



- [Home](#) ▾
- [Education, training and skills](#) ▾
- [Further and higher education, skills and vocational training](#) ▾
- [Further and higher education courses and qualifications](#) ▾
- [Technical and higher technical qualifications \(THTQ\): overview](#)



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Guidance

Overview of technical and higher technical qualifications

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Applies to England

Contents

[Background](#)

[How technical qualifications relate to occupational standards](#)

[Technical occupation qualifications \(TOQs\)](#)

[Occupational entry](#)

[Additional specialist qualifications](#)

[Higher technical qualifications \(HTQs\)](#)

[Approved technical qualifications list](#)

Background

Approved technical qualifications are available at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. They align with

published [occupational standards](#) and prepare learners to enter skilled employment.

Learners may need further work-based training to achieve full occupational competence.

The Department for Education (DfE) may approve qualifications under section A2D5 of the [Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act \(ASCLA\) 2009](#), using categories set out in section A2D2.

This guidance covers:

- technical occupation qualifications (TOQs)
- higher technical qualifications (HTQs)

It does not cover:

- [T level technical qualifications \(TQ T levels\)](#), which have separate requirements

How technical qualifications relate to occupational standards

Technical qualifications approved under the ASCLA must align with, build upon or selectively cover outcomes in published occupational standards. We define these terms as qualifications that:

- align: cover as many knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) in an occupational standard as possible within an education setting
- build upon: link to an occupational standard and add additional learning outcomes beyond the KSBs in that standard
- selectively cover: include some outcomes from one or more occupational standards, but not the majority of any single standard

Skills England's [occupational maps](#) show how qualifications link to occupations.

Technical occupation qualifications

(TOQs)

Between May 2024 and July 2025, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), and later Skills England, approved TOQs in 2 categories:

- occupational entry
- additional specialist

Occupational entry

These level 2 and level 3 qualifications:

- align to the KSBs in a published occupational standard
- cover as many KSBs as can reasonably be delivered in an education setting
- support entry into a specific occupation

Learners may still require further training to become fully competent.

Some level 2 extended TOQs also include:

- introductory sector knowledge
- transferable employability skills

Level 3 TOQs are not available to 16 to 19 year olds where a T level already exists in that subject area.

Approval

The TOQ approval process is now closed.

DfE is now responsible for approving changes and withdrawals for existing TOQs, but is not accepting new submissions for this qualification type.

[Higher technical qualifications \(HTQs\): guidance for applicants](#) has more information on how organisations can make any changes.

Requirements

Qualifications in this category must:

- enable learners to meet KSBs for entry-level competence
- provide employers with reliable evidence of achievement
- differentiate learner performance to support selection decisions
- form part of an engaging programme that supports progression
- be the core element of a study programme

Additional specialist qualifications

These level 2 and level 3 qualifications:

- develop advanced or specialist competence
- build on outcomes in one or more occupational standards
- support specialisation in a specific job role

Learners are expected to have already achieved outcomes in the relevant standards.

Approval

These qualifications are approved under section A2D5 of ASCLA 2009 using:

- the additional specialist competence test
- the employer demand test

They must also meet funding requirements in the DfE [Qualification funding approval manual](#).

Requirements

Additional specialist qualifications must:

- enable learners to carry out specialist duties in an occupation
- provide employers with reliable evidence of specialist competence
- differentiate achievement for selection decisions
- support engaging and motivating learning
- allow flexible delivery, primarily for learners aged 19+
- be the core element of a study programme

Higher technical qualifications (HTQs)

HTQs are level 4 and level 5 qualifications.

They are designed to:

- support entry into a profession
- enable progression to higher education

Approval

HTQs are approved under section A2D5 of ASCLA 2009 using:

- the alternative approval test
- the employer demand test

Only approved HTQs can use the official quality mark.

[HTQ guidance](#) contains more information about the HTQ reforms.

Requirements

HTQs should:

- align to KSBs in published occupational standards
- support entry into related occupations

They may still require further training for full competence.

Approved technical qualifications list

You can view a [full list of approved TOQs and HTQs](#), including:

- awarding organisations
- qualification sizes
- occupational routes
- linked occupational standards

[↑ Back to top](#)

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