



Department
for Education

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

April 2024

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Updates to this document

April 2024 update

This document has been updated to:

- Reflect the latest position on the removal of 16-19 funding for qualifications assessed as overlapping with Waves 3 and 4 T Levels

Set out when we expect to publish the lists of qualifications approved in cycle 1 of the new funding approval process at levels 3 and 2

- Make a correction to the section on cross-cutting qualifications to refer to Total Qualification Time (TQT) instead of Guided Learning Hours (GLH).
- Clarify that under the SSA Art, Media and Publishing, that we will not approve for public funding large alternative academic qualifications in the subcategory of Media and Communications. This is to avoid potential overlap with T Levels.
- Provide additional information on cycle 2 of the reforms and, specifically, on qualifications at level 2 that support progression to further study at level 3.
- Provide further information on the reformed personal, social and employability qualifications which will be reformed in cycle 3.

Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of reforms to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below that are currently taking place, including changes to the criteria against which qualifications will be assessed for funding approval, the different categories of qualifications at levels 2 and 3, the subjects that will be considered for funding, and the implications for the availability of qualifications that will be publicly funded in England.

It is primarily aimed at providers of further education and other interested stakeholders. Awarding organisations can find information on the process for submitting qualifications for funding approval, including submission windows for the different levels and cycles on the [Single access point](#) on gov.uk.

This document is not a replacement for tailored support for students. In addition to careers programmes delivered through schools and colleges, we will publish detailed information, advice and guidance in relation to 16-19 study programmes as we build towards 2025 when the reforms to the qualifications system take effect.

The government is clear that the purpose of post-16 education is to support people to move into high-skilled jobs, either directly or through progression into good quality higher education courses. We have already reformed A levels, and we are bringing on stream world-class T Levels. Following successive reviews which highlighted the complexity and variable quality of the current system, the government is in the process of reforming post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below. This process is divided into three phases.

Phase 1 – removing funding at levels 3 and below due to low or no enrolments

In Phase 1, we began streamlining the offer by removing funding from qualifications with sustained low or no publicly funded enrolments in England. This resulted in the removal of public funding approval from around 5,500 qualifications at levels 3, 2 and below. This work was completed in August 2022.

Phase 2 – removing funding from level 3 qualifications due to overlap with T Levels

The second phase focusses on removing 16-19 funding from level 3 qualifications that overlap with T Levels, which are the core of the new technical education offer at level 3. Removing funding from technical qualifications which overlap with T Levels will ensure young people can feel confident that they are studying technical qualifications which will prepare them for jobs in their chosen occupation. The breadth and depth of T Levels gives students a thorough understanding of the sector and the skills needed to work in specific occupations, as well as an industry placement which gives them valuable experience. Last summer's T Level results show students are succeeding in these new, high-quality qualifications, with more than 90% of students achieving a pass and the majority achieving a merit or above. Students have gone on from T Levels to outstanding destinations, including moving directly into employment, undertaking higher apprenticeships, or progressing into higher education.

T Levels are being scaled up in a managed rollout, with 18 subjects currently available at over 200 providers across England. A qualification overlaps with a T Level if it is a technical qualification with similar outcomes to those set out in a standard covered by a T Level and aims to support students into employment in the same occupational area. We have now published the final list of qualifications that will have funding removed on 1 August 2024 because they overlap with waves 1 and 2 T Levels, the final list of qualifications that will have funding removed on 1 August 2025 because they overlap with wave 3 T Levels, and the provisional list of qualifications that will also have funding removed on 1 August 2025 because they overlap with wave 4 T Levels. We will publish the final wave 4 overlap list following the opportunity for awarding organisations to appeal.

Phase 3 – introducing new funding approval criteria for technical and non-technical qualifications at level 3 and below

Phase 3 of the reforms concerns the introduction of new funding approval criteria for qualifications in scope of the review at levels 3 and below.

These assessment criteria will be applied through a new, integrated funding approval process in which the Department for Education (DfE), the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) all have a key role. The new funding approval criteria will improve the quality of publicly funded qualifications at levels 3 and below, meaning that students, parents and educators will be assured that all qualifications approved for public funding at level 3 and below are those required to deliver the skills of the future and will lead to good outcomes.

The DfE will approve technical and non-technical qualifications for funding in England.

Non-technical qualifications are qualifications which are not based on the occupational standards. These include:

- alternative academic qualifications at level 3
- technical progression qualifications at level 2, which support progression to a level 3 technical qualification
- academic progression qualifications at level 2, which support progression to a level 3 academic qualification
- T Level foundation qualifications

These qualifications will be taught from:

- 1 August 2025, for qualifications in cycle 1 of our approval process
- 1 August 2026, for qualifications in cycle 2 of our approval process.

As part of this final phase, IfATE will take on responsibility for approving new and revised technical qualifications at level 3 and level 2, requiring them to be linked much more closely to employers' needs and setting specific criteria that they will need to meet to improve quality and outcomes.

Non-technical qualifications and qualifications at level 1 and entry level will need to be approved by DfE against quality and progression criteria.

Both sets of qualifications will need to meet regulations set by Ofqual.

At level 3, overlap with A levels and T Levels will only be permitted in certain circumstances for 16-19 funding, which are set out in the rest of this guide. Ofqual will provide feedback for consideration by DfE and IfATE when deciding whether a qualification should be approved.

Qualifications which are approved for public funding will also have some specific requirements around titling, so that students and education professionals will be able to identify those qualifications which have been approved for funding under this new, rigorous process. These requirements are set out in this guide.

Reformed qualifications will, in future, be approved for three years, rather than one year as is presently the case, unless a change in circumstances necessitates an earlier review. This will provide greater certainty and stability to providers of further education. Reformed qualifications which have been approved under this new process will start to become available for first teach from 1 August 2025, and we expect to publish a list of approved qualifications at level 3 in May 2024 and at level 2 in July 2024.

The process of submitting qualifications for approval will be clear, simple and accessible, with one submission on GOV.UK for consideration by the three organisations involved in the assessment – DfE, IfATE and Ofqual.

Transitioning to the Advanced British Standard

On 4 October 2023, the Prime Minister announced his long-term plan for introducing the Advanced British Standard.

The Advanced British Standard will be a new baccalaureate-style qualification for students aged 16-18. It will bring academic and technical pathways together into a single framework, within which students will be able to study a technical route based on the T Level model, academic subjects, or a combination of both.

This new framework will increase the number of taught hours for students to at least 1475 over two years – an additional 195 hours for most students. This will support both breadth and depth of study, ensuring students are well-equipped to go on to higher education, higher technical study, apprenticeships or employment. Increasing taught time will also benefit the most disadvantaged students, who are less likely than their peers to have access to the resources they need for independent study.

The Advanced British Standard will also bring us closer in line with leading world economies where students study maths and the native language until the end of compulsory education.

