



Department  
for Education

# **Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England**

**Policy Statement**

**July 2021**

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## Foreword by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills



As we rebuild from the pandemic, we have put reforming post-16 education and skills at the heart of our plans to build back better and level up this country. We are revolutionising the system so we can move past the outdated notion that A levels are the only option for the best and brightest students, and that there is only one route up the career ladder. Our vision is to transform the qualifications landscape and expand opportunity

right across the country, so that more people can get the skills they need to get good jobs.

Our *Skills for Jobs* White Paper set out the bold reforms we will introduce to support the Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee. This policy statement sets out our vision for level 3 qualifications. In September 2020, the first students started on T Levels. These new qualifications are equivalent to three A levels and have been co-created with over 250 employers so students can get the right skills and experience, and businesses can build a pipeline for the workforce that they need for the future.

Now we must improve the overall offer so that all qualifications that are available alongside A levels and T Levels are high quality. We need to ensure that approved qualifications are relevant, necessary and will lead to positive outcomes for all types of students, including those with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is vital in a fast moving and high-tech economy that technical education closes the gap between what people study and the needs of employers. It would therefore be a dereliction of duty for us to continue to fund qualifications which do not sufficiently develop skills and are not valued by employers, particularly where these are disproportionately taken by those with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We will streamline and improve the quality of the level 3 system. We are strengthening the pathways to progression, creating clearly defined academic and technical routes with qualifications leading to further study, and/or skilled employment. This clarity of purpose will allow students to see more easily how their study will help them to progress.

We set out this vision in two consultations, and we continue to be unapologetic about both the need and our commitment to raise standards in technical education, as we have already done for GCSEs, A levels and apprenticeships. These changes will mean that many students will take different routes through the system, some taking technical options when they previously had taken academic. Some will take three years to achieve a more stretching, high value course, rather than spending two years on a lower value programme. Others who previously went on to undergraduate degrees will go on to higher technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships or straight into skilled employment.

Though our goal of a slimmed-down, higher quality system remains the same, our thinking about the qualifications that are needed to sit alongside T Levels has continued to evolve. This policy statement sets out where we see the value in qualifications that can be taken alongside A levels and T Levels as well as a range of subjects where it is justified to take specialist alternatives, such as in performing and creative arts.

We will phase the introduction of reformed qualifications, starting with a single test route (pathfinder) concentrating on the Digital route for introduction from 2023, scaling up in the following year and completing the reforms by 2025. This timeline is ambitious, but we cannot afford to wait any longer to deliver the system that the country needs. We need to be training people for green jobs to deliver our net zero ambition, and delivering the skills needed for growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing, green technologies and artificial intelligence.

The changes will lead to once in a generation reform. They will help young people make positive choices in further education, and support adults looking to upskill or retrain through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. They will also mean employers can be confident that qualifications deliver the skills they and the wider economy need. This will support the nation's recovery from the pandemic, building on the progress made so far to level up the country and create equal opportunities for all. We look forward to working with leading edge employers of all sizes, students, and post-16 providers as well as awarding organisations and others across the FE sector to successfully implement these changes.

Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

## Introduction

This document sets out changes to level 3 qualifications that will be implemented as part of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England. It is for anyone with an interest in post-16 education and training for young people and adults in England.

It sets out final decisions following the second stage consultation which ran from 23 October 2020 to 31 January 2021<sup>1</sup>.

It summarises the groups of qualifications that we will approve for funding alongside A levels and T Levels. It also sets out how we expect students to progress and how the new range of qualifications will support all students to fulfil their potential.

We do not provide a list of the qualifications or the subjects that will be funded in future. All qualifications will need to pass the new approvals process to be eligible for public funding. This approvals process will check the necessity of the qualification, check for T Level overlap (where relevant), and that it meets new criteria on quality, in order to be eligible for funding. Further information about this can be found in the separate qualifications approvals process document. The detailed criteria for approval are still in development and we will continue to work with sector experts to finalise these, including the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute), Ofqual, employers, awarding organisations and post-16 providers.

We have published a separate document that sets out the [detailed response to each consultation question](#) and provides more technical detail about the changes. This policy statement should be read alongside the government response document for a complete view of the consultation response and the reforms to the qualifications landscape.

Following our call for evidence on level 2 and below, which ran from 10 November 2020 to 14 February 2021, we will consult on our proposals to reform at these levels later in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> [DfE \(2020\) Review of post-16 qualifications Second Stage Consultation](#)

## The need for change

As part of an employer-led skills system and world class further education system, great qualifications are essential to helping everyone, whatever their age, to get good jobs and realise their ambitions. Whether they want to go straight into skilled employment or into higher education (HE), achieving a level 3 qualification will be an important stepping stone<sup>2</sup>. There are compelling reasons to ensure both 16 to 19 year olds and adults are completing high quality level 3 qualifications. Achieving level 3 is valuable in itself: full level 3 qualification on average result in a 16% earning return and a 4% increase in the change of employment<sup>3</sup>. However, its most significant value is in giving students the skills and knowledge that will set them up to succeed when they take the next step.

Every qualification needs to be high quality, but a really effective system will help students to make good choices and give them skills that will open up options for progression rather than shut them down. As a country we have done well at increasing the number of graduates. However, we have been less successful in consistently guiding students towards the courses or the jobs that will benefit them, and the country, the most. This might be because their post-16 choices don't open up the best HE options, or it might be because their qualification doesn't support the development of technical skills that are really in demand by employers. This has led to shortages in many skilled trades and professions, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). The National Audit Office estimate that in 2015, employers in England experienced around 2.7 million STEM recruitment shortages<sup>4</sup>, reflecting a significant shortage of vital technician-level STEM skills. Improving and rebalancing the system will help students and employers, increasing social mobility and productivity at the same time.

Higher education will continue to play a vital role in our economy, society and culture but we must move away from an assumption that undergraduate degrees should automatically be the goal of post-16 study. Progressing to skilled employment, including via higher apprenticeships, and Higher Technical Qualifications (levels 4-5) needs to be seen as equally valid or better choices for some students. The highest performing countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, do just this. Their skills systems are backed by employers, which gives young people and adults a clear route to rewarding careers. Students have clear options and are confident that their qualifications get them to where they want to go. Employers have trust in the system and know that the available

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<sup>2</sup> For details of what each qualification level means see: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>.

<sup>3</sup> DfE (2021): '[Measuring the net present value of further education in England 2018 to 2019](#)'.

<sup>4</sup> NAO (2018): '[Delivering STEM \(science, technology, engineering and mathematics\) skills for the economy](#)'.

technical education and training will provide them with highly competent employees who are ready for work<sup>5</sup>.

These challenges are not new and we have consulted over the past two years on the role of qualifications in tackling the problem. Our first consultation highlighted the complexities and variable quality within the current system, with over 12,000 qualifications approved for funding for 16 to 19 year olds at entry level to level 3<sup>6</sup> and over 4,000 approved at level 3 alone. Excluding A and AS levels, there are over 200 engineering qualifications and over 200 qualifications in building and construction funded for 16 to 19 year olds at level 3<sup>7</sup>. There are 15 plumbing qualifications approved for 16 to 19 funding at level 3 alone, ranging from 170 guided learning hours (GLH) to more than 1,800. There is no such thing as a perfect number of qualifications, but the future system will be slimmed down and clearer.

Not only are there too many qualifications in many parts of the system, but the quality varies considerably<sup>8</sup>. We need to raise the bar so that every publicly funded qualification is necessary, has a clear purpose and offers good progression opportunities. All qualifications will continue to be regulated by Ofqual, however a new review process will ensure all publicly funded qualifications meet these aims.

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<sup>5</sup> The Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016) [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#).

BIBB (2020) [Training in Germany – an investment against the shortage of skilled workers](#) (The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)).

<sup>6</sup> DfE (2019) '[Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England: the current system and the case for change](#)'.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding at level 3, as of May 2020.

<sup>8</sup> DfE (2019) '[Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England: the current system and the case for change](#)'.



