



Department
for Education

Post-16 level 3 and below pathways: equality impact assessment

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Contents

Contents	2
Table of figures	4
Part 1: Introduction	5
Part 2: Brief outline of policy or service	6
The case for change	6
V Levels	7
T Levels	7
Level 2	7
Assumptions and caveats for level 2	8
Part 3: Analysis of impacts	9
Summary table	9
Other characteristics	9
Consultation responses on Questions 21 to 24 equality impact on protected characteristics	10
Age	10
Level 3	10
Level 2	11
Adults (19+)	12
Summary for age	12
Disability	12
Level 3	12
Level 2	14
Race	15
Level 3	15
Level 2	16
Sex	17
Level 3	17
Level 2	17
Gender reassignment	18
Marriage and civil partnership	18
Pregnancy and maternity	18

Religion or belief	19
Sexual orientation	19
Other characteristics	19
Economic disadvantage	19
Part 4. Decision-making	23
Part 5. Monitoring evaluation and action plan	24

Table of figures

Table 1: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in academic year 2023 to 2024 at level 3	10
Table 2: Proportion of 16 to 19 and 19+ enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2	11
Table 3: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 with SEN support, for qualifications	13
Table 4: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 with SEN or LLDD support, for qualifications	14
Table 5: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 by race and ethnicity group	15
Table 6: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 by race and ethnicity group	16
Table 7: Proportion of female 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3	17
Table 8: Proportion of female 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2	17
Table 9: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 who were eligible for free school meals FSM	20
Table 10: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 by Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) band.	20
Table 11: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 who were eligible for FSM	21
Table 12: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 by Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) band.	21

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
- 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.

The relevant 'protected characteristics' for the purposes of the PSED are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

We only access impacts on age, disability, race and sex using the data we hold about these characteristics. In addition, we consider impacts on financially disadvantaged students aged 16 to 19.

To note: we do not have data on gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, so we are unable to access impacts on them.

Part 2: Brief outline of policy or service

The current post-16 qualification landscape is complex. There are strong qualifications in A Levels and T Levels providing opportunities in the academic and technical pathways.

The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper published in October 2025 set out the government's intent to introduce:

- a vocational pathway at level 3 for students aged 16 to 19, to complement A Levels and T Levels
- the Further Study pathway for students aged 16 to 19, supporting progression to further study at level 2, building on the successes of the T Level Foundation Year (TLFY) and Academic Progression Pilot
- the Occupational pathway for students aged 16 to 19, supporting direct entry into skilled employment at level 2

These pathways would be supported by three new qualifications:

- V Levels, for students who want a broad study programme at level 3 with an opportunity for more applied learning and assessment (V Levels can be taken alongside A Levels or on their own in study programmes)
- Foundation Certificates at level 2, for students who want to progress to education and training pathways at level 3
- Occupational Certificates at level 2, for students to progress into skilled employment in relevant level 2 roles or an apprenticeship

As part of these reforms, T Levels will become the only large qualification option (1,080 guided learning hours (GLH) or more) where a student wishes to study in a particular sector-focused area.

The future 16 to 19 skills system will therefore have distinct pathways across both level 2 and level 3, with a clear line of sight to students' intended destination, into further study or directly into employment. The pathways will allow students to acquire the skills needed to thrive in work and education in a way that is easy for them to navigate. Qualifications leading into employment must be linked to the skills employers need. The improved options and clear pathways should directly contribute to reducing the likelihood of students aged 16 to 19 becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The case for change

The reforms underpin the government's mission to drive economic growth, meet skill shortages and ensure all qualifications have good outcomes for students. We aim to have a qualification system which is rigorous, coherent, clear and delivers strong foundations for students.

That is why our reforms are underpinned by three principles:

- **Progression** - the qualifications that young people take between ages 16 to 19 must deliver positive outcomes, either enabling them to progress into further study at a higher level or into sustainable employment, linked where appropriate to the areas they studied
- **Future proof** - each qualification route must be of high quality, rigorous, and be adaptable to future skills needs. Each route should be equally prestigious, so that whichever route students take, it is valuable and respected
- **Clarity of choice** - the pathways for students aged 16 to 19 must be simple, clear and easy to navigate, so that young people are able to make the right choice for them. Students should have clear choices whether they want to specialise or want to study a broader portfolio. They should be able to mix and match academic and vocational qualifications, depending on their needs and plans for the future, so we can better support and retain students on the right pathway for them

V Levels

The assumption taken for the equalities impact assessment (EQIA) is that A Levels will be the qualifications of choice for academic learners. T Levels will be the qualification of choice for students who know which technical route they wish to specialise in. V Levels will be new high-quality vocational qualifications that will enable learners to cover a breadth of areas, which can be taken in combination with A Levels to ensure a broader educational experience.