The current reforms to post-16 education, on which the government has consulted extensively, are essential to ensure that reformed publicly funded qualifications are necessary, high quality and lead to good outcomes, and that the system is as streamlined as possible ahead of these longer-term reforms.

The Advanced British Standard is an ambitious, long-term reform programme which will take a decade to deliver in full. The DfE [consultation](#) on the Advanced British Standard closed on 20 March 2024, a response will follow later this year. ,

Organisations should prepare to implement qualifications reforms as planned.

Level 3

From 2025, reformed qualifications at level 3 will be approved as either technical, or alternative academic qualifications.

Awarding organisations are required to submit reformed qualifications for assessment against the new approval criteria, to ensure that they are necessary, have a clear purpose and lead to meaningful progression outcomes. The submission window for technical and alternative academic qualifications that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2025 (cycle 1) closed on 31 July 2023. We expect to publish a list of approved level 3 qualifications in cycle 1 routes in May 2024, giving providers over 12 months' notice of the changes. Reformed qualifications that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2026 (cycle 2) will be submitted for funding approval in June 2024, and a list of approved cycle 2 qualifications will be published on gov.uk the following year. A full timeline is at [Annex A: key dates](#).

Example: large AGQs in both Travel and Tourism and Uniformed Protective Services will remain funded until 2026, after which qualifications in these subjects will either be approved as small alternative academic qualifications, or technical qualifications mapped against relevant level 3 occupational standards.

We will continue to fund new starts on currently funded qualifications until the point at which they are no longer funded. For qualifications that overlap with T Levels, this means that providers can enrol students on to these qualifications until the day prior to funding is withdrawn. For example, for qualifications that are being defunded on 1 August 2024, students can be enrolled up until 31 July 2024 and we will fund the course until completion. The same applies for qualifications being replaced under phase 3 of the reforms. We will publish a list of qualifications that are being defunded in cycle 1 (1 August 2025) in May this year.

Technical Qualifications

Technical qualifications will be based on the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in the occupational standards co-designed with employers and approved by IfATE. This will ensure they are linked much more closely to employers' needs and meet specific criteria to improve quality and learner outcomes. Technical qualifications must not overlap with T Levels to be approved for funding in the 16-19 offer. IfATE's [occupational maps](#) provide greater detail on technical routes, including the occupations IfATE recognise and the occupational standards available at each level. More information on the approval of technical qualifications can be found in the [Approval of qualifications from 2025](#) section of this guide.

Alternative Academic Qualifications

From 2025 onwards, alternative academic qualifications at level 3 will be approved for funding in a range of strategically important subjects such as STEM and those supporting entry into NHS careers. These qualifications are an important part of how we will support diverse student needs and deliver skills required by the economy in areas that A levels and T Levels do not cover. Where Ministers have decided to no longer fund a subject, this is because the subject is more suited to a technical qualification, there is already an associated A level, or because the qualification does not lead to good progression outcomes. More information on the approval of alternative academic qualifications can also be found in the [Approval of qualifications from 2025 section](#) of this guide.

Alternative academic qualifications will be approved in two groups – large (720-1080 guided learning hours) or small (150-420 guided learning hours). Some subjects where large qualifications have previously been permitted will now also be restricted to small qualifications (the size of one A level). This is where Ministers have decided these subjects would be better studied as part of a mixed study programme alongside A Levels, rather than on their own.

Alternative academic qualifications must demonstrate a clear link to related higher education courses and will be assessed by the DfE against the new funding approval criteria. More information on the range of subjects in which alternative academic qualifications will be approved can be found in the [Future funding of level 3 alternative academic qualifications](#) section of this guide.

Level 2 and below

We are reforming qualifications at level 2 and below to address the complexity and varied quality of the offer and to ensure that all qualifications support good outcomes for students. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3 qualifications and apprenticeships and, for some, to employment at level 2. On 18 October 2022, we published the [government response to the level 2 and](#)

[below consultation](#). This confirmed the direction of the reforms, including the qualification groups we will fund in future. We said that:

- At level 2, qualifications should either support progression to further study or work-based training at level 3 or lead directly into skilled employment in sectors and occupations where level 2 skills are needed.
- As at level 3, the majority of technical qualifications at level 2 should be aligned to employer-led occupational standards – the same standards that already underpin T Levels and apprenticeships.
- For learners studying at level 1 and entry level, the focus for most people should be either progression onto a technical qualification at level 2 or 3 that leads to employment in a skilled occupation, or progression to a work-based pathway such as an apprenticeship or supported internship.
- Basic skills qualifications in English, maths and digital, as well as ESOL qualifications would also continue to play a vital role.
- We recognised that some learners will go into employment without reaching level 2, and that a small minority will be aiming first and foremost for independent living. In future, personal, social and employability skills qualifications should be designed to meet national standards, to ensure greater consistency and quality.

Qualifications at level 2 and below are an important part of our further education landscape – not just for their value to the economy but also for their potential to improve social mobility, inclusion, and lifelong learning. We recognise the diversity of the cohort studying at level 2 and below. Individuals who take these qualifications will have very different backgrounds, achievements, needs, aspirations and motivations. They are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have special educational needs or disabilities. It is vital that these students can access, and benefit from, high-quality provision that provides the support they need to unlock their potential and offers excellent progression opportunities. Our proposed landscape will serve all students better.

Level 2 and below qualifications will also need to meet new quality criteria to be approved for future funding. This will include a requirement for qualifications leading to skilled employment at level 2 to align to employer-led occupational standards, thereby ensuring they deliver the skills that employers need.

The submission window for technical qualifications that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2025 (cycle 1) closed on 24 November 2023. A list of qualifications that will be available for first teach in cycle 1 (from 1 August 2025) will be published on gov.uk in July 2024, giving providers over 12 months' notice of the changes. Reformed qualifications that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2026 (cycle 2) will be submitted for funding approval in October 2024, and a list of approved cycle 2

qualifications will be published on gov.uk in July the following year. A full timeline is at [Annex A: key dates](#).

Scope of the review

All level 3 and below qualifications which DfE approves for post-16 funding offers (including Advanced Learner Loans) are subject to review. The only exceptions are the following qualifications that we have already confirmed, following public consultation, will continue to be funded.

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

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

Apprenticeships and the 14 to 16 offer (Key Stage 4) are also out of scope of the review. This is because apprenticeships are funded differently, using the apprenticeship levy, and while qualifications may be mandated or delivered as part of these programmes, they are not required to go through a separate approval process and are not funded on a stand-alone basis. As the review is focussed on post-16 provision, qualifications approved solely for pre-16 delivery are not part of the review. If an awarding organisation wants a Key Stage 4 qualification to be considered for funding post-16, it will need to be submitted through the new post-16 approvals process. The decision post-16 will not affect any decisions for delivery at KS4.

Mayoral combined authorities (including combined county authorities and county deals)

² The Access to HE Diploma will continue to be regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

and the Mayor of London have devolved adult education functions, funded by the adult education budget (AEB).

