduction](#)

Foreword by Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, Chief Regulator, Ofqual

The introduction of V Levels marks a significant moment for vocational education for young people in England. The vocational landscape at level 3 has long lacked the consistency and clarity that is so important to the success of general qualifications such as A Levels.

V Levels will change that. Bringing nationally-set content and a common grading

scale to a distinctly vocational qualification will allow students, employers, universities and colleges to understand and trust what these qualifications represent.

Supporting this new qualification, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates will give more options for students at level 2 as they think about further study or employment through a vocational route.

Together, these reforms will reshape the landscape of opportunities for young people making their post-16 choices.

To be successful, these new qualifications will need to meet the levels of trust the public currently place in enduring assessments such as A Levels and GCSEs. Their success lies in the confidence and understanding the public has in their quality and what they signify. Building that same confidence in V Levels and the new level 2 qualifications is not incidental to reform; it is the foundation on which reform succeeds. That is Ofqual's responsibility, and we take it seriously.

This consultation sets out our proposals for how awarding organisations will be regulated to deliver these qualifications, our expectations of them, and the rules by which we will hold them to account. We are publishing it alongside the Department for Education's consultation on national subject content, because content and the way it is assessed must be designed together to secure qualifications that are coherent and trusted.

Your response to this consultation matters. The quality of the framework for these new qualifications depends on the expertise and experience of those who will deliver and use them. Please take the time to read the proposals and give us feedback from your perspective or that of your organisation. This is your opportunity to contribute to shaping a system that will redraw the landscape of vocational education and give students the qualifications they need and deserve to prepare them for the future of work and education.

Proposals at a glance

Ofqual's regulatory approach

- Make V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates subject to

Ofqual's accreditation requirement

- Require awarding organisations to establish, maintain, comply with and keep under review an assessment strategy for V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates

V Levels

Qualification design

- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications to meet the general purposes specified by Ofqual
- Require awarding organisations to design V Levels in line with the guided learning hours specified by DfE
- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications that cover the content specified by DfE
- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications to meet assessment objectives and weightings for these specified by Ofqual and to have regard to guidance relating to them

Grading scale

- Require awarding organisations to use a grading scale of A*-E plus a grade N and U (Ungraded)

Assessment design

- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications in line with proportions of assessment methods specified by Ofqual
- Require awarding organisations to design assessments which include synoptic assessment to provide students with opportunities to draw together different areas of knowledge, understanding and/or skills, to produce developed responses to allow them to construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning and to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in response to authentic, vocationally-related contexts and scenarios
- Require awarding organisations to set all assessments, and permit awarding organisations to allow centres to adapt certain aspects of some assessment tasks
- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications with a modular assessment structure
- Require awarding organisations to make available each academic year one

assessment series for timetabled assessments and one window for submission of marks for centre-marked assessment

- Require a proportion of the total marks for the qualification to be made available through a terminal assessment in the final series in which a student intends to certificate. For V Levels in digital systems and data, accounting and finance and education, this is 40% of the total marks
- Permit retakes in any series in which an assessment is made available and permit the carry forward of marks from centre-marked assessments already achieved
- Require awarding organisations to mark timetabled assessments and allow awarding organisations to mark other assessments themselves, or permit centres to mark them. Where centre-marking is permitted, require awarding organisation moderation of centre-marking before results are issued
- Require the use of numerical marks for all assessments, which will lead to the use of compensatory assessment approaches
- Require awarding organisations to follow requirements specified by Ofqual relating to the setting and maintenance of standards

Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates

Qualification design

- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications to meet the general purposes specified by Ofqual
- Require awarding organisations to design Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates in line with the guided learning hours specified by DfE
- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications that cover the content specified by DfE

Grading scale

- Require awarding organisations to use a grading scale of Pass, Merit, Distinction and U (Ungraded)

Assessment design

- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications in line with the proportion of assessment methods specified by Ofqual
- Require awarding organisations to design assessments which include synoptic assessment to provide students with opportunities to draw together different

areas of knowledge, understanding and/or skills, to produce developed responses where they can construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning and to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in response to authentic, vocationally-related contexts and scenarios