## Once in a generation reform

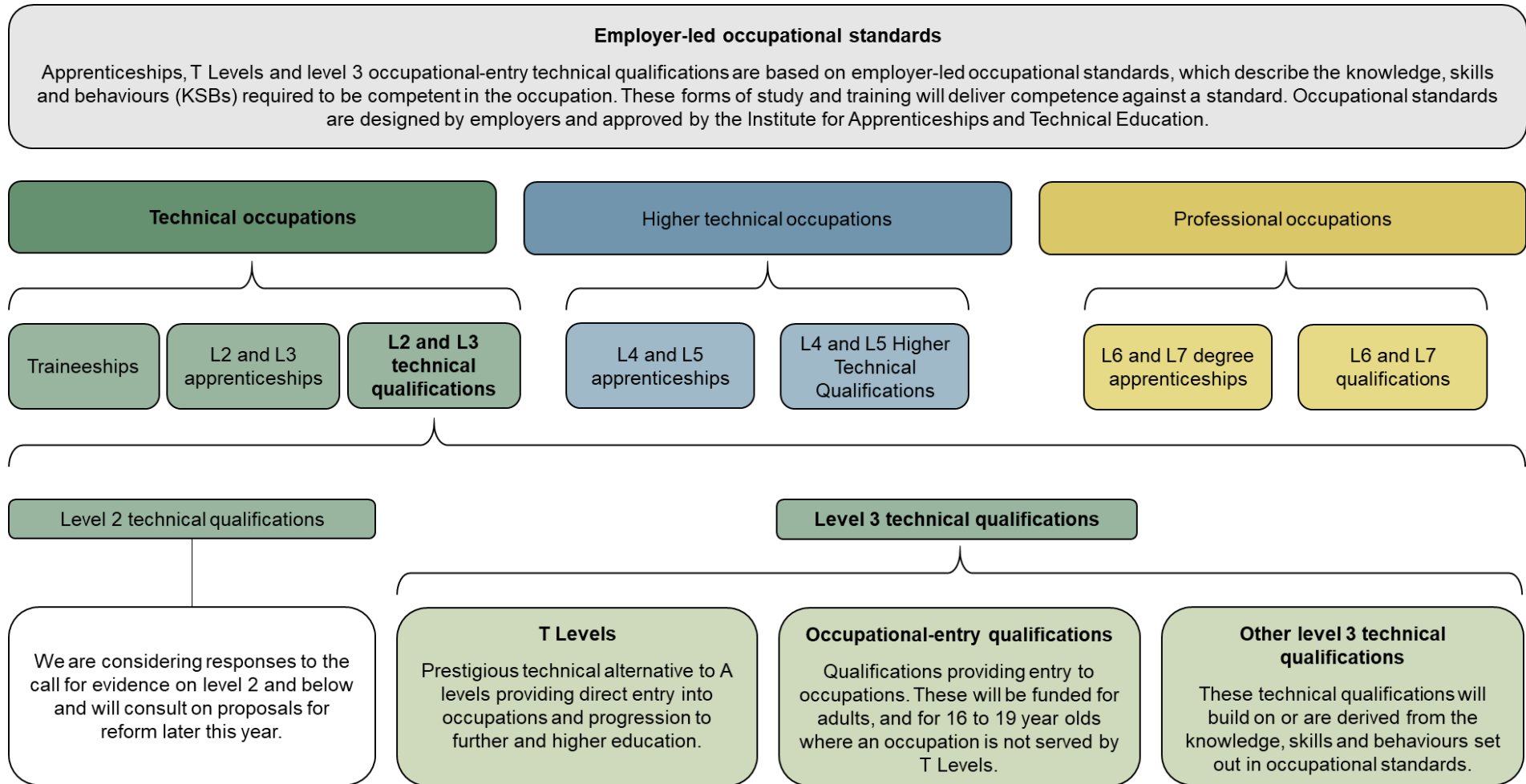
To address the issues described above we are reforming the post-16 system, improving qualifications and access to education for all. We are building an integrated skills system, where the different elements are clearly linked and it is easy to see the progression routes through and between sectors. Apprenticeships and technical education will fit within a single framework built from employer-led occupational standards. This will enable clear docking points between qualifications and apprenticeships, for example T Level to higher apprenticeships at level 4 where appropriate.

To ensure these reforms deliver for employers, they need to be confident about quality and understand the system. Following publication of the Sainsbury Review in 2016, the government's Post-16 Skills Plan introduced a common framework of 15 technical education routes made up of occupations with corresponding employer-led occupational standards. These will form the basis for the reformed technical qualification offer. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has published [Occupational Maps](#) which articulate this common framework by documenting the skilled occupations. Within these maps, occupations are grouped together to show linkages between them and possible routes for progression. These are structured into three bandings:

- **Technical** – progression into these occupations will be through T Levels and other level 3 qualifications, level 2 qualifications and level 2 and 3 apprenticeships.
- **Higher Technical** – which will be accessed through Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and other level 4 and 5 qualifications as well as level 4 and 5 apprenticeships.
- **Professional** – which includes level 6 and 7 qualifications as well as degree apprenticeships.

Figure 1 (below) illustrates the relationship between occupational standards and level 3 technical qualifications alongside apprenticeships and T Levels.

**Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the relationship between occupational standards and level 3 technical qualifications**



T Levels are the centrepiece of changes at level 3. They are broad, challenging programmes of study equivalent to three A levels, designed by employers to support progression directly into skilled employment or to higher technical study or a higher apprenticeship, and also form a path to higher education.

This document sets out the range of technical qualifications that will sit alongside T Levels for both 16 to 19 year olds and adults at level 3. Technical qualifications are those that are primarily designed to lead to skilled employment. This does not rule out students also using technical qualifications as a springboard to higher technical education such as a higher or degree apprenticeship, HTQ, or an undergraduate degree related to their field of study, but students can be confident that technical qualifications will enable them to move directly into skilled employment with vibrant career opportunities alongside the option of higher qualifications. We want the vast majority of technical qualifications to be based on employer-led occupational standards, just like apprenticeships. This will improve the link between the classroom and the workplace.

A levels are world renowned qualifications and will be central to the study programmes of most students taking the academic pathway to progress to our world leading universities. This document sets out the range of academic qualifications that will sit alongside A levels to help provide the best preparation for HE.

This will mean that every qualification will have a clear purpose, allowing students to see more easily how their qualification choices will help them to take the next step.

We set out the different types of academic and technical qualifications that will be publicly funded in future in the pages below. All qualifications approved for funding in future will need to meet rigorous quality standards. This document provides high level information on the new system of approval and regulation that will ensure the market remains clear, high quality and fit for purpose.

Adult skills are critical for the future of our economy. The ability for adults to upskill and retrain gives the country the skills it needs and gives us a greater return on our investment in adult education. We will fund a more diverse technical landscape for adults than we will for 16 to 19 year olds, recognising not all adults will be able to take a two year T Level course

Good qualifications are only useful if people of all ages are able to study them. This is why the Prime Minister introduced the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to allow everyone to access the education and training they need throughout their lives. National Skills Fund investment which started this year will help adults to train and gain valuable skills to improve their job prospects. As part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, we are now fully-funding free Level 3 qualifications for any adult who has not already achieved a full level 3 qualification.

The Lifelong Loan Entitlement will also be introduced from 2025, providing individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over

their lifetime. It will be available for both modules and full years of study at higher technical and degree levels (levels 4 to 6), regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities. Under this flexible skills system, people can build up learning over their lifetime and have a real choice in how and when they study to acquire new life-changing skills throughout their career.

We are proposing to put many of these changes into law through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill. This will make sure that the system is set up to deliver for decades to come. We recognise and value the role and expertise of awarding organisations, and we will continue to work in partnership to offer support during the implementation of these changes. Further information on the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill can be found at:

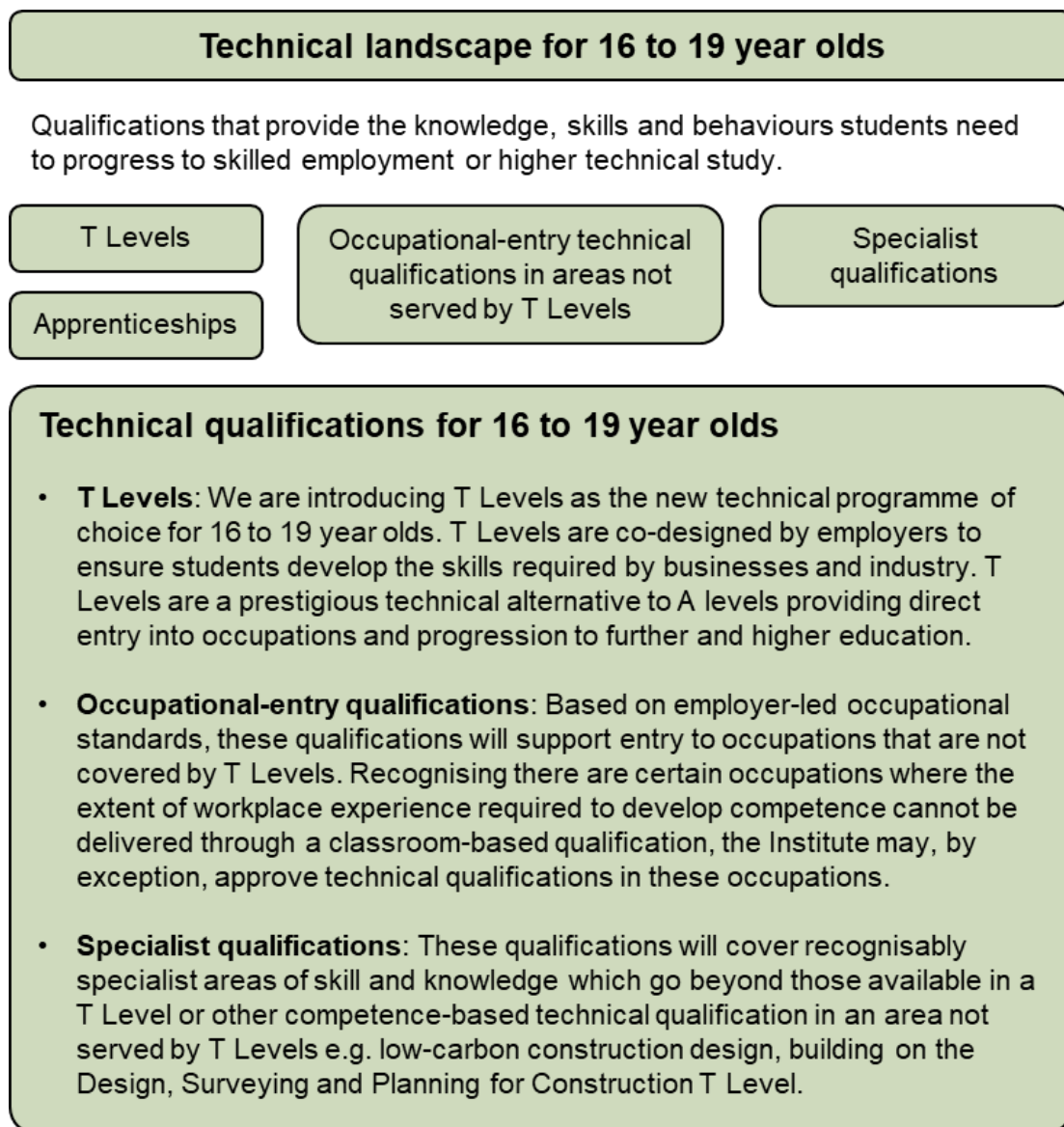
- [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill](#)
- [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill – Summary Policy Notes](#)

Alongside the reforms set out in the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, we also published the Interim Conclusion to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. We want to ensure a more sustainable student finance system, drive up the quality of higher education provision and promote genuine social mobility. We plan to consult on further reforms to the higher education system in due course, before setting out a full response to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding.

# The technical landscape

## Technical qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

Figure 2: Diagram showing the level 3 technical qualifications that we will fund in future for 16 to 19 year olds



## T Levels and the removal of funding for overlapping qualifications

T Levels offer a highly prestigious and credible technical and practical alternative to A levels and they have been designed with reference to the best technical education systems in the world. They will become the main technical option for 16 to 19 year olds. Following the recommendations of the Sainsbury Review, we have adopted an exclusive licensing approach for T Levels where a single awarding organisation is awarded the contract for each T Level technical qualification. This approach provides clarity and simplicity for students and employers and ensures a consistently high level of quality. We are introducing T Levels in phases, starting with a small group of providers to ensure that

they get the support they need. The first three T Levels in Education and Childcare, Digital, and Construction were launched in September 2020 – and are being delivered to approximately 1300 students in 43 early adopter schools and colleges across the country.

The number of providers and T Levels available will increase each year as we move toward full national rollout, with a further seven T Levels launching across the country in September 2021. In addition to general further education and sixth form colleges, independent training providers, University Technical Colleges, maintained schools and academies are already delivering, or have been approved to deliver T Levels in the future. T Levels will be rolled out nationally, so they will be available for students in every area of the country.

All planned T Levels will be available to some providers by 2023. Providers with Ofsted ratings of 'Good' and 'Outstanding' will be able to deliver all available T Levels in 2023, but other providers will be restricted to T Levels first introduced in 2020 and 2021. From 2024 as we progress to national roll out, all providers delivering 16-19 study programmes can deliver all available T Levels, irrespective of Ofsted rating.

As each T Level becomes available nationwide, we will remove 16-19 funding approval from technical qualifications that overlap with them. This will help to simplify the market and ensure as many 16 to 19 year olds as possible benefit from the high quality, breadth and depth offered by T Levels. By overlap we mean that a qualification is technical, the outcomes that must be attained by a person taking the qualification are similar to those set out in a standard covered by a T Level, and it aims to take a student to employment in the same occupational area. Technical qualifications that are defunded on the basis of overlap with T Levels for 16 to 19 year olds may continue to be funded for adults, although these will be considered as part of the approval process from 2024 and subject to future quality criteria.

Academic qualifications which overlap with T Levels will also be considered as part of the approval process from 2024. Overlap with T Levels will only be allowed for small academic qualifications (equivalent size to one A level or smaller) taken alongside A levels. They will also need to meet the other criteria for approval as an academic qualification. Large academic qualifications will not be funded if they overlap with a T Level.

## T Level roll out

The first three T Levels launched successfully in September 2020 and have been well received by providers and importantly, students. Early in the academic year, students at Havant and South Downs College had started paediatric first aid training as part of the Education and Childcare T Level. Students on the Digital Production, Design and Development T Level at La Retraite in London had taken part in a hackathon event with the Railway Delivery Group, where they developed and presented ideas on how to improve services offered to rail passengers.

A student studying the T Level in Education and Childcare said:

*“I chose to study the T Level in Education and Childcare as I felt it was a good progression route for me. This course will enable me to support children and give them the opportunity to succeed. I really enjoy the industry placement part of the course. I am learning many skills at the placement which makes it very rewarding.”*

A student studying the Digital Production, Design and Development T Level at Barnsley College, is thoroughly enjoying their course. They said:

*“Since starting the Digital T-Level, I feel supported by the computing staff. They are friendly, helpful, and always approachable for anything I need to know. I feel I can ask questions and I am learning new skills and knowledge that I can use in the workplace and put into context for my future career.”*

*The building I study in feels brand new and I am using PCs that are better than my computer at home. There is all the software I need available to me, and even some that I have not yet used.”*

## A technical system based on employer-led occupational standards and occupational competence

We can be confident that T Levels meet employers’ needs because they are based on employer-led occupational standards. We want to do the same for the rest of the technical education system and we will align the vast majority of post-16 technical qualifications to employer-led occupational standards by the end of the decade.

Employer-led occupational standards were originally developed for apprenticeships, but they will also now form the basis of technical qualifications, starting with T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications. Standards are short documents, developed by employers and others working with the Institute, that set out what it means to be occupationally competent in an occupation, in the form of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to succeed in the workplace.

Linking qualifications to employer-led occupational standards isn't just a means of ensuring quality, relevance and currency; it will help students to understand what opportunities different pathways will provide and which careers they will prepare them for. It will also ensure that technical qualifications remain up-to-date and continue to deliver the skills that industry needs. This will be achieved through other reforms set out in the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper including the reform of the occupational maps owned by the Institute and the development of interactive careers maps by the National Careers Service.

## Other technical qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

T Levels will cover most occupations that a 16 to 19 year old might train for at level 3, but they won't cover everything. That is why we will also fund a range of other technical qualifications:

- **Technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations** ('occupational-entry qualifications') that are not served by T Levels. These will deliver occupational competence<sup>9</sup> in occupations suitable for 16 to 19 year olds which are not covered by T Levels. Like T Levels, these qualifications will be aligned to employer-led occupational standards. We expect fewer qualifications to meet the high-quality bar than are currently available. For a small number of employer-led occupational standards, it may not be possible to deliver occupational competence in a classroom setting. Where there is clear demand from employers for qualifications in these areas, and good prospects for progression, the Institute may still judge it appropriate for a qualification to be approved in these occupational areas.
- **Specialist qualifications.** These qualifications build on and go beyond a standard, enabling students to develop more specialist skills and knowledge than could be acquired through a T Level or occupational-entry qualification alone, helping to protect the skills supply in more specialist industries and adding value to the T Level offer. For example, a qualification in marine engineering, which builds on the Maintenance and Operations Engineering Technician standard covered by the Maintenance, Installation and Repair T Level.