Approval of qualifications from 2025

To ensure that all publicly funded qualifications at level 3 and below are necessary, have a clear purpose and lead to good progression outcomes, we are introducing new criteria that technical and non-technical qualifications will need to meet in order to be approved for funding from 2025. These criteria have been consulted on by DfE and IfATE, building on earlier consultations around the policy principles.

DfE, IfATE and Ofqual will all have an important and complementary role to play in reviewing the qualifications, with DfE making the final decision on funding approval: DfE providing assurance of the quality and relevance of academic qualifications and all qualifications at level 1 and entry level, as well as overall oversight of funding approval; IfATE harnessing employer expertise to ensure qualifications deliver skills that are needed in the economy; and Ofqual continuing to regulate qualifications on behalf of students of all ages.

In order to minimise bureaucracy, and avoid submission of the same information multiple times, we have developed an integrated approval process across the three organisations. Awarding organisations will submit qualifications via the [Single access point](#) on gov.uk. Awarding organisations will only need to submit each qualification once.

We are simplifying funding approval cycles, moving away from monthly application windows and 12-month approval periods. Reformed qualifications will, in future, be approved for three years, unless a change in circumstances necessitates an earlier review. This will provide more time for awarding organisations to make informed business planning decisions and will offer greater certainty and clarity for providers to plan their curriculums. Flexibility will be built into the system to allow for more agile funding decisions, for example, in response to a new or emerging skills priority.

Although there will be aspects of the integrated approval process which will be new, there will also be aspects that many awarding organisations will be familiar with. Where there are new approval areas to navigate, there will be support in place. We strongly encourage awarding organisations to engage with their centres as early as possible regarding the qualifications which have and have not been submitted for funding approval. This will be key in supporting centres to plan and prepare, in advance of the list of approved qualifications being published.

Approval of level 3 qualifications from 2025 – an overview and timeline

The process of reviewing alternative academic and technical qualifications for funding from 2025 onwards will be phased across two cycles, set out below.

Cycle 1 – level 3 qualifications funded from 2025

In Cycle 1, we will approve level 3 alternative academic and technical qualifications in subjects in the following occupational routes that align with waves 1 and 2 of T Level roll-out:

- Construction and the Built Environment
- Digital
- Education and Early Years
- Engineering and Manufacturing³
- Health and Science

Level 3 technical qualifications will be considered for approval in Cycle 1 where they cover occupations in the above routes⁴. For level 3 alternative academic qualifications, the subjects associated with each cycle that will be approved for funding are listed in the [future funding of level 3 alternative academic qualifications](#) section of this guide.

The government has decided to rule out certain subjects for approval as level 3 alternative academic qualifications, either because they are more suited to a technical qualification, or because there is an associated A level or T Level. This is to help providers understand more easily the qualifications that may be approved for funding as we implement the policy established through our public consultations, and support curriculum planning. More information on the subjects where qualifications will not be considered for funding is included in [table 2](#).

Awarding organisations had until 31 July 2023 to submit level 3 qualifications in cycle 1 routes and subjects that they wish to be considered for funding from 2025-26. These qualifications are currently being assessed. DfE will publish an approved list of cycle 1 qualifications that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2025 on gov.uk in May 2024. Awarding organisations will then have the opportunity to request a procedural

³ Though not a wave 1 or 2 T Level, as a priority sector it is important to ensure all qualifications in this sector are high quality.

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

review and any changes to the list will be published in July 2024. A more detailed timeline is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

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

Cycle 2 – level 3 qualifications funded from 2026

This cycle will cover all other routes that have not been included in cycle 1, excluding cross-cutting qualifications, which will now be assessed in cycle 3. Cycle 2 includes:

- other level 3 technical qualifications which were not included in the routes listed under cycle 1, including technical occupational progression qualifications and employer proposed qualifications for adults. A full list of the routes available in cycle 2 are detailed in the technical section below.
- alternative academic qualifications in sector subject areas associated with the remaining occupational routes, or that do not map to a route; and
- alternative academic qualifications in sector subject areas that do not align to occupational routes, such as performing arts.

A breakdown of the approval process sequence for each cycle can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). Awarding organisations will submit level 3 qualifications for cycle 2 in June 2024. The cycle 2 process will culminate in a list of qualifications which will be funded from the 2026 to 2027 academic year being published in May 2025.

A timeline showing the full list of qualification types and subjects in each cycle can be found at [Annex A](#).

Awarding organisations will also be offered the opportunity to submit qualifications in cycle 1 routes in cycle 2, where they failed to submit them in cycle 1, in recognition of the new funding approval process. Qualifications in cycle 1 routes that are submitted in cycle 2 will not receive funding until 1 August 2026, in line with other cycle 2 routes. Existing qualifications at level 2 and level 3 that align with the routes and qualification categories being considered in cycle 1, will have funding approval removed from 1 August 2025. We will also provide an update to this document when the department has provided further details on the delivery of T Levels in Hairdressing, Barbering and Beauty Therapy, and Catering.

Cycle 3 – level 3 qualifications funded from 2027

In cycle 3 we will consider **cross-cutting skills** qualifications in all routes.

Cross cutting qualifications when considered as part of cycle 3, will need to be less than 359 guided learning hours. Ahead of this, qualifications considered to be cross-cutting and that are larger than 359 guided learning hours will have their funding removed on 1 August 2026. This is to reduce the potential for large cross-cutting qualifications to duplicate content that is contained in T Levels.

Qualifications that are less than 359 guided learning hours will have funding rolled over until 2027.

What will not be funded

Table 2 below sets out the subjects where qualifications will not be approved for public funding from 2025.

Qualification type	Subjects	Funded for 16-19	Funded for adults
Large technical qualifications	Occupations covered by T Levels	No	Yes
Large alternative academic qualifications	Subjects where there are T Levels, such as science or business (see Annex B)	No	No
Large alternative academic qualifications	Subjects better served by technical qualifications or apprenticeships such as transportation operations or warehousing and distribution	No	No
Small alternative academic qualifications	Subjects where there are A levels, with the exception of science, IT, art and design, music and sport ⁵ .	No	No

Table 2: occupations and subjects where qualifications will not be approved

⁵ A full list of the subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding approval is provided in Table 3.

Future funding of level 3 alternative academic qualifications

Qualifications are defined as being academic if their primary purpose is to support students to progress into higher education. A levels are world class qualifications and provide the best preparation for higher education in most academic subject areas. This is evidenced by data showing that students who take A levels are more likely to progress to higher education⁶, less likely to repeat their first year or drop out of university^{7,8}, and likely to earn higher wage returns following graduation⁹ after controlling for prior attainment. That is why A levels will continue to be at the core of 16-19 academic study programmes, and why the ABS will bring academic and technical pathways together into a single framework, within which students will be able to study a technical route based on the T Level model, academic subjects, or a combination of both.