T Levels

T Levels will be the only large qualification for students who want a sector focussed 16 to 19 choice. To ensure that new and existing T Levels are accessible at scale, we are proposing additional measures to reduce assessment burden, rationalise the breadth and depth of content, and introduce greater flexibilities for providers to shape industry placements (IPs).

Level 2

The Further Study pathway will be for students who are clear that they want to progress onto further study at level 3, and who are likely to be able to do so after a further year on a Level 2 programme. Study programmes in this pathway will include a Foundation Certificate qualification in a vocational subject.

The Occupational pathway will be for students who want to progress directly into employment, so there needs to be a high-quality offer for these students to meet the demand for jobs in relevant level 2 roles. Study programmes in the Occupational Pathway will include a relevant technical qualification – Occupational Certificate – to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers need. They will be based on level 2 occupational standards and include centrally set sector level content.

The two new pathways aim to provide clearer progression pathways leading to further study or employment, tailored to their primary destinations. Introducing new Foundation and Occupational Certificates will ensure these pathways are supported by high-quality qualifications designed with a clear destination in mind. This will reduce the number of qualifications available for students aged 16 to 19 at level 2. They build on the previous reform proposals to develop an occupational pathway at level 2 and several progression pathways to level 3 study, including the T Level Foundation Year programme. They aim to create a streamlined set of high-quality qualifications offering clear progression routes.

Assumptions and caveats for level 2

The assumption for this EQIA is that students aged 16 to 19 who are studying existing vocational and occupational qualifications at level 2 would form the main cohort for the Further Study and Occupational pathways.

To assess the impact on 16 to 19 students studying level 2 qualifications, we have taken a consistent approach to that taken to assess the reforms at level 3. We have compared enrolments on level 2 vocational and occupational qualifications with enrolments on all level 2 qualifications. The latter includes 16 to 19 enrolments on GCSE English and maths, which will reflect the large numbers of students retaking these qualifications alongside their main qualification(s) that can be at any level. Caution should therefore be taken about interpreting the impact of the level 2 reforms.

Part 3: Analysis of impacts

Summary table

The table below shows the impact of the policy on students aged 16 to 19 with protected characteristics.

Protected characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown or not applicable
Age	-	-	X	-
Disability	X	-	-	-
Gender reassignment	-	-	-	X
Marriage and civil partnership	-	-	-	X
Pregnancy and maternity	-	-	-	X
Race	X	-	-	-
Religion or belief	-	-	-	X
Sex	X	-	-	-
Sexual orientation	-	-	-	X

Other characteristics

Socioeconomic

Those from a disadvantaged background as identified by Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) band and eligibility for free school meals (FSM) at academic age 15.

Protected characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown or not applicable
Socioeconomic (disadvantage background)	X	-	-	-

Consultation responses on Questions 21 to 24 equality impact on protected characteristics

Across questions 21 to 24 in the consultation, respondents most frequently mentioned special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as their main concern, followed by age in relation to adult student access. Other characteristic group concerns that were frequently mentioned were the socioeconomic disadvantaged and potential geographic inequality.

The concerns raised by respondents within the consultation response will be mentioned within the individual characteristics with details of mitigations or acknowledgement of consideration in policy development.

Respondents mentioned that they felt that potential positive impacts of the policy are:

- clearer progression routes and simplified pathways benefiting students from disadvantaged background
- standardised national qualifications could reduce regional inequity and inconsistency of offer
- emphasis on employer engagement and workplace experience seen as potentially positive for students from backgrounds with limited professional networks providing them with exposure to workplaces that otherwise would be inaccessible

We will consider the concerns of respondents about the negative impacts of the policy on protected characteristics in the separate sections that follow.