For funding approval in these categories, awarding organisations must submit their qualifications to the approvals process that is to be introduced by the Institute (subject to legislation). Technical qualifications will need to be approved by the Institute in order to be considered for funding approval by ESFA. The Institute's approval will focus on ensuring that qualifications will deliver these skills needed by employers. Ofqual will

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<sup>9</sup> The learner has achieved as many outcomes of the standard as can reasonably be expected in an education setting, and can perform to a level needed to successfully start an entry-level role relevant to the occupation.



continue to have responsibility for awarding body recognition and to provide independent regulation of approved qualifications in live delivery to ensure that standards are maintained. The two bodies will collaborate to ensure that their respective processes and requirements do not impose unnecessary burden on AOs, Ofqual will also advise the Institute during the approval process to ensure that qualifications are robust before approval is granted.

Qualifications that do not fit into these categories or existing qualifications that are not submitted for approval will not be funded for 16 to 19 year olds and will have their approval for funding removed. Where new T Levels are introduced in future, qualifications which overlap with them would have funding approval removed – in the same way as for existing T Levels. To ensure providers and awarding organisations are given as much notice as possible, we will announce any intentions to develop new T Levels and the arrangements for defunding overlapping qualifications before the end of this year. Throughout the qualifications approval process, consideration will also be given to whether there is a need for any new T Levels to be developed to ensure the system remains future-proofed.

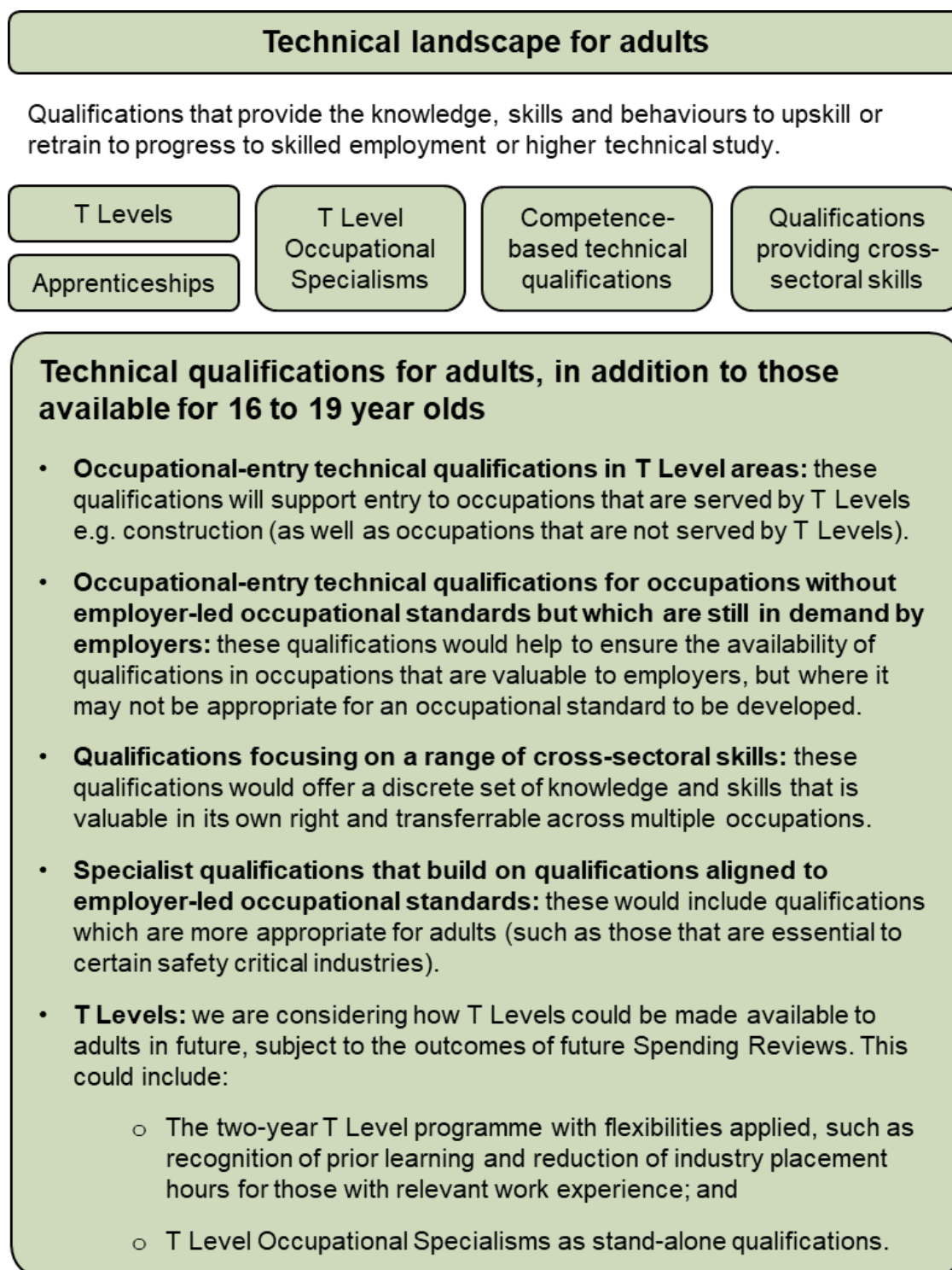
## Technical qualifications for adults

Adults need a broader range of technical qualifications given their more varied backgrounds in terms of skills and experience. Therefore, in addition to the qualifications available for 16 to 19 year old, adults will also have access to:

- **Technical qualifications, of a smaller size to T Levels, that enable entry into occupations that are already served by T Levels.** These qualifications will ensure adults' differing needs, circumstances, and motivations for study are accommodated by recognising that they may not necessarily need to study as broad a qualification as a T Level. These qualifications will therefore be smaller than T Levels. These could include any occupations covered by T Levels, including Data Technician or Senior Production Chef.
- **Technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations without employer-led occupational standards.** We want to ensure the availability of qualifications in occupations that are valuable to employers, but where an employer-led occupational standard has not been developed. Identification of these qualifications may indicate the need for a standard to be developed, ensuring the availability of qualifications in areas that are valuable to employers. In some cases it may not be appropriate for an employer-led occupational standard to be developed, for example if it does not meet the Institute's criteria around the sufficiency of the breadth or depth of the role itself. The Institute is exploring how this is implemented through the occupational maps and approval process.

- **Qualifications which focus on a range of cross-sectoral skills** that are transferrable across multiple occupations and offer a discrete set of knowledge and skills that is valuable in its own right. For example, standalone qualifications focusing on skills such as management, leadership, and digital.
- **Specialist qualifications** which are available to 19+ students due to safety restrictions on those aged 16 to 19 which prevent that age group from taking such qualifications, such as those that are essential to certain safety critical industries.
- **T Levels:** The consultation responses also show in principle support for making T Levels available to adults – but any expansion of T Levels to adults would be subject to the outcomes of future Spending Reviews.

Figure 3: Diagram showing the level 3 technical qualifications that we will fund in future for adults:



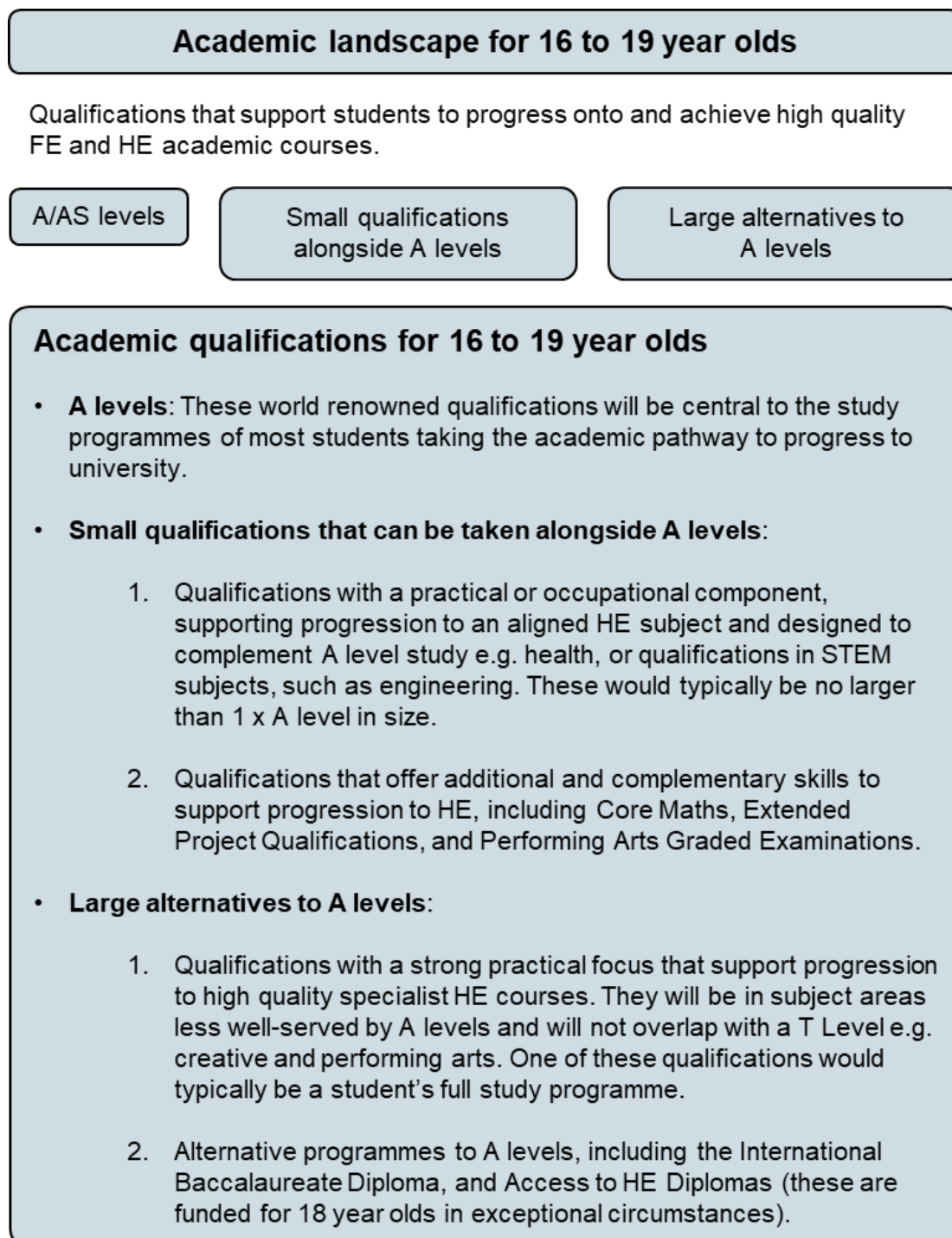
To support adults to access qualifications, including to upskill or retrain alongside existing responsibilities, technical qualifications should be able to be taught in a modular way and relevant prior learning and experience should be recognised. Providers will play an important part in delivering these principles and ensuring qualifications meet the needs of adults, so we will work with them to ensure they are empowered to do so in a way that is viable for them.

To ensure students achieving these qualifications have acquired occupational competence, we will also work with Ofqual and the Institute to ensure the content of these qualifications is assessed in an appropriate way, and engage with relevant stakeholders, including awarding organisations, providers, and employers, so that qualification design and assessment reflects the requirements of different industries and occupations.

# The academic landscape

## Academic qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

Figure 4: Diagram showing the academic qualifications that we will fund in future for 16 to 19 year olds:



For students who want to progress to further academic study, A levels offer excellent preparation. Data shows that students who take A levels are more likely to progress to

HE<sup>10</sup>, less likely to drop out at university<sup>11</sup>, and likely to earn higher wage returns following graduation<sup>12</sup> after controlling for prior attainment.

We believe that by focusing on a smaller range of qualifications, this will lead to better outcomes for students. A levels provide the best preparation for HE in most academic subject areas, and provide access to the best opportunities at the broadest range of HE providers. Students need good study programmes, regardless of their route. Too many current qualifications lead to students' options for HE progression being narrowed, both in terms of the choice of subjects available to them and the type of provider. A levels will be the core of the academic pathway, but we have listened to feedback and understand the need for a wider range of academic qualifications. We recognise the need for a small range of other high quality academic qualifications to sit alongside A levels:

- We will fund a **small range of high-quality qualifications that should typically be taken alongside A levels**. These qualifications would be small in size and no more than 360 guided learning hours, equivalent to one A level. This will enable students to take them as part of a study programme alongside A levels and AS levels. These qualifications will need to demonstrate that they complement A level study and will support progression to high quality HE courses that deliver strong graduate outcomes. They could include subjects with some overlap with A levels or T Levels. This means that there is the potential to have qualifications in STEM subjects and those which align with the Plan for Growth<sup>13</sup>, such as engineering, IT or applied science. This does not mean allowing blanket approval for qualifications in all areas that currently have Applied General qualifications (AGQs). We will set a high bar for demonstrating the value of having an additional subject in the range, particularly if they overlap with A levels, drawing on evidence of successful outcomes for students taking those subjects at the moment and links to further study in important HE subjects.
- We will also fund a **limited range of high quality academic qualifications that can be taken as alternatives to A levels**. We recognise that for a small number of specialist HE courses not well served by A levels, there will be a justification in allowing students to specialise during their 16 to 19 study. Such qualifications will likely include some in, for example, performing arts.

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<sup>10</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>11</sup> [Continuation rates 2010/11 – 2016/17 - Office for Students](#).

<sup>12</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>13</sup> HM Treasury (2021): [Build Back Better: our plan for growth](#).

As mentioned above, we are committed to ensuring that as many young people as possible benefit from our rigorous, employer-led T Levels. They are the gold-standard technical study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds. Therefore, in the new landscape, other large academic qualifications that overlap in content with T Levels, which might include AGQs such as Pearson BTEC and OCR Cambridge Technical qualifications, will no longer receive public funding. We are convinced that this is the correct approach to support successful progression, either to higher education or employment.

This will mean that study programmes made up of alternative academic qualifications such as AGQs will be rare. Most students on the academic pathway who are progressing to HE without any A levels will be those taking large alternative programmes such as in the performing arts. We believe the future landscape will serve all students better by providing high quality qualifications with clear pathways for progression. To support students through the system they will need improved information, advice and guidance as well as transition support. More detail on transition is covered in the “Supporting students to access level 3” section below.

We will continue to fund a small group of existing qualifications. These include:

- **Alternative, high quality programmes:** The International Baccalaureate Diploma and Access to HE (we expect that only a small number of 16 to 19 year olds will take Access to HE qualifications).
- **Small qualifications that offer additional and complementary skills to support progression to HE:** Extended Project qualifications, Advanced Extension Awards, Performing Arts Graded Examinations and Core Maths qualifications.

## Academic qualifications for adults

Adults who want to progress into further study will have access to the same range of academic qualifications as 16 to 19 year olds. This is because these qualifications offer the best preparation to progress onto and successfully complete high quality HE courses.

We will also fund Access to HE Diplomas to support adults who do not have traditional qualifications to progress into HE as well as to reskill.

## Study programmes

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

A levels, T Levels and mixed programmes of study including predominantly A levels will provide students with the right combination of skills and qualifications to progress to their preferred destination. As mentioned above, study programmes consisting entirely of alternative qualifications will be rare. Most students on the academic pathway progressing to HE without any A levels will be those taking large alternative programmes such as in the performing arts. It will be important to prevent students taking combinations of small qualifications designed to be taken alongside A levels that would effectively replicate large AGQ programmes of study. This would be less likely to give students coherent programmes of study that will open up the best possible progression option. We will consider whether specific rules need to be set for the combinations of qualifications that can be taken alongside A levels. The ESFA will set out further detail in our funding approval criteria on how this will work.

In addition, we will continue the discounting process currently used for performance tables to ensure overly similar qualifications taken together do not each attract performance table points. We will monitor progress over time as the reforms implemented by the review take effect.

## Accountability and post-16 performance tables

DfE has responsibility for maintaining the lists of qualifications included in 16-19 performance tables. The new funding approval process will ensure that all qualifications are high quality but while funding approval will be a pre-requisite for inclusion, it will not be sufficient. The Department will consider other factors, including the fit with the Government's broader policy priorities. The final decision on which qualifications should be included in performance tables will continue to lie with the Secretary of State for Education. Full details of the process for adding qualifications to the performance tables, performance points and approach to discounting will be published alongside the funding approval criteria.

## Supporting students to access level 3

To support as many students as possible to progress to level 3 and beyond, we need to ensure that approved qualifications are relevant, necessary and can lead to positive outcomes for *all* students, including those with SEND and those from disadvantaged



backgrounds<sup>14</sup>. We understand that raising the quality bar at level 3 will mean more rigorous and stretching qualifications for some. However we believe this is the right thing to do as raising the quality bar will ensure all students benefit from high quality qualifications which lead to better progression outcomes. We are committed to ensuring that T Levels are accessible to all young people and have introduced flexibilities for SEND students (see questions 17 and 18 in the [Government Response](#)). The T Level Transition Programme will support young people who are not yet ready to progress to a T Level but have the potential to succeed on it after some further preparation.

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<sup>14</sup> When we refer to disadvantage we mean students from lower income / opportunity backgrounds. In our Impact Assessment we use two measures to consider disadvantaged: 1) individuals eligibility for Free School Meals at age 15; 2) individuals placement in the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) banding (5 groups, from the least to most deprived).