As set out in our July 2021 policy statement, the government recognises the need for large and small alternative academic qualifications in a limited range of subjects. By “large” we mean between 720 and 1080 guided learning hours or the size of 2 or 3 A levels, and by “small” we mean between 150 and 430 guided learning hours, or up to the size of 1 A level. The diagram below sets out the types of large and small alternative academic qualifications the government will fund for 16- to 19-year-olds and/or adults. Academic qualifications approved in this range will be known as **Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)**.

Post-2025 academic landscape at 16-19 and for adults

Qualifications that support students to progress onto and achieve high quality further education and higher education academic courses.

A/AS levels

Small qualifications (up to the size of an A level) alongside A levels

Large qualifications (the size of 2 or 3 A levels) taken as alternatives to A levels

⁶ 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.

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

⁸ Continuation rates 2010/11 – 2016/17 - Office for Students.

⁹ 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.

1. Small alternative academic qualifications

The approach we have taken to determining the range of subjects¹⁰ in which we will fund small AAQs reflects two key priorities:

- To ensure that as many students as possible benefit from A levels.
- To ensure that AAQs complement and enhance the A level offer, helping to support students into high-quality degree courses in subjects valuable to the economy.

The range of subjects where we will approve small AAQs for funding (and which can be studied alongside A levels) will be focused on:

- those that are strategically important (such as STEM and those supporting the NHS); and
- those that are less well-served by A levels (including some subjects where there are A levels, reflecting feedback to our consultation about the value of alternative qualifications in certain subject areas, particularly in creative arts areas).

These are set out in table 3 below.

¹⁰ We are using the term 'subjects' to refer to specific subjects within the overall sector subject area (SSA). For example, computing is a subject that sits within the SSA ICT practitioners. For more information about qualification descriptions, including SSA classifications and for a full list of SSAs, please refer to guidance published by Ofqual at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/types-of-regulated-qualifications/qualification-descriptions>.

Subjects where small alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding	Year of first teaching of approved qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied science • Medical science • Human biology 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engineering and engineering principles or technology 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and social care 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information technology • Computing 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjects which support progression to degrees in healthcare professions allied to medicine, dentistry, and nursing 	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial studies 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformed protective services • Policing 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British sign language studies 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art, craft and design • Sound engineering • Animation and visual arts 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing, production, and creative arts • Music performance, production and technology • Qualifications for music practitioners or the creative music industry 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative digital media production • Digital games, film and video production 	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport, exercise science, and physical activity • Sporting excellence and performance 	2026

Table 3 – subjects where small AAQs will be considered for funding approval and their first teaching year.

Small AAQ that can be approved by exception

We do not expect to approve small AAQs for funding if they are in subjects not listed in Table 3 above. However, we will consider exceptional cases for small AAQs if they are in sector subject areas (SSAs) where there is no A level. In these cases, the awarding organisation will need to provide strong evidence as to the need for an alternative academic qualification, i.e. a clear case that it is needed to support progression to higher education courses that deliver strong graduate outcomes.

Funding approval will not be given to small AAQs from August 2025 in SSAs where there are A levels (except for those subjects such as Science which are listed in Table 3).

There is no A level in that SSA.

We have identified the SSAs without A levels and where awarding organisations (AO) can therefore submit small AAQs for funding approval by exception in Cycle 1 or 2.

Cycle 1 for first teach in 2025	Cycle 2 for first teach in 2026
Building and construction Child development and well-being Direct learning support Teaching and lecturing	Administration Agriculture Animal care and veterinary science Anthropology Archaeology and archaeological science Architecture Environmental conservation Foundations for learning and life Horticulture and forestry Hospitality and catering Marketing and sales Publishing and information services Retailing and wholesaling Service enterprises Transportation operations and maintenance Travel and tourism Urban, rural and regional planning Warehousing and distribution

When developing a qualification in these subjects, AOs should consider whether it aligns to a level 3 occupational standard. If it does, the qualification is likely more suited to be a technical qualification and less likely to be approved as academic, without a clear case that the content is academically focused and has a clear and direct link to related HE courses.

These examples illustrate the above in practice.

Subject of small AAQ	Considered for funding?
Criminology	No. Its SSA (Sociology and social policy) is aligned with Cycle 2, but it overlaps with the A Level in Sociology and Ministers have not agreed it is a strategically important subject such as STEM and those supporting the NHS.
Environmental studies	Yes. Its SSA (Environmental conservation) is aligned with Cycle 2 where there is no A Level.
Applied Science	Yes. It is in a SSA (Science) aligned with Cycle 1 where there is an A Level, but Ministers have agreed it is a strategically important subject such as STEM and those supporting the NHS.
Business	No. Its SSA is aligned with Cycle 2, but there is an A Level in Business Studies and Ministers have not agreed it is a strategically important subject such as STEM and those supporting the NHS.

There is a strong case that the qualification is on the academic pathway and progresses students to high-quality HE courses.

In our Qualifications Funding Approval Manual, we confirm the qualification-type funding criteria for AAQs.

There is an additional requirement for qualifications proposed by exception. The letters of support from higher education providers (HEP) must provide evidence that supports the approval for funding by exception.

- To demonstrate support for the qualification, each letter must explain in detail how and why the content and learning aims of the qualification provide an appropriate foundation for students to progress onto HE courses in related subjects.
- The letter should make explicit reference to the core and optional units or modules within the qualification. It should explain the relevance of the content or subject matter to the HE courses offered by the HEP.

Small qualifications that are out of scope for the approvals process will continue to be available. These are: Core Maths, Extended Project Qualifications, Advanced Extension Awards, and Performing Arts Graded Examinations.

2. Large alternative academic qualifications

Large AAQs (equivalent to at least 2 A levels) will be considered for public funding from 2026 in subjects where:

- there are no T Levels;

- there is a need for a **large** qualification enabling entry to more specialist areas of higher education such as performing arts; and
- there is a clear and direct progression link into higher education.

The range of specific subjects where we will consider funding large AAQs is listed in the right-hand column of Table 4. If a subject is not listed here, it will not be considered for funding, either because it is more suited to technical study, or because a T Level exists. For example, while we will consider a large AAQ in sport, we will not fund large AAQs in personal training and fitness instruction, which are part of the same sport, leisure and recreation sector subject area. This is because a subject such as personal training and fitness instructing is best served by technical qualifications as these will be designed to provide the skills required for a specific occupation. We would, therefore, expect such qualifications to be designed and submitted for approval as technical qualifications, under the level 3 occupational standard for personal trainer.

Sector Subject Area (SSA)	Subjects where large alternative academic qualifications will be considered for funding from 2026
Performing arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing arts • Production arts • Music • Music technology • Music performance and production
Sport, leisure and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport • Sport and exercise science • Sport and physical or outdoor activity
Crafts, creative arts and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art and design • Fine and applied art

Table 4 – subjects where large AAQs will be considered for funding

We do not expect to approve large AAQs in other sector subject areas. The only exceptions will be where there is a new or emerging skills priority, and there is a clear need for large alternative academic qualifications to support the skills pipeline into those sectors. Such qualifications will only be considered for funding if they lead to higher education and are not in sector subject areas that are associated with T Level routes.