- Require awarding organisations to set all assessments, and allow awarding organisations to permit centres to adapt certain aspects of some assessment tasks
- Require awarding organisations to design qualifications with a modular assessment structure
- Require awarding organisations to make available each academic year one or two assessment series for timetabled assessments and one or two windows for submission of marks or grades for centre-marked assessments
- Permit retakes in any series in which an assessment is made available and permit the carry forward of marks already achieved through centre-marked assessments
- Require awarding organisations to mark timetabled assessments and allow awarding organisations to mark other assessments themselves, or permit centres to mark them. Where centre-marking is permitted, require awarding organisation moderation of centre-marking before results are issued
- Require awarding organisations to follow requirements specified by Ofqual relating to the setting and maintenance of standards, including the use of compensatory aggregation approaches

V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates – reviewing and appealing results and on-screen assessment

- Seek views on the approach for reviews of marking, reviews of moderation and appeals
- Seek views on the approach to on-screen assessments

Retaking Core Exams in Technical Qualifications within T Levels

- Amend Ofqual's assessment requirements to require awarding organisations to permit students to retake individual papers within the Core Exam sub-component

Audience

This consultation is open to anyone who may wish to make representation but may be of most interest to:

- awarding organisations who intend in future to offer, V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates, and their representative bodies
- schools, colleges, students, and their representative bodies
- further and higher education institutions and their representative bodies
- employers and their representative bodies
- awarding organisations who offer, or intend in future to offer, Technical Qualifications within T Levels

Consultation arrangements

Duration

This consultation will open on 23 April 2026 and end on 2 July 2026 at 11:59pm.

Respond online

Responses should be submitted through [the online consultation platform](#).

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online consultation platform, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is incompatible with the platform, you may request an alternative format. Please email

consultations@ofqual.gov.uk to request this. For information on how Ofqual will use and manage your data, please see [Annex E](#).

Introduction

This consultation is split into 6 parts and seeks views on both our proposed regulatory approach, and the specific Conditions, requirements and guidance we propose to set to require these approaches.

- This introduction explains the background to DfE's proposals, Ofqual's role in them and when they will be implemented.
- [Part 1](#) explains our overall proposed regulatory approach.
- [Part 2](#) explains our proposed approach to regulating V Levels. [Annex A](#) includes the draft Conditions, requirements and guidance proposed to do this.
- [Part 3](#) explains our proposed approach to regulating Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates. [Annex B](#) and [Annex C](#) include the draft Conditions, requirements and guidance proposed to do this.
- [Part 4](#) explains our proposed approach to the use of on-screen assessment in V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates.
- [Part 5](#) sets out proposed changes relating to Technical Qualifications within T Levels to allow individual parts of the Core Exam sub-component to be taken separately for students retaking assessments. [Annex D](#) includes the draft updated assessment requirements proposed to do this.
- [Part 6](#) sets out our assessment of the equalities and regulatory impacts of these proposals.

DfE's post-16 level 2 and level 3 qualification pathways

Following the [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#), in October 2025 the government published the [Post-16 education and skills white paper](#). This set out its intention to simplify the post-16 landscape into 3 clear pathways for students who do not want to follow an exclusively academic pathway after their GCSEs (such as A Levels), and who are not certain about taking a level 3 qualification related to working in a specific

occupational area (such as T Levels).

DfE consulted on these proposals in its [Post-16 level 3 and below pathways](#) consultation between October 2025 and January 2026 and published its [response](#) to this consultation in March. The response sets out the government's intention to introduce 3 new vocational qualifications:

- V Levels – At level 3, V Levels will be broad applied and vocational qualifications. They will be 2-year qualifications with a size of 360 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and be based on DfE-set subject content linked to occupational standards. They are aimed primarily at students who want to progress to higher study, higher technical training or apprenticeships.
- Foundation Certificates – At level 2, there will be a 'further study' pathway with learners taking a one-year Foundation Certificate of a size between 240 and 300 GLH. These will be designed to help students progress to further study at level 3. They will be based on content set by DfE linked to occupational standards.
- Occupational Certificates – At level 2 there will also be an 'occupational pathway' with students taking a 2-year Occupational Certificate, designed to help them progress to employment or an apprenticeship. These will range in size between 540 and 720 GLH. A proportion of the qualification will be based on DfE-set core content providing an overview of a sector, and a proportion on occupation-specific content from relevant occupational standards, also specified by DfE.