Age

Level 3

Table 1: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in academic year 2023 to 2024 at level 3

Demographic	All level 3 enrolments	16 to 19 Applied General Qualifications (AGQ) or Tech Level or other level 3 enrolments
16 to 19	93%	80%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in academic year 2023 to 2024 at level 3

80% of enrolments in level 3 vocational and technical qualifications are by learners aged 16 to 19, compared to 93% for all level 3. The proposals relate specifically to students aged 16 to 19 who are most commonly school leavers starting their Post 16 learning pathway. However, it is also common for a much smaller subset of students aged 17 and 18 to start level 3 qualifications later after completing a level 2 course. By introducing V

Levels alongside further T Levels, we expect level 3 qualifications to remain as accessible in the new qualification landscape as they are now. T Levels and V Levels should support more students to work or study further in areas relevant to their level 3 studies, and the further changes we are making to T Levels to reduce unnecessary assessment burden and increase flexibility for industry placements will support more students to access them.

Level 2

Table 2: Proportion of 16 to 19 and 19+ enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

Demographic	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ¹
16 to 19	49%	34%
Adults ² (19+)	51%	66%

Source: 16 to 19 and 19+ enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

The Level 2 proposals outlined in this impact assessment will specifically affect students aged 16 to 19, which make up 34% of enrolments on level 2 vocational and occupational qualifications. Adults aged 19 and over also take existing vocational and occupational level 2 qualifications.

In the future, all students aged 16 to 19 will be able to choose between two pathways at level 2 where that is the best fit for them. Students taking a one-year Further Study programme at academic age 16 will be able to progress onto a level 3 pathway at age 17; we expect this pathway to support positive progression to level 3 which will benefit students that need to take more time in further education. These students will also benefit from the Level 3 reforms to introduce V Levels. Students who take the two-year occupational pathway at age 16 would be able to progress into employment or could progress to a level 3 pathway after one year. These clearer pathways, with some flexibility, should lead to positive outcomes for all students aged 16 to 19 taking level 2 pathways.

¹ Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

² Nearly 93% of enrolments on all level 2 qualifications in the data for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and work-based learning (Apprenticeships and Traineeships) funding models are for adults aged 19 and over.

Adults (19+)

Existing level 2 and level 3 qualifications will not be defunded for adults as new level 2 and level 3 qualifications are introduced. This should broadly mitigate the impacts of any changes to the 16 to 19 landscape over the coming years while we further consider reforms to adult provision.

It is possible that reduced demand for existing qualifications may cause some education and training providers to stop delivering some qualifications or for awarding organisations to withdraw some qualifications. This could possibly have a negative impact on adults, if there are fewer options for vocational education and training available to them.

It is also possible that, as awarding organisations are being asked to prioritise developing qualifications for 16- to 19-year-olds, reforms to qualifications designed for adults may be delayed. To mitigate these risks, we will continue to work with awarding organisations, providers and strategic authorities to ensure the qualifications landscape meets the needs of adult learners.

Summary for age

We posed the question of perceived impacts on protected characteristics within the consultation. Respondents were concerned that introducing more T Levels at level 3 may disadvantage younger learners who are not ready for early specialisation. The policy intent to introduce V Levels means we expect fewer 16- to 19-year-olds specialising in future, as V Levels will offer young people more breadth rather than depth. Where learners do wish to specialise, we are making improvements to T Levels to further support accessibility.

Concerns were also raised that level 2 reforms could similarly limit younger learners who need broader exploration. We expect the policy proposal to be positive for students aged 16 to 19, as it will give them a simple and accessible choice of pathways and high-quality qualifications at level 2. The current landscape of vocational qualifications with various sizes and often multiple purposes will change to a more streamlined offer that will enable them to choose a pathway which enables them to progress either into employment at level 2 or further study at level 3. All students aged 16 to 19 will have an option to study at level 2, as they will be able to pick one of the new pathways based on their chosen progression route.

Disability

Level 3

Table 3 below shows the proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments at level 3 who received SEND support at age 15 and the proportion of students who would be in scope to take V Levels as they are enrolled on an AGQ, Tech Level or Other level 3 qualification.

Table 3: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 with SEN support, for qualifications

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 3 enrolments	AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications
% SEN support at age 15	6%	9%
% EHCP at age 15	1%	2%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

The table highlights that those from a SEND background are more likely to be affected by the introduction of V Levels in the future landscape as a greater proportion of enrolments with SEND opt for vocational and technical qualifications when compared to the whole level 3 cohort.

Students with special educational needs (SEN) are more likely to have lower prior attainment at age 15³ and require more accessible and flexible qualifications. The introduction of V Levels aims to broaden student choice and will simplify the landscape.