3. Study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds

Where a student wants to take academic subjects at level 3, it is our clear expectation that an academic study programme should include two A Levels wherever possible and appropriate. This is based on the evidence regarding progression from A Levels into higher education when compared to applied general qualifications. The evidence shows that students taking study programmes consisting entirely of non-A level qualifications in order to progress to higher education generally experience worse outcomes at university¹¹. We want to ensure that all students taking these qualifications benefit from the improved outcomes that a mixed study programme which includes A levels can bring. The government recognises, however, that multiple A Levels will not be possible in all cases and providers will have the flexibility, as they do now, to design study programmes within the funding rule which are tailored to the needs of individual students. For example, providers may wish to design study programmes containing 1 A level and two small AAQS where this would benefit students on a part-time study programme, students with lower prior attainment at level 2, students with special educational needs and disabilities or those with exceptional circumstances.

While we expect to continue to see programmes comprising purely of A Levels or T Levels, study programme composition will be varied and may include a mix of academic and technical qualifications, or a mix of levels where, for instance, a student needs to retake level 2 English or Maths alongside a level 3 qualification. Students may also need to spend longer at level 2 if it means improved progression prospects to higher levels, for example, taking the T Level Foundation Year before taking a T Level, or studying a level 2 academic progression qualification before moving to a mixed academic programme at level 3.

A study programme containing a large technical qualification combined with small AAQs or A levels to form mixed technical programmes at level 3 may also benefit some students. The technical qualification must form the core of such a mixed technical study programme. We may set a minimum requirement for the technical component of 450 guided learning hours to secure this outcome. Such a mixed technical study programme must also provide coherent learning in a clear individual learning plan and the outcome must be technical competence and progression to skilled employment.

However, specific funding rules will prevent study programmes that consist entirely of small AAQs. Where multiple small academic qualifications are included alongside A levels, specific funding rules will stipulate that these must be in different subjects.

Students taking large approved AAQs equivalent in size to three A levels will not typically take additional qualifications. In some cases, an individual student may wish to study an

A level alongside their qualification, but this is not likely to be common. We do not plan to develop funding rules about the combination of other qualifications with these large AAQs.

4. Academic qualifications for adults

Alongside A levels and Access to HE Diplomas¹², adults who want to progress into higher education will have access to the same range of AAQs at level 3 as 16- to 19-year-olds. This is because these qualifications offer the best preparation to progress onto, and successfully complete, higher education courses. Access to HE Diplomas support adults who may not have traditional qualifications to progress into higher education.

5. Criteria and requirements for alternative academic qualifications

To be approved for funding as an AAQ, qualifications will need to meet criteria as set out in the Funding Approval Manual on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). This includes new criteria to ensure the qualification:

- supports progression to higher education;
- has an appropriate title;
- is necessary; and
- meets mandatory content requirements.

This is alongside existing criteria which awarding organisations will be familiar with, to ensure that the qualification:

- is within a specified sector subject area;
- is an appropriate size;
- meets Ofqual's regulatory requirements (see below).

It is vital that AAQs command the confidence of students, parents, employers and educators as reliable and valid measures of knowledge and skills achieved. That is why Ofqual have introduced additional regulatory requirements for these qualifications. In addition, Ofqual will review qualification materials as part of the approval process and provide feedback to DfE.

¹² To note, we have confirmed that Access to HE Diplomas will continue to be approved for funding.

Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications

1. Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications at 16-19

The government's objective is to deliver a high quality and stable technical education system, based on occupational standards developed by employers. This will ensure that the skills needs of business and industry are better served and that clear progression pathways are created, delivering the outcomes students need, either to enter into a skilled job, or to progress within a skilled career.

T Levels will form the core of the technical offer at level 3 and will cover most occupations that a student might train for at 16-19. In addition to T Levels, there are three main types of technical qualification that will be funded in the post-2025 landscape. These will be known as:

- **Technical occupational entry and technical occupational progression:** qualifications that aim to support a student to enter into, or to progress within a role. These qualifications will only be funded at 16-19 where they do not overlap with a T Level;
- **Technical additional specialist:** qualifications that allow a student to develop additional knowledge and competencies and specialise within a sector. These qualifications will build on knowledge covered by a T Level or other occupational entry qualification, e.g., low-carbon construction design, building on the Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction T Level;
- **Technical cross-cutting function:** qualifications that allow students to develop skills that are relevant across occupations.¹³

Post-2025 technical landscape at 16-19

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours students need to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.

T Levels

Technical occupational entry and technical occupational progression qualifications in areas not served by T Levels

Technical additional specialist qualifications

Apprenticeships

Technical cross-cutting function qualifications

Technical qualifications will be approved by IfATE against criteria linked to their occupational standards¹⁴.

¹³ Please note this is a change from what was in the [policy statement 14 July 2021](#)

¹⁴ Further information about IfATE's approval process can be found on [IfATE's website](#).

The approval of level 3 technical qualifications will now take place in three cycles. The first of these cycles covers the following routes: Construction and the Built Environment, Digital, Education and Early Years, Engineering and Manufacturing, and Health and Science. Awarding organisations could submit occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications for funding approval in occupations in these routes that are not covered by T Levels. The deadline for submitting qualifications for approval in Cycle 1 was the 31 July 2023. Once approved we will be publishing a full list in May 2024. These qualifications will be available for first teach in 2025.

Cycle 2 will include routes listed in the table below that were not included in cycle 1. Awarding organisations can submit, by June 2024, qualifications that are either occupational entry or additional specialist. These qualifications will be available for first teach in 2026.

In cycle 3 we will consider **cross-cutting skills** qualifications in all routes.

Cross cutting qualifications when considered as part of cycle 3, will need to be less than 359 Total Qualification Time. Ahead of this, qualifications considered to be cross-cutting and that are larger than 359 Total Qualification Time will have their funding removed on 1 August 2026. This is to reduce the potential for large cross-cutting qualifications to duplicate content that is contained in T Levels.

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

Occupational entry and additional specialist qualifications in these routes:	Year of first teaching of approved qualifications
• Construction and the build environment*	2025
• Digital*	2025
• Education and Early Years*	2025
• Engineering and manufacturing*	2025
• Health and science*	2025
• Agriculture, environmental and animal care*	2026
• Business and administration*	2026
• Care services*	2026
• Creative and design*	2026
• Legal finance and accounting*	2026
• Protective services	2026
• Sales marketing and procurement*	2026
• Transport and logistics	2026
• All other technical qualification categories, in all the above routes , including occupational progression, and employer-proposed.	2026
• Crosscutting technical qualifications	2027

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

Once an awarding organisation has submitted a qualification for funding approval, it will firstly be considered and approved by IfATE as a technical qualification and by Ofqual to ensure it meets the regulatory requirements before it is considered for funding approval by DfE. As with academic qualifications, decisions on which technical qualifications will be funded from 2025 within cycle 1 will be made available in May 2024.

