



Department
for Education

Updates to Outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform at Level 3

Equality Impact Assessment

March 2026

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Part 1: Introduction

This document records the analysis undertaken by the Department for Education to enable Ministers to fulfil the requirements placed on them by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

The PSED requires the Minister to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These aims are also known as the three limbs of the PSED.

Part 2: Brief outline of policy or service

The outcomes of the [Review of Qualifications Reform at Level 3 and Below](#) were published in December 2024. Ministers set out that where 16-19-year-old learners wish to study a large qualification (of 720 guided learning hours or more) in a T Level route, they should take a T Level. This was confirmed in the [Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) published in October 2025.

The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, published on 20 October 2025, announced the introduction of V Levels; a third vocational pathway offering learners who are not certain about which sector they want to work in the opportunity to combine vocational and academic qualifications in a variety of subjects. Considering this change, the [Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways Consultation](#) announced that funding would be retained for all qualifications with 719GLH or fewer that were going to have public funding removed in 2026 and 2027 until V Levels are introduced.

Throughout the consultation, stakeholders raised concerns about the pace of defunding unreformed qualifications, especially those with 720GLH as the sector transitions.

From 2027, funding approval will be removed from legacy vocational and technical Level 3 qualifications with 1080 GLH or more in existing T Level subject areas, except for large Health and Social Care qualifications, which will be removed from 2028 to coincide with the introduction of a T Level in Social Care. As more T Levels are introduced, funding approval for unreformed qualifications with 1080GLH or more in those subject areas will be removed in the same year.

Other legacy vocational and technical qualifications at Level 2 and at Level 3 will have funding approval removed as new qualifications are introduced from 2027 in line with the details set out in the Transition Plan to the reformed 16-19 qualifications landscape.

The tested subjects were the 5 most widely taught in Europe: biology, chemistry, physics history and geography. Each jurisdiction tested their pupils in 2 of these subjects. In England, these were chemistry and physics.

Part 3: Analysis of impacts

This impact assessment examines the potential impacts of removing public funding from the additional 12 large qualifications in T Level areas. The impact assessment for the Review of Qualifications Reform already considered the impacts of removing other large qualifications still due to be defunded in 2027 and 2028.

This impact assessment does not cover the impact of qualifications becoming unavailable because of operational end date changes. This is because Awarding Bodies can make these changes independently and on an ongoing basis for commercial reasons.

16-19 learners

In the 2023/24 cohort, 64% of enrolments on these qualifications were by males compared to 46% taking all level 3 qualifications.¹ A greater proportion of enrolments by ethnic minority learners took these qualifications compared to the whole level 3 cohort (4% compared to 36%). A greater proportion had SEND; 18% compared to 7%, and 20% of enrolments on these qualifications were by learners who were eligible for FSM at the age of 15 compared to 13% for the whole level 3 cohort.

The department has assessed that removing these qualifications will have positive impacts for learners that are subsequently directed to take T Levels, as outcomes for T Level students are positive. Learners who have completed a T Level most commonly progress on to paid work (40%), university degrees (34%), or an apprenticeship (14%), with two thirds (67%) progressing to the same field of their T Level. T Levels are already showing good progression outcomes, with more students continuing in related work or study compared to other large level 3 technical courses². For those learners that would have opted for the large VTQ but would not want to take a T Level, the department has determined there are enough options for learners to take unreformed qualifications (those 1019 GLH or below) to mitigate any negative impacts until V Levels are introduced.

The decision to retain funding for qualifications with 1019GLH or fewer will have mixed impacts on 16-19 learners. By retaining these qualifications, learners will have a greater variety of options in the interim period before V Levels are introduced. This mitigates any risks of learners being displaced to level 2 or becoming NEET by not having enough options at level 3. However, it is possible that the decision to continue funding these qualifications will mean providers will direct fewer learners to T Levels.

¹ This compares all ethnic backgrounds, including unknown backgrounds, with those from white ethnic backgrounds.