## The T Level Transition Programme

The T Level Transition Programme is an exciting, new high-quality level 2 study programme designed to develop the skills, experience, knowledge and behaviours to support progression onto and success on a T Level. It provides a rounded package of preparation including English and maths, relevant technical knowledge and skills, work experience and preparation to support access to a T Level Industry Placement, and wider support and development to help students prepare for a level 3 T Level.

We began a phased implementation of the programme from September 2020 alongside T Levels. It has been fantastic to see the launch of T Level Transition Programmes in Education and Childcare, Digital, and Construction in 32 providers, teaching approximately 950 students across the country.

At Bishop Burton College, a student said:

*“The T-Level transition child care programme has helped me feel extremely confident in myself, I feel the happiest I've felt in years. The course tutors are so unbelievable lovely and are always happy to help, I can't thank them enough for what they have done for me and my fellow pupils. The course is so very intriguing and I want to attend every lesson as they are just so much fun. We all feel that the T-Level transition course has really helped us feel confident to go on to the full T-Level course and ready to one day hopefully become the best primary school teacher I can.”*

At Havant and South Downs College, a digital transition student said:

*“This course has inspired me to believe in girl power, working in an industry that has been more masculine in the past has made me realise I am just as capable of doing it too.”*

A further 40 more institutions are preparing to deliver a T Level Transition Programme, including Health and Science from September 2021. We are working with a small number of volunteer T Level providers to explore different approaches, to help to determine what the final national programme will look like from 2022.<sup>15</sup> As new T Levels are launched from 2022 and 2023 onwards, we expect the number of providers delivering the T Level Transition Programme to increase year on year. Also, providers who want to build on their successful earlier delivery of the Transition Programme will gradually extend their offer to mirror their T Levels offer.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers#next-steps-in-developing-the-t-level-transition-programme>

Students who do not want to progress to T Levels but have the potential to progress to level 3 with additional support, will also need high quality level 2 provision to help them reach level 3. Students in countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, and Singapore have the option of an additional year to support progression from lower to upper secondary education. We are exploring with the sector, through the call for evidence on qualifications at level 2 and below and through direct engagement with providers, how best to support these students.

The biggest gap in provision is for students needing additional support to prepare for A levels, and other academic qualifications that sit alongside them, although there are some examples of effective practice among providers. We will continue to work with providers to explore how we can best prepare these students for academic study at level 3.

Whilst we want as many students as possible to progress to level 3 and beyond, for some students this may not be an appropriate aim, or the best route into their chosen career. We want these students to move into the best possible employment opportunity, including via an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship – one that is skilled, sustainable, and allows for career progression through a system of employer-led occupational standards.

We are grateful for the thoughtful input to our call for evidence on study at level 2 and below. We are currently assessing the feedback and will consult on further proposals for reforming qualifications and study at these levels later this year. As part of this, we are exploring a potential model for 16 to 19 year olds which aims to better prepare individuals for entry into the labour market at level 2, and provide core transferable skills individuals need to unlock successful careers or upskill later in life.

We recognise that some students who are most likely to face challenges in the reformed system are likely to be those with lower attainment in the current system. The system needs to serve these students better. The reforms are intended to support the best outcomes and progression pathways for all at each stage in the system, whether this be at level 2 and below, at level 3, or beyond. Figure 5 illustrates how 16 to 19 year olds' study programmes might change in the future system.

## What the future landscape means for you

The future qualifications landscape will bring changes for young people, adults, post-16 providers, employers and awarding organisations.

Figure 5 (below) illustrates how students' qualification choices and typical routes through the system might change for 16 to 19 year olds. Figure 6 (below) illustrates the range of different technical qualifications that will be available for adults in future and the different groups of adults for whom they are likely to be most suitable.

Diagrams illustrating the next steps and benefits of the reforms for different broad groups for whom the reforms will be most relevant are provided at Annexes A-D. These tables are indicative and do not pre-judge future qualification approvals decisions.

**Figure 5: Possible illustrative routes through the future system for different groups of 16 to 19 year olds**

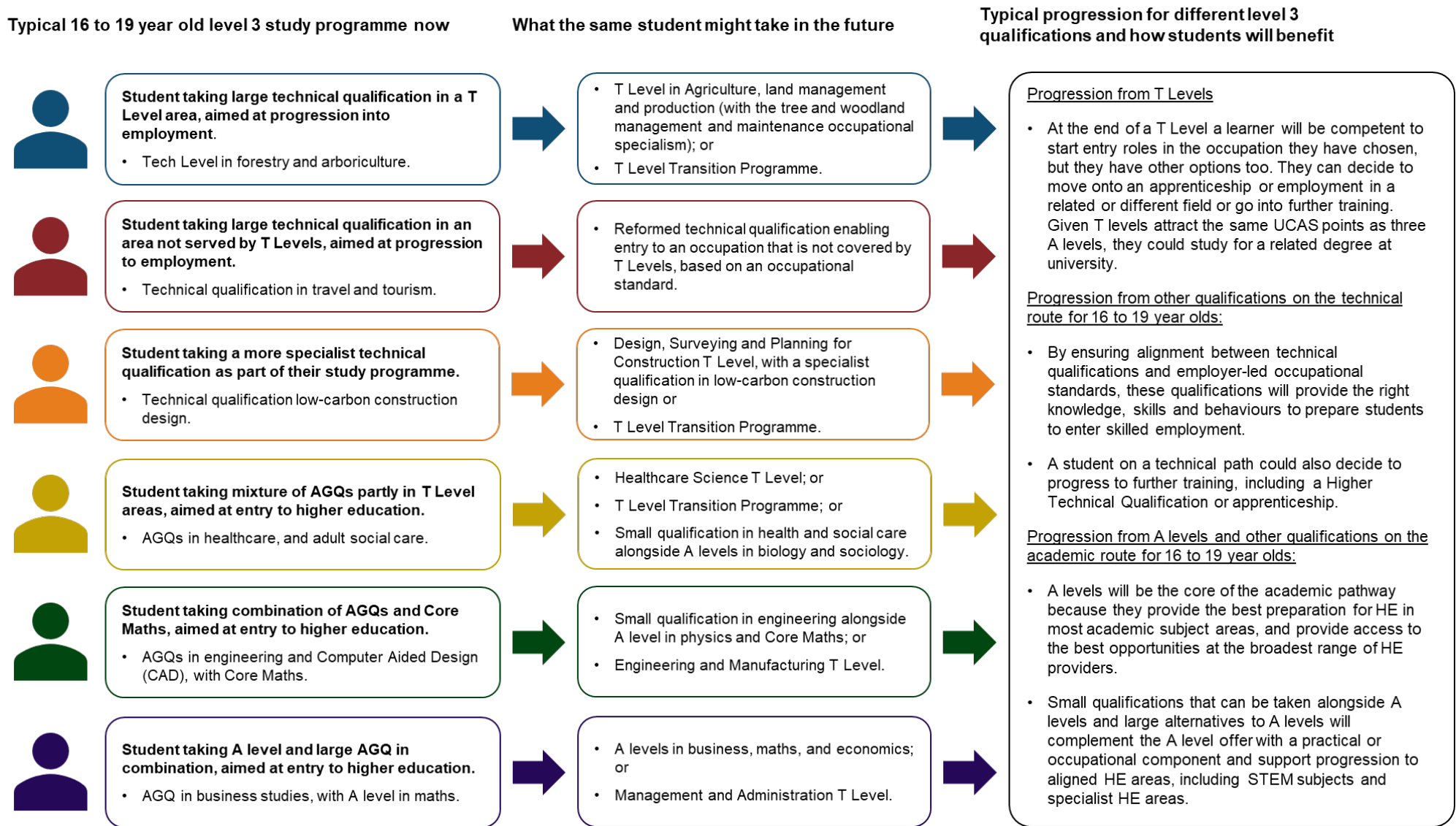


Figure 6: Different types of technical qualifications that will be available for different groups of adults in future