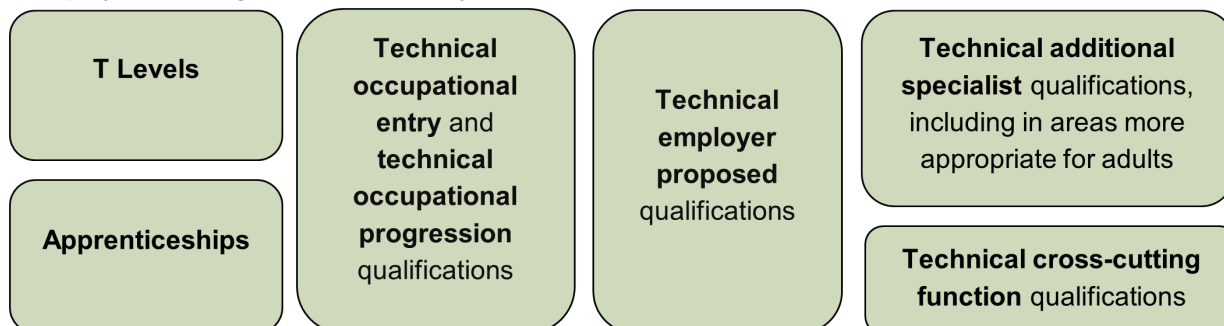
2. Future funding of level 3 technical qualifications for adults

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

- **Technical occupational-entry qualifications in T Level areas:** these qualifications will support entry to occupations that are served by T Levels e.g., construction (as well as occupations that are not served by T Levels).
- **Technical employer proposed qualifications:** occupational entry qualifications where no standard currently exists for the aligned occupation, but where it may not be appropriate for an occupational standard to be developed.
- **Technical additional specialist qualifications more appropriate for adults:** these would include qualifications which may only be suitable for adults (such as those that are essential to certain safety critical industries).
- **T Levels for adults:** In September 2022, DfE commenced a two-year pilot to explore whether T Levels should be made available to adults. The findings will inform ministers' decision whether to offer T Levels to adults and would be subject to HM Treasury agreement.

Post-2025 technical landscape for adults

Education providing the knowledge, skills and behaviours to upskill or retrain to progress to skilled employment or higher technical study.



Accountability and post-16 performance measures at level 3

Alternative academic qualifications, occupational entry qualifications, and additional specialist qualifications approved for funding at level 3 will be eligible for inclusion in 16-18 performance measures. Full details of the process for adding qualifications to the performance tables, performance points and the approach to discounting will be published in due course.

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

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

Cycle 1 – level 2 technical qualifications funded from 2025

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

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

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

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

A list of qualifications that are approved for funding, and which will be available to teach in the 2025 to 2026 funding year, will be published in July 2024. This list will be updated in September 2024 to include any additional qualifications approved following procedural review.

During the transition from existing qualifications to reformed or new qualifications, we want to ensure that using SSAs does not create gaps or insufficient coverage in provision, because some existing qualifications in the SSAs listed for cycle 1 may be in scope of the next funding approval cycle. This is particularly important at level 2, where we are considering qualifications for approval in a staggered way, with qualifications leading to employment (technical qualifications) considered first, and qualifications supporting progression to higher levels of study in the same SSAs considered in the following year. Details of how we will address this in the process for removing funding approval from qualifications in cycle 1 can be found in the Qualifications Funding Approval Manual: from August 2025 onwards.

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

Cycle 2 – level 2 qualifications funded from 2026

Cycle 2 will include both technical and progression qualifications:

Technical qualifications

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

The process for submitting level 2 technical qualifications for funding approval will be the same as for cycle 1. Awarding organisations will have until October 2024 to submit level 2 occupational entry, additional specialist and employer-proposed qualifications that they wish to be considered for funding from August 2026.

A list of qualifications that are approved for funding, and which will be available to teach from September 2026, will be published in July 2025. This list will be updated in September 2025 to include any additional qualifications approved following procedural review.

Progression qualifications

In cycle 2 we will also consider for funding level 2 qualifications that support **progression to further study at level 3**. This will include

- Academic progression qualifications which support progression to mixed programmes containing Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) at level 3 that were approved for funding in cycle 1;
- Technical progression qualifications which support progression to a technical qualification at level 3 that was approved for funding in cycle 1 and is not delivered as part of a T Level;
- All T Level foundation qualifications which support progression to any T Level in a relevant occupational route.

The date by which awarding organisations need to submit each type of qualification for consideration for funding will be as follows:

Qualification type	Submission deadline
Academic Progression Qualifications	4 October 2024
Technical Progression Qualifications	4 October 2024
T Level Foundation Qualifications	4 October 2024

Qualification type	DfE publish qualifications approved for funding	DfE update publication of qualifications approved for funding following procedural review
Academic progression qualifications	July 2025	September 2025
Technical progression qualifications	July 2025	September 2025
T Level Foundation qualifications	July 2025	September 2025

Table 5 – dates when DfE will publish qualifications approved for funding from September 2026

As in cycle 1, as we transition from existing to reformed qualifications, we will continue to ensure that using SSAs does not cause a gap in provision. Details of how we will address this in the process for removing funding approval from qualifications in cycle 2 can be found in the Qualifications Funding Approval Manual: from August 2025 onwards.

Cycle 3 – level 2 and below qualifications funded from 2027

In cycle 3 we will consider **cross-cutting skills** qualifications in all routes. This will be the final technical qualification group at level 2.

Cycle 3 will also include level 2 progression qualifications which support progression to level 3 technical and academic study in level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2026 (cycle 2). The process for approving level 2 progression qualifications in cycle 3 will be the same as for progression qualifications approved in cycle 2.

Cycle 3 will also include all progression qualifications at level 1 and entry level and all PSE qualifications.

We will give more detail when we launch cycle 3.

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

The government's consultation response indicated that reformed qualifications in English, maths and ESOL skills for life would be introduced for first teaching from September 2027 (cycle 3) following a process to consider updates to the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. We have subsequently decided to postpone any update to the national standards with a view to introducing reformed qualifications for first teaching from September 2028.