If a student wishes to specialise, they will be able to take a T Level. V Levels are smaller and can be combined with other aspects to offer students with SEND the opportunity to study qualifications based on what employers need, but without having to dedicate their whole study programme to one subject. This means they will have the flexibility and the chance for them and providers to adapt, so they can learn at their own pace or with additional support where it is needed.

Some students with SEND may be unable to commit to full time education and V Levels will offer them an alternative opportunity for students to take high-quality smaller qualifications.

We have seen an increasing proportion of students with SEND taking T Levels⁴. With planned changes to improve the accessibility of T Levels (that is removing some of the assessment burden on students, reducing content which in turn will reduce the GLH of some T Levels (as well as limiting future new T levels to 1,080 GLH), and introduce further flexibilities to industry placements) this should make T Levels even more accessible to students with SEND.

Overall, we aim for planned reforms to level 3 qualifications will be positive for students with SEND, enabling them to progress onto related employment, apprenticeships and

³ [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ The proportion of T Level entrants with some form of SEND support has risen from 10.5% in 2022/23 to 11.6% in 2024/25. Source: T Level entrants statistics publication <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-and-t-level-foundation-year-entrant-data-2025-to-2026>

related higher education. It will also give students greater flexibility in learning, quality and consistency of qualifications and choice of subjects to create a coherent and distinct study programme. We expect the plan to introduce V Levels and new T Levels will improve outcomes for students and should not reduce the accessibility of studying at level 3. We recognise that we will need to work closely with the sector and providers to ensure that rollout of our reformed qualifications does support this cohort of students.

Level 2

Table 4: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 with SEN or LLDD support, for qualifications

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ⁵
% SEN support at age 15	20%	18%
% EHCP at age 15	8%	7%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

Students aged 16 to 19 with SEN or with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) would be impacted by this policy, given that the combined proportion of enrolments for students aged 16 to 19 with a disability on vocational and occupational qualifications at level 2 is 25%. This is lower than the proportion for students aged 16 to 19 with a disability across all level 2 qualifications (28%).

We also expect the reforms to the level 2 pathways to indirectly benefit students aged 16 to 19 studying at level 1, who may also have SEND, and subsequently progress to level 2. We are introducing new 16 to 19 level 1 English and maths qualifications for students with prior GCSE attainment of grade 2 or below, to consolidate the foundational skills and knowledge before taking a GCSE English or maths resit.

Summary for disability

We posed the question of perceived impacts on protected characteristics within the consultation. SEND was the most frequently raised equality concern, with respondents warning that exam-heavy assessment, fixed structures and inaccessible placements could restrict the progression of students with SEND.

We expect the policy of introducing the Further Study and Occupational pathways at level 2 to have a positive impact overall, from clearer choices and more tailored provision

⁵ Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

leading to clear destinations. This was a key lesson from the T Level Foundation Year programme at level 2.

When designing the new pathways at level 2, we will consider accessibility for SEND students and assess for any disproportionate impacts on students with a disability as we implement the policy.

Race

Level 3

Table 5 below shows the proportion of enrolments for students aged 16 to 19 at level 3 from different ethnic backgrounds and compares it to the ethnicity of the enrolments who would be in scope to take V Levels as they are not enrolled to take A/AS Levels or T Levels.

Table 5: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 by race and ethnicity group

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 3 enrolments	AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications
% Asian (inc. Chinese)	15%	12%
% Black	7%	7%
% Mixed	6%	6%
% Other	2%	2%
% White	64%	67%
% Unknown ethnicity	7%	7%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

The above table highlights that planned reforms to level 3 qualifications is slightly more likely to impact students from a white ethnic background as the percentage of enrolments onto AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications for this group is slightly higher.

The introduction of V Levels and new T Levels is expected to benefit students from all ethnic backgrounds by improving quality of level 3 vocational and technical qualifications. A simpler landscape will be easier to navigate for students from all backgrounds, giving young people options to either specialise in a T Level or undertake a broader, vocationally focused programme of study through V Levels.

Level 2

Table 6: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 by race and ethnicity group

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ⁶
% Asian (inc. Chinese)	9%	8%
% Black	7%	6%
% Mixed	6%	6%
% Other	2%	2%
% White	64%	68%
% Unknown ethnicity	13%	10%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

The proportion of students aged 16 to 19 who would undertake the Further Study or Occupational pathways at level 2 would be more likely to come from a White background (68%). The proportions of students aged 16 to 19 of all ethnicities studying vocational and occupational qualifications at level 2 are broadly similar to the proportions studying any qualification at level 2.