² [Technical education learner survey 2025](#) – for the first 4 cohorts of T Level learners

Adult learners

Funding for the 12 large qualifications in T Level areas will only be removed for the 16-19 cohort. The department understands that decisions for the 16-19 cohort can also impact adults. Adult uptake on these 12 qualifications is low at c.550 funded through AEB in 2023/24. As funding is still available for adults, we think impacts will be small and isolated. There may be some instances where the providers available to an adult learner only offer places on large qualifications as infill rather than through adult-only cohorts. As T Levels are not available to adult learners, some adults may struggle to access a large level 3 classroom-based qualification in these T Level routes. Qualifications with 1019GLH or fewer will still be available, however, so adult learners will still have a range of options to choose from.

Part 4. Decision making

Based on the findings of this Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) we propose that we proceed with removing public funding from the 12 qualifications identified from August 1, 2027, and retaining funding for qualifications of 1079GLH or fewer until V Levels are introduced.

Part 5. Monitoring evaluation and action plan

We will continue to have due regard to our legal duties and update our Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to take any additional impacts into account as we further develop the policy. This commitment includes:

- Ongoing Monitoring: We will regularly review the impact of our policy decisions on all learners, with a particular focus on those with protected characteristics.
- Stakeholder Engagement: We will continue to work closely with providers, awarding bodies and key stakeholders as reforms continue.
- Data Analysis: Analysing enrolment and outcome data to identify any disproportionate effects on specific groups.
- Policy Adjustment: Making necessary adjustments to our policies to ensure they are fair and equitable.

Part 6. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology behind the equalities impact assessment and provides the data underlying the figures shown in the document.

Qualifications

The Department for Education approves qualifications for government funding for learners aged 14 to 19+. The equalities impact assessment is based on level 3 qualifications with 1080 guided learning hours or more in T Level routes that are approved for funding in the 2025/26 academic year.

Learners

The equalities impact assessment uses enrolments funded under the 16-19 study programmes. Enrolments are identified through the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and School Census. This includes enrolments for:

- 16-19 High Needs Learners
- 16-19 Learners (excluding high needs learners)
- 19-24 Learners with an EHCP
- 14-16 Direct Funded Learners

Learner characteristic information

Learner characteristics data is derived from two sources; the ILR and the Young Persons Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD). school census. The ILR provides characteristics information, including ethnic background and learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD). These are self-reported so may not as reliable as the information from the YPMAD. The YPMAD provides information on learner characteristics as recorded in the school census at age 15. These include free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special education needs and disabilities (SEND) status, and ethnic background. The YPMAD also provides information on prior GCSE or equivalent in English and maths where available.

Data on level of deprivation is based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), part of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The index gives a score to each postcode area representing the proportion of children under 16 in each area who are income deprived. Scores for learners' home postcode areas are grouped into bands 1 (most deprived) to 5 (least deprived).

Part 7. Annex

Table 1a: 2023/24 16-19 Enrolment Characteristics for the 12 qualifications due to be defunded with whole level 3 cohort comparator

	12 qualifications	All level 3
16-19 Enrolments	25,517	2,262,886
...of which female	36%	54%
...of which Asian (inc. Chinese)	13%	15%
...of which Black	10%	7%
...of which Mixed	6%	6%
...of which Other	3%	2%
...of which White	60%	64%
...of which Unknown ethnicity	8%	7%
...of which SEN Support at age 15	13%	6%
...of which EHCP at age 15	5%	1%
...of which FSM at age 15	20%	13%
...of which IDACI 1 (Most disadvantaged)	26%	18%
...of which IDACI 2	22%	19%
...of which IDACI 3	18%	18%
...of which IDACI 4	15%	19%
...of which IDACI 5 (Least disadvantaged)	14%	21%

Table 1b: 2023/24 AEB Enrolment Characteristics for the 12 qualifications due to be defunded with whole level 3 cohort comparator

	12 qualifications	All level 3
19+ Enrolments	545	64,712
...of which female	35%	63%
...of which Asian (inc. Chinese)	13%	14%
...of which Black	14%	14%
...of which Mixed	8%	5%
...of which Other	4%	4%
...of which White	59%	61%
...of which Unknown	2%	2%
...of which LLDD	36%	20%



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