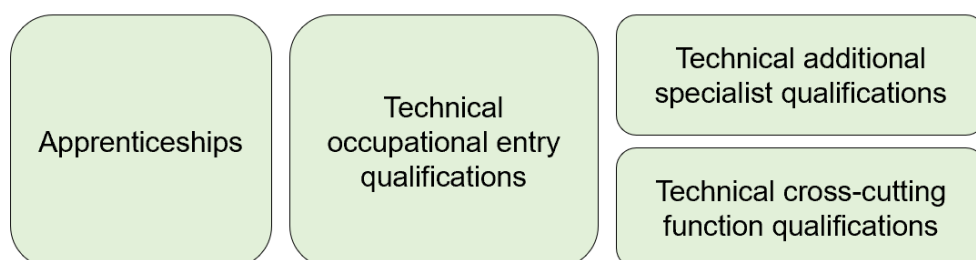
Future funding of level 2 technical qualifications for 16- to 19-year-olds

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

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

Post-2025 technical landscape for 16-19 year olds

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



Level 2 technical qualifications will be approved by IfATE against criteria linked to their occupational standards. Full details of the criteria can be found on the IfATE website. These qualifications will also need to meet Ofqual's regulatory requirements for level 2 and below qualifications leading to employment.¹⁵

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

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

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

Once an awarding organisation has submitted a qualification for funding approval, it will firstly be considered for approval by IfATE before it is considered for funding approval by the department. Decisions on which qualifications will be funded will be made available as follows:

Cycle 1 – July 2024

Cycle 2 - July 2025

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

Study programmes for 16- to 19-year-olds

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

¹⁵ Ofqual launched its consultation on regulating level 1 and 2 qualifications leading to employment in January 2023 - [Consultation on regulating level 1 and 2 qualifications designed to lead to employment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-regulating-level-1-and-2-qualifications-designed-to-lead-to-employment). Updated regulations for these qualifications were shared with awarding organisations in May 2023.

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

This is because employers have told us that young people with limited or no work experience will benefit from the additional content that is embedded in the extended qualifications. It will give them a broader understanding of the sector in which they will be working as well as providing relevant transferable skills. This should lead to better outcomes for the students.

Future funding of level 2 technical qualifications for adults

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

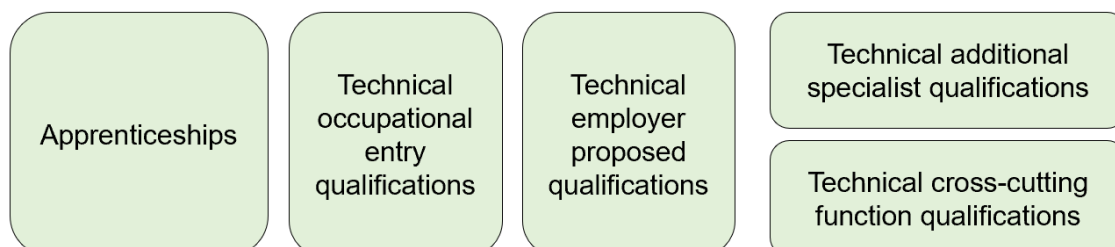
Adults will be able to choose whether to take a single occupational entry qualification, aligned to an occupational standard, or an extended occupational entry qualification which includes additional introductory sector knowledge and employability skills. This decision is likely to depend on their existing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

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

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

Post-2025 technical landscape for adults

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



Future funding of level 2 progression qualifications

As set out in the government's response to the consultation at level 2 and below, we will also consider for funding in cycles 2 and 3, qualifications which support progression to further study at level 3.

These qualifications are likely to suit post-16 students who need additional time before they progress to level 3, for example to retake maths and English GCSEs or because they have other personal or pastoral support needs. For this reason, we would expect these qualifications to be a relatively small part of the overall study programme for 16- to 19-year-olds and this is reflected in our guideline size of 120 to 240 GLH. We do not expect them to be designed as a pre-requisite for level 3 study. To be considered for funding, all progression qualifications will need to meet the detailed criteria set out in the Qualifications Funding Approval Manual: for 2025 and beyond.

Level 2 academic progression qualifications (for 16- to 19-year-olds and adults)

In **cycle 2** we will consider for funding level 2 qualifications that support progression to small AAQs in the following subject areas that will be taken as part of a mixed programme alongside A levels

- Applied science
- Medical science
- Human biology
- Early years
- Engineering and engineering principles or technology
- Health and social care
- Information technology
- Computing
- Subjects allied to medicine, dentistry and nursing

We will consider academic progression qualifications in the following SSAs, by exception, where a small AAQ has also been approved as an exception:

- building and construction
- child development and wellbeing
- teaching and lecturing
- direct learning and support

We would expect progression qualifications to be sufficiently broad to maximise the progression options available to students. For example, an academic progression qualification in Science and/or Engineering might support progression to any AAQ in

applied science, engineering or technology. We would not expect a progression qualification to be so narrow that it only supports progression to a single named AAQ.

Awarding organisations will need to specify the intended progression pathways as part of the submission process. They will also be required to provide evidence of demand from providers.

In **cycle 3** we will consider for funding level 2 qualifications that support progression to AAQs in the remaining subject areas. This includes progression to small AAQs in

- Uniformed protective services
- Policing
- British sign language studies
- Art, craft and design
- Sound engineering
- Animation and visual arts
- Performing, production and creative arts
- Music performance, production and technology
- Qualifications for music practitioners or the creative music industry
- Creative digital media production
- Digital games, film and video production
- Sport, exercise science and physical activity
- Sporting excellence and performance
- Financial studies

We will consider academic progression qualifications in the following SSAs, by exception, where a small AAQ has also been approved as an exception in Cycle 2:

- Administration
- Agriculture
- Animal care and veterinary science
- Anthropology
- Archaeology and archaeological science
- Architecture
- Environmental conservation
- Foundations for learning and life
- Horticulture and forestry
- Marketing and sales
- Publishing and information services
- Retailing and wholesaling
- Transportation operations and maintenance
- Travel and tourism
- Urban, rural and regional planning

- Warehousing and distribution

We will also consider academic progression qualifications leading to large AAQs in

- Performing arts
- Production arts
- Music
- Music technology
- Music performance and production
- Sport
- Sport and exercise science
- Sport and physical or outdoor activity
- Art and design
- Fine and applied art

T Level Foundation qualifications (level 2)

In **cycle 2** we will consider for funding qualifications that are designed specifically to support progression to T Levels. T Level Foundation qualifications will be considered for funding in any route where there is a current or planned T Level. They should contain a breadth of knowledge, understanding and skills that will prepare students for study on any T Level within the given occupational route and should be aligned with the national expectations in the Framework for Delivery for the T Level Foundation Year (TLFY). The DfE has developed National Technical Outcomes (NTOs) for each T Level route and these should be used to underpin the content for all T Level Foundation qualifications. Full details of the criteria that these qualifications will need to meet can be found in the Qualifications Funding Approval Manual from August 2025.

Level 2 technical progression qualifications (for 16- to 19-year-olds and adults)

These are level 2 qualifications that support progression to technical occupational entry qualifications at level 3 that are not delivered as part of a T Level, for example level 3 qualifications in subject areas that are not served by T Levels and qualifications that are approved specifically for adults.