Summary for race

We posed the question of perceived impacts on protected characteristics within the consultation. Respondents highlighted the risk of cultural bias in curriculum content, case studies and assessments. They emphasised that all qualifications must embed racial inclusivity from the outset to avoid disadvantaging minority ethnic students across the system.

Overall, we expect that the introduction of the Further Study and Occupational pathways to have a positive effect on students from all ethnic backgrounds, as the aim of the policy is to create clearer choices at level 2 and more tailored provision leading to clear destinations. We will consider the concerns raised by respondents about race during level while designing the new level 2 pathways.

⁶ Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

Sex

Level 3

Table 7 below shows the proportion of enrolments for students aged 16 to 19 at level 3 who are female which inversely provides us with the data as to who are male.

Table 7: Proportion of female 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 3 enrolments	AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications
% Female	54%	53%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

As highlighted in Table 7, planned reforms may result in a slightly greater impact on female students, due to higher proportion of female students in this age group who study at level 3.

We do not anticipate reforms to level 3 to have a negative impact on either male or female students. The introduction of V Levels and new T Levels should lead to positive outcomes for all students to choose a learning pathway with streamlined opting for vocational or technical programmes.

Level 2

Table 8: Proportion of female 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ⁷
% Female	47%	47%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

The table above shows the proportion of enrolments at level 2 who are female, which inversely tells us the proportion who are male.

Among students aged 16 to 19, male students are more likely to be affected by this policy, due to the higher proportion of male students in this age group who study at level

⁷ Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

2. Among students at academic age 16 to 18 in England, there are proportionally more males who are NEET (9.5% of population) than females (8.2% of population).⁸

We anticipate that both sexes will be positively impacted by introduction of the Further Study and Occupational pathways. The policy aims to create clearer choices and more tailored provision leading to clear destinations, which will support students to reach their chosen destination.

Summary for sex

Within the Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways consultation response, concern was raised that reformed qualifications did not inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or limit opportunities for students to pursue careers in under-represented non-traditional sectors. Respondents suggested mitigations including inclusive imagery and marketing materials that challenged stereotypical assumptions about sectors were suited to particular genders.

We will work to ensure that the planned reforms at level 2 and level 3 will not widen sex disparities, and as qualifications are designed, we will consider what further mitigations are needed to support narrowing some existing disparities (for example, exploring how more female students can be encouraged to participate in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects at level 2 and 3).

Gender reassignment

We do not currently have data on gender reassignment. We do not have reason to believe that the introduction of the new level 3 and level 2 pathways would disproportionately impact students with this characteristic. We expect all students to benefit from the quality and accessibility of the new qualifications and pathways.

Marriage and civil partnership

We do not currently have data on marriage and civil partnership characteristic within the demographic data. We do not believe that the introduction of the new pathways will directly discriminate against students who are married or in a civil partnership.

Pregnancy and maternity

We do not have data on the pregnancy and maternity characteristic within the demographic enrolment data. We posed the question of perceived impacts on protected

⁸ [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, Calendar year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

characteristics within the consultation. Respondents said that students who are pregnant or have young children may face barriers from rigid, full-time study models, attendance requirements and assessment structures, which could make it difficult to continue or return to learning. They also highlighted financial and practical pressures such as childcare and transport costs. While some of these issues should be mitigated by providers, we will work to ensure that that introduction of new level 2 and level 3 qualifications will still offer flexible programmes that providers can offer to students that need more flexibility.

Religion or belief

We do not currently have data on the religion or belief characteristic. We have no evidence to suggest that the introduction of the new level 2 and level 3 pathways will not disproportionately or negatively impact students by religion or faith. We expect all students to benefit from the quality and accessibility of the new qualifications and pathways.

Sexual orientation

We do not currently have data on the sexual orientation characteristic. We have no evidence to suggest that the introduction of the new level 2 and level 3 pathways will disproportionately or negatively impact students by sexual orientation. We expect all students to benefit from the quality and accessibility of the new qualifications and pathways.

Other characteristics

Economic disadvantage

Whilst not a protected characteristic, we also recognise the importance of ensuring that the proposals positively impact students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Level 3

Table 9 below shows the proportion of enrolments for students aged 16 to 19 at level 3 who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) at age 15.