Different aims of adults looking to upskill or retrain at level 3	Different types of qualifications that will be available to them depending on their aims and needs	What the qualification will enable them to do	Who these qualifications are likely to be most suitable for
<p>To retrain to gain the skills needed to change careers.</p>	<p>Qualifications, of a smaller size to T Levels, supporting entry to occupations that are served by T Levels and occupations that are outside the T Level framework.</p>	<p><b>Entry to an occupation:</b> the student can perform to a level needed to successfully start a role relevant to the occupation and is well placed to reach occupational competence after a period of on-the-job experience.</p>	<p>These are likely to be most suitable for adults who are unable to commit to a two-year programme and have existing learning and experience that might make some of the broader T Level content unnecessary. These alternatives will still enable adults to develop and demonstrate occupational competence as they would if taking the T Level.</p>
	<p>T Level Occupational Specialisms as stand-alone qualifications.</p>		
	<p>The two-year T Level programme with flexibilities applied, such as recognition of prior learning and reduction of industry placement hours for those with relevant work experience.</p>	<p><b>Entry to an occupation</b> (as above)</p>	<p>This full two-year programme is likely to be most suitable for younger adults who are less likely to have existing learning and experience.</p>
<p>To learn specialist skills to support progression in their current role.</p>	<p>Specialist qualifications that build on qualifications aligned to employer-led standards, including in areas which are more appropriate for adults (such as those that are essential to certain safety critical industries).</p>	<p>An enhanced level of proficiency building on and deepening knowledge and skills in an occupational standard.</p>	<p>These qualifications are likely to benefit adults looking to upskill within their existing careers and will help to protect the skills supply into more specialist industries or occupations.</p>
<p>To gain additional skills that will enable them to perform additional tasks in their current role.</p>	<p>Qualifications focusing on a range of cross-sectoral skills that are transferrable across multiple occupations and offer a discrete set of knowledge and skills that is valuable in its own right. For example, standalone qualifications focusing on skills such as management, leadership, and digital.</p>	<p>These qualifications allow the student to perform a specific set of functions in the workplace and may be transferrable across multiple occupations.</p>	<p>These qualifications are likely to be most suitable for adults who want to upskill in employment, gaining a discrete set of knowledge and skills that are transferrable across multiple occupations.</p>

## Timeline

The process of reforming our post-16 system has been in the making for a number of years. Reform of A levels started almost ten years ago, the Wolf Review of post-16 education was published in 2011 and the Sainsbury Review, with its ambitious vision for technical education, was published in 2016. Implementing the changes being made as part of this review of qualifications is the next step in delivering the system that the country needs.

Key milestones in the delivery of these reforms, including the removal of funding from existing qualifications and introduction of reformed qualifications is provided below. A timeline showing the introduction of reformed qualifications alongside rollout of T Levels is provided in Annex E.

### Key milestones

We will:

- Roll out T Levels in four waves, with wave 1 already being taught in selected providers, and 10 T Levels on track to be available in over 100 providers from September 2021.
- Remove funding approval from qualifications with no publicly funded enrolments in August 2021<sup>16</sup>.
- Remove funding approval from qualifications with no or low publicly funded enrolments in August 2022<sup>17</sup>.
- Remove funding approval from existing technical qualifications that overlap with wave 1 and 2 T Levels and we plan to publish a finalised list of these qualifications before the end of academic year 2021/22. We will also approve for funding technical qualifications which align to standards in the Digital route and enable entry into Digital occupations for both 16 – 19 and adults

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<sup>16</sup> These are qualifications which had been approved for funding and available for at least 3 years but which had no publicly funded enrolments. For those we plan to remove public funding from on 1 August 2021 these will have had zero enrolments in academic year 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18.

<sup>17</sup> These are qualifications which had been approved for funding and available for at least 3 years but which had low (1-99) or no publicly funded enrolments. For those we plan to remove public funding from on 1 August 2022 we will remove funding approval from qualifications which had low (1 to 99) or zero enrolments in 2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19.

that have been approved through the new approvals process **from August 2023**.

- Remove funding approval from existing technical qualifications that overlap with wave 3 and 4 T Levels and we plan to publish a finalised list of these qualifications before the end of academic year 2022/23. We will also approve for funding the relevant technical qualifications (those aligning to remaining wave 1 and 2 routes, as well as Engineering and Manufacturing route) for both 16 to 19 year olds and adults that have been approved through the new approvals process **from 1 August 2024**.
- Make available reformed academic qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds and adults; and remove funding for qualifications that do not have a place in the new landscape **from 1 August 2024**.
- Approve remaining academic and technical qualifications which align to waves 3 and 4, and other outstanding qualifications for both 16 – 19 year olds and adults for funding through the new approvals process for delivery from 1 August 2025.



## Delivering quality

To make a success of a new qualifications system we need responsive post-16 providers supported by effective accountability, governance, and intervention. Our vision for this was set out in the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper. This will provide the foundation for managing a changing curriculum and patterns of student study.

It needs to go hand in hand with outstanding teaching. Schools and colleges are already beginning to teach T Levels and as these changes are phased in we will support them to deliver new and reformed qualifications across the post-16 landscape.

Through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, we are proposing to extend the powers of the Institute so that it may approve a broader range of technical qualifications. The legislation will give the Institute the ability to specify new categories of qualification and approve qualifications within those categories. This allows scope for the types of qualification at level 3 that will sit alongside T Levels in the reformed landscape. Subject to passage through Parliament, we expect these powers to be in place following Royal Assent in Spring 2022. The legislation will also give the Institute a new oversight role for technical education and training, ensuring the coherence across the skills system.

In addition, the Bill will embed the collaborative relationship between the Institute and Ofqual for technical qualification approval and regulation. This will streamline and reinforce the long-term stability of the regulatory framework for technical qualifications. Ofqual will continue to recognise and regulate awarding organisations in line with their statutory objectives and duties; the Institute will continue to bring an employer voice to bear across a significantly broader range of technical education qualifications through an expanded approval remit. Ofqual and the Institute will work in partnership with other public bodies as appropriate, to form an end-to-end system for the long-term assurance of technical qualifications. The Institute will begin to set out these arrangements in more detail presently.

Ofqual, the Institute and ESFA will be implementing a new approvals process, establishing an approach that is coherent and ensures funded level 3 qualifications have a distinct purpose, are truly necessary in the new simplified system, support meaningful progression, and are high quality. For technical qualifications, the Institute will lead an approvals process, setting criteria for the various technical qualification categories. For academic qualifications, ESFA will set criteria to ensure all qualifications approved for funding are necessary alongside A levels. Ofqual will provide advice about quality to both organisations. The ESFA will continue to have overall responsibility for funding decisions, based on its own criteria, and for technical qualifications, will only fund those that have been approved by the Institute.

Criteria for approval of technical qualifications for delivery from 2023 will be published later in the year following engagement and testing with awarding organisations and

employers by the Institute. A timeline showing the approval of reformed qualifications is provided at Annex E.

## **Support for delivery of T Levels and industry placements**

We recognise the scale and ambitious pace of our reforms will bring challenges, including the scale-up of industry placements as more T Levels are introduced. We will support schools, colleges and other providers to deliver T Levels nationwide in time for the removal of public funding for overlapping technical qualifications. This includes dedicated support to help providers plan for T Levels delivery, a specific learning and development programme for T Level providers and a dedicated capital fund, with over £250 million capital committed so far. We have also provided £40 million to support teachers and leaders with the delivery of T Levels through the T Level Professional Development offer, which offers free support for T Level providers. We will monitor regional take up of T Levels to ensure that they are on offer in all areas when overlapping qualifications are defunded.

Industry placements are a key component of a T Level and are also what sets T Levels apart from previous classroom based technical qualifications. The aims of an industry placement are to develop and put into practice up-to-date technical skills at level 3, develop employability skills, give students credibility with prospective employers and provide opportunities for employers to develop their local talent pipeline.

This is why we have allocated nearly £165 million to providers through the Capacity and Delivery Fund since the 2018/19 academic year, to help providers establish the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver industry placements, leading to almost 30,000 placements being delivered. We have also published industry placement delivery guidance and a support package to help employers deliver high quality placements. In addition, we have appointed the Association of Colleges to support providers with the delivery of high-quality placements, and the National Apprenticeship Service is providing a referral and matching service to connect employers with T Level providers. We have also recently launched a short-term financial incentive scheme to support employers to deliver T Level industry placements for the first two T Level student cohorts.<sup>18</sup> Each placement can attract a £1000 incentive payment for placements that start before the 31 July 2022. It is critical to the success of the T Level programme that we bring employers on board to deliver industry placements, post Covid-19 and for employers to embed placements into their future workforce strategy as T Levels scale up. With all this support available, and with the determination of providers to deliver placements despite the challenges that the pandemic has brought, we are confident that every T Level student,

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<sup>18</sup> For further detail, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-incentive-payments-for-employers-offering-a-t-level-industry-placement>

including those who started in September 2020, will benefit from a high-quality industry placement.

# Annexes

## Annex A: Timeline showing next steps and benefits of the reforms for a young person or parent/carer

You are a young person or parent/carer...

...what happens now?

### Autumn 2021

- Wave 2 T Levels first available to take for students completing GCSEs in summer 2021\*.
- You will be able to respond to the planned government consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below.

\*Subject to provider eligibility to deliver T Levels.

### Autumn 2022

- Wave 3 T Levels first available to take for students completing GCSEs in summer 2022.