In **cycle 2** we will consider for funding technical progression qualifications in the following routes:

- Construction and the built environment
- Digital
- Education and early years
- Engineering and manufacturing
- Health and science

Technical progression qualifications should be at route level and will need to contain route-level introductory content thereby maximising the progression options available to students. For example, a technical progression qualification in construction might support progression to range of level 3 technical occupational entry qualifications in the construction route for both 16- to 19-year-olds and adults. We would not expect a progression qualification to be so narrow that it only supports progression to a single named occupational entry qualification at level 3.

There may be some overlap in the content between technical progression qualifications and T Level foundation qualifications when they are in the same occupational route. However, we would expect technical progression qualifications to contain additional content that clearly differentiates them from a T Level foundation qualification. For example, they could include some optionality at the pathway or occupational level to reflect the different level 3 occupational qualifications students can progress to.

Awarding organisations will need to specify the intended progression pathways as part of the submission process. They will also be required to provide evidence of demand from providers.

In **cycle 3** we will consider level 2 technical progression qualifications in all remaining occupational routes, including:

- Agriculture, environment and animal care
- Business and administration
- Care services
- Catering and hospitality
- Creative and design
- Hair and beauty
- Legal, finance and accounting
- Protective services
- Sales, marketing and procurement
- Transport and logistics

Future funding of level 1 and entry level progression qualifications, and personal, social and employability (PSE) qualifications

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

A [consultation](#) on the draft national standards for PSE qualifications was launched on 25th March 2024. We will consider responses to this consultation, and publish our response, before confirming the funding approval process for cycle 3.

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

Future Funding of English and maths Qualifications

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

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

Technical occupational entry qualifications and technical additional specialist qualifications approved for funding at level 2 will be eligible for inclusion in 16-18 performance measures.

Study programmes

We will publish detailed information, advice and guidance in relation to 16-19 study programmes as we build towards 2025 when the reforms to the qualifications system take effect. This will support students and providers to choose the right qualifications to ensure that every young person undertakes a high quality, coherent study programme that is appropriate to their career and study aspirations.

Work experience and non-qualification activities will continue to be an important part of the study programmes for all students. These will complement the other elements of the study programme and support the student to progress to further or higher education, or into skilled employment.

Annex A: Level 3 key dates

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding approval removed from
September 2025 (Cycle 1)	<p><u>Alternative academic qualifications</u></p> <p>Small AAQs in: ICT practitioners, Health and social care, Science, Medicine and dentistry, Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine, Engineering.</p> <p>Small AAQs in other SSAs by exception: if there is no A level in that SSA and there is a strong case that the qualification is on the academic pathway and progresses students to high-quality HE courses</p> <p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications in: Construction and the Built Environment; Digital; Education and Early Years; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science.</p>	Level 3 academic and technical qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of these categories, but are not approved through the reform process

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding approval removed from
September 2026 (Cycle 2)	<p><u>Alternative academic qualifications</u></p> <p>Small AAQs in: Accounting and finance, Crafts, creative arts and design, Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles, Media and communication, Performing arts, Public services, Sport, leisure and recreation.</p> <p>Small AAQs by exception only (as cycle 1)</p> <p>Large AAQs in: Performing Arts, Sport, leisure and recreation, Crafts, creative arts and design.</p> <p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Occupational entry and additional specialist technical qualifications in other routes not included in cycle 1.</p> <p>Employer proposed and occupational progression qualifications in all routes.</p>	Level 3 academic and technical qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of these categories, but are not approved through the reform process
September 2027 (Cycle 3)	<p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Cross cutting qualifications.</p>	Level 3 technical qualifications which are in scope of this category, but are not approved through the reform process

Annex A - Level 2 and below key dates

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding approval removed from
September 2025 (Cycle 1)	<p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Level 2 technical qualifications¹⁶ in Construction and the Built Environment; Education and Early Years; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Health and Science in the following qualification groups:</p> <p>Technical occupational-entry qualifications for young people and adults</p> <p>Technical additional specialist qualifications</p>	Level 2 technical qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of these categories, but are not approved through the reform process
September 2026 (Cycle 2)	<p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Level 2 technical occupational entry qualifications and technical additional specialist qualifications in all other occupational routes.</p> <p>Technical employer-proposed qualifications for adults only in all routes.</p> <p><u>Academic and other non-technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications in routes reformed in 2025</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to the T Level occupational routes.</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 AAQs in academic subject areas reformed in 2025</p>	All Level 2 qualifications in the subject areas which are in scope but are not approved through the reform process (except those scheduled for first teaching in 2027)

¹⁶ Level 3 will have digital qualifications in the earlier phase. However, there are no level 2 standards in digital and so there cannot be any occupational entry or additional specialist qualifications in digital at level 2.

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding approval removed from
September 2027 (Cycle 3)	<p><u>Technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Technical cross-cutting function qualifications in all routes.</p> <p><u>Academic and other non-technical qualifications</u></p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical qualifications in routes reformed in 2026</p> <p>Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to level 3 AAQs in academic subject areas reformed in 2026</p> <p>All qualifications at level 1 and entry level</p> <p>All PSE qualifications</p>	All remaining level 2 and below qualifications
September 2028 (Cycle 4)	<p><u>Essential Skills qualifications</u></p> <p>All English, maths (level 1 and entry level) and ESOL Skills for Life (level 2, level 1 and entry level) qualifications</p>	All remaining English, maths and ESOL qualifications

Annex B – How we have defined alignment with T Levels for large Alternative Academic Qualifications

We know providers want to understand how these changes will affect their curriculum offer, and the range of qualifications they currently offer to students. An important part of this is understanding what we mean when we say we will not fund large Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in sector subject areas associated with T Level routes.

The table below shows the SSAs we have associated with each T Level route. We recognise that individual qualifications within an SSA may also be associated with other T Level routes, but each SSA is only included once. This reflects the T Level route it is most closely associated with, or that will be introduced latest. This means we will not approve large AAQs for funding in the SSAs in the table below.¹⁷

T Level route	Sector subject areas associated with this route
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal care	Agriculture
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal care	Animal care and veterinary science
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal care	Environmental conservation
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal care	Horticulture and forestry
Business and Administration	Administration
Business and Administration	Business management
Construction and the Built Environment	Building and construction
Creative and Design	Manufacturing technologies
Creative and Design	Media and communication
Digital	ICT practitioners
Education and Early Years	Child development and well-being
Education and Early Years	Direct learning support
Education and Early Years	Teaching and lecturing
Engineering and Manufacturing	Engineering
Health and Science	Health and social care
Health and Science	Medicine and dentistry
Health and Science	Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine
Health and Science	Science
Legal, Finance and Accounting	Accounting and finance
Legal, Finance and Accounting	Economics
Legal, Finance and Accounting	Law and legal services
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	Marketing and sales
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	Retailing and wholesaling
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	Warehousing and distribution

¹⁷ List is subject to revision if new T Level routes or pathways are introduced.



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