In its consultation, DfE also set out its intention to continue to enhance the deliverability of T Levels. DfE has decided to change the way in which students can retake the Core Exam sub-component in the Technical Qualification (TQ), to improve deliverability and reduce assessment burden on providers and students.

Ofqual's role in the reforms

Ofqual is the qualifications and assessments regulator for England. Our role includes:

- securing standards in qualifications so they give a reliable and consistent indication of knowledge, skills and understanding
- promoting public confidence in qualifications and national assessments
- promoting public awareness and understanding of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications

- securing that qualifications are provided efficiently and represent value for money

We explain how we will do this in our [corporate strategy](#), where we set out our objective to oversee the improvement and reform of qualifications and assessments. We will do this by providing expert advice to inform the design of the government's changes and playing a key role in ensuring that qualifications remain trusted, reliable and fair during any transition and into the future.

The Secretary of State has written to Ofqual in relation to these reforms setting expectations for how Ofqual delivers this role. A copy of [this letter is available here](#). This sets out the Secretary of State's intention that the reforms result in the establishment of a high quality, distinctive vocational and technical offer that meets the needs of the intended cohorts, commands long-term confidence, and supports improved assessment practice across awarding organisations. The letter emphasises the importance of consistency between awarding organisations offering the same qualifications, to be achieved through the introduction of nationally set content and common grading scales, alongside nationally determined qualification sizes and titles for each qualification type. It also says that these qualifications should be developed in a way to ensure that they are suitable for use in performance tables.

It also sets out the following assessment principles that should guide Ofqual's regulatory approach:

- the structure and assessment of V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates should reflect their distinctive purpose and the needs of the intended cohort
- the grading scales should recognise the full range of achievement of the intended cohorts and be straightforward for students, education institutions and employers to interpret
- the qualifications should have a modular assessment structure, so that assessment can take place at appropriate points during the course of study
- the approach to modular assessment must support comparability and the securing of public confidence
- the applied and practical nature of the subject content will require the use of a balance of assessment methods, including examinations set and marked by awarding organisations and other assessments set by the awarding organisations and marked by teachers
- where assessments are marked by teachers, the quality assurance arrangements that awarding organisations put in place in relation to this must secure fairness and

consistency of marking, with sufficient control of standards to secure public confidence

- risks to authenticity of students' assessment evidence, such as those associated with the use of generative AI, should also be addressed
- awarding organisations should have scope to innovate in assessment but must consider centre manageability

In line with these steers, our proposed regulatory approach seeks to:

- prioritise consistency and comparability in these qualifications
- reflect the applied and vocational nature of the qualifications and support effective teaching and learning
- ensure that assessment arrangements are manageable for awarding organisations and centres

This consultation is about Ofqual's approach to regulating the new qualifications and our proposed Conditions, requirements and guidance. The overall DfE policy and timeline for the reforms is not within Ofqual's remit, so is out of the scope of this consultation.

Implementation of proposals

The proposals in this consultation relating to V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates are intended to support DfE's intentions that the first subjects in these qualifications will be available for first teaching by centres from September 2027. The first tranche of qualifications that DfE intends to be available from September 2027 is listed below. DfE is consulting on specific titles as part of its subject content consultation:

V Levels

- V Level in education
- V Level in accounting and finance
- V Level in digital systems and data

Foundation Certificates

- Foundation Certificate in digital systems and data
- Foundation Certificate in education and early years

Occupational Certificates

- Occupational Certificate for early years practitioners
- Occupational Certificate in culinary skills
- Occupational Certificate in hospitality (accommodation)
- Occupational Certificate in hospitality (food and beverage)

Further subjects will follow in subsequent years and DfE will publish information about this as part of its implementation plan.

[DfE's consultation](#) is open until 4 June 2026 and the final versions of the subject content will be published later in the summer. Our intention is to publish Ofqual's decisions following this consultation, alongside the final Conditions, requirements and guidance in Autumn 2026.

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