### Autumn 2023

- Wave 4 T Levels first available to take for students completing GCSEs in summer 2023, and introduction of reformed technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations in the Digital route.

### Autumn 2024

- National rollout of T Levels to all providers and introduction of most new, reformed level 3 technical and academic qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds.

### How will I benefit from these reforms?

Our reforms will make sure every student has the opportunity to gain the skills needed to enter employment or progress to higher levels of education. The new, high quality system will strengthen the links between classroom and workplace, with technical qualifications based on employer led standards and academic qualifications giving the best preparation to do well at university. The choices available after completing GCSEs or other level 2 qualifications will be simpler, offering clear progression routes that will help them realise their ambitions.

## Annex B: Timeline showing next steps and benefits of the reforms for a provider

**You are a post-16 provider...**

**...what happens now?**

### **Autumn 2021**

- Funding to be withdrawn for qualifications with no enrolments from 1 August 2021.
- Approved T Level providers able to deliver Wave 2 T Levels.
- The Institute will publish criteria for 2023 technical qualifications in November 2021.
- You will be able to respond to the planned government consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below.

### **Autumn 2022**

- Funding to be withdrawn for qualifications with no or low enrolments from 1 August 2022.
- Approved T Level providers able to deliver Wave 3 T Levels.
- Further guidance, qualification approval criteria and funding criteria will be published in 2022 for qualifications approved for delivery from 2024 and beyond.

### **Autumn 2023**

- Funding to be withdrawn for qualifications that overlap with Wave 1 and 2 T Levels from 1 August 2023.
- All providers with Ofsted ratings of 'Good and Outstanding' can deliver all planned T Levels, (other providers are able to deliver T Levels launched in 2020 and 2021).
- Introduction of reformed technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations in the Digital route.

### **Autumn 2024**

- Funding to be withdrawn for qualifications that overlap with Wave 3 and 4 T Levels from 1 August 2024.
- National rollout of all planned T Levels, which can be delivered by all providers irrespective of Ofsted rating, and introduction of most, new reformed level 3 technical and academic qualifications.

**How will I benefit from these reforms?**

From 2024, T Levels and A levels will be the qualifications of choice for classroom based study. Simplifying the system will make it easier to navigate and linking qualifications to employer led standards will give providers confidence they are developing an offer that meets the local area and student needs.

## Annex C: Timeline showing next steps and benefits of the reforms for an adult

You are an adult thinking about improving your skills...

...what happens now?

### Summer 2021

- If you don't already have a level 3 qualification, you can take advantage of the [free courses and qualifications for adults \(19+\)](#) available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

### Autumn 2021

- You will be able to respond to the planned government consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below.
- DfE will continue to work with stakeholders to explore delivery models for T Levels for adults.

### Autumn 2023

- Introduction of new, reformed technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations in the Digital route.

### Autumn 2024

- National rollout of T Levels to all providers\*
- Introduction of most new, reformed level 3 technical and academic qualifications for adults.

\*Availability of T Levels for adults is subject to the outcomes of future spending reviews.

### How will I benefit from these reforms?

Our reforms will ensure that adults have access to high quality qualifications that are flexible enough to meet their varying needs. Recognising adults are not typically undertaking full time study, we propose that technical qualifications allow for modular delivery and recognise prior learning. Technical qualifications designed for adults will be aligned to employer led standards, supporting adults to upskill, retrain and progress into employment or further study. These qualifications will give adults the skills employers need.

## Annex D: Timeline showing next steps and benefits of the reforms for an employer

**You are an employer...**

**...what happens now?**

### **Autumn 2021**

- You will be able to respond to the planned government consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below.

### **Summer 2022**

- First students completing Wave 1 T Levels available to hire.

### **Summer 2023**

- First students completing Wave 2 T Levels available to hire.

### **Autumn 2023**

- Introduction of reformed technical qualifications enabling entry into occupations in the Digital route.

### **Summer 2024**

- First students completing Wave 3 T Levels available to hire.

### **Autumn 2024**

- National rollout of T Levels to all post-16 providers and introduction of most new, reformed level 3 technical and academic qualifications.

### **Summer 2025**

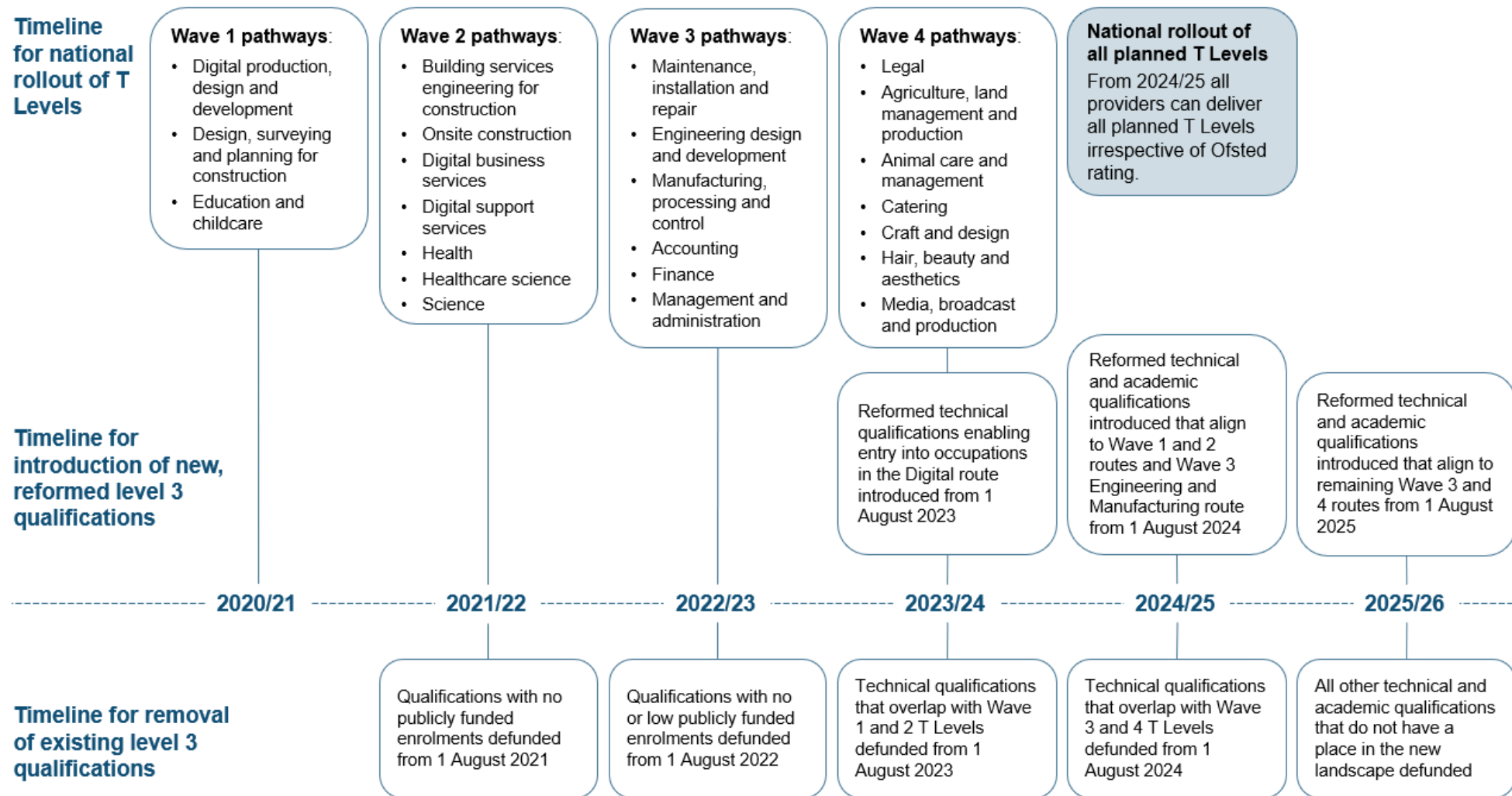
- First students completing Wave 4 T Levels available to hire.

### **How will I benefit from these reforms?**

Many employers struggle to find people with the skills they need or understand exactly what skills and experience a candidate will have gained from a particular qualification. Our reforms will address this, developing a system based on employer led standards and occupational competence. The high quality streamlined qualifications offer will be easier to understand and give young people the skills, knowledge and behaviours employers need. A flexible system for adults will support retraining and upskilling, enabling more adults to progress to higher technical education where many of our skills gaps are.



## Annex E: Timeline showing the introduction of reformed qualifications alongside rollout of T Levels



Guidance for post-16 providers on the next steps towards delivery of T Levels is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers>.



Department  
for Education

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