Table 9: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 who were eligible for FSM at academic age 15

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 3 enrolments	AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications
% FSM at age 15	13%	17%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

Table 10: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3 by Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) band.⁹

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 3 enrolments	AGQ or Tech Level or other level 3 qualifications
% IDACI 1 (most disadvantaged)	18%	23%
% IDACI 2	19%	20%
% IDACI 3	18%	18%
% IDACI 4	19%	17%
% IDACI 5 (least disadvantaged)	21%	17%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 3

The tables above shows that the proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is higher in the group taking vocational and technical qualifications than for the whole 16 to 19 cohort. This indicates that reforms to level 3 vocational and technical qualifications will disproportionately impact students from poorer backgrounds.

The expectation is that introducing V Levels and new T Levels will have a positive impact upon disadvantaged students, as these qualifications will improve outcomes for students, make the qualification landscape simpler to navigate, and better support progression into relevant work and study. V Levels will be small qualifications that can be built into coherent study programmes which allows for students to have additional support to re-sit English or maths GCSE alongside their study programme to secure a Grade 4, if necessary. Alternatively, these students could take one of the new level 2 high quality pathways.

Additionally, it is possible that students from a disadvantaged background will require more flexibility in the learning approach to allow them time to partake in part-time employment to supplement household income or care for dependents. V Levels are qualifications that will make up a programme of a similar size to three A Levels, this should allow sufficient time for students to manage personal commitments alongside their

⁹ Percentages do not total 100% because an additional group with unknown IDACI status is not shown.

studies. An increasing proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have been taking T Levels. With further changes to reduce the assessment burden on students, reduce content (and therefore potentially the GLH) and the introduction of new industry placement flexibilities this should make T Levels even more accessible to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Level 2

Table 11: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 who were eligible for FSM at academic age 15

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ¹⁰
% FSM at age 15	30%	29%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

The table above shows that students who were eligible for free school meals at academic age 15 will not be disproportionately affected by the policy, given that the proportion of enrolments for these students on level 2 vocational and occupational qualifications (29%) is similar to the proportion for all level 2 qualifications, with 1 percentage point difference.

Table 12: Proportion of 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2 by Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) band.¹¹

16 to 19 Enrolments	All level 2 enrolments	Level 2 vocational and occupational qualification enrolments ¹²
% IDACI 1 (most disadvantaged)	30%	30%
% IDACI 2	22%	23%
% IDACI 3	16%	17%
% IDACI 4	12%	13%
% IDACI 5 (least disadvantaged)	9%	10%

Source: 16 to 19 enrolments in the 2023 to 2024 academic year at level 2

The table above shows that students from any disadvantaged backgrounds will not be disproportionately affected by the policy. We intend that this policy will have a positive

¹⁰ Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

¹¹ Percentages do not total 100% because an additional group with unknown IDACI status is not shown.

¹² Includes enrolments on these qualification types in Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications: Vocationally-Related; Other Vocational; Occupational; Other General Qualification

impact on students at a socioeconomical disadvantage through increased quality of level 2 pathways.

Summary for economic disadvantage

We posed the question of perceived impacts on protected characteristics within the consultation. Respondents said that students who are economically disadvantaged would be disproportionately affected by the reforms that they were concerned could reduce local provision and increase travel to learn distances. This is especially important where industry placements or specialist facilities are required for T Levels. They also noted that existing vocational medium sized qualifications are better suited to students with lower prior attainment and are concerned they will be negatively impacted if these are not retained. We will consider these concerns as part of the pathway design process and will allow more flexibility in how placements can be delivered to support student accessibility- including more provision for remote placements where travel costs are a barrier.

Part 4. Decision-making

We propose to proceed as planned with the policy proposals, working closely with the sector and providers, to ensure that there are no adverse or disproportionately negative impacts on people who share a protected characteristic.

Part 5. Monitoring evaluation and action plan

We will continue to assess any potential equalities considerations in line with further policy development and any further evidence that becomes available. This includes:

- ongoing monitoring – we will regularly review the impact of our policy decisions on students, with a particular focus on those with protected characteristics
- stakeholder engagement – we will continue to work closely with providers, awarding bodies, employers and key stakeholders as we develop and introduce the proposed qualifications
- data analysis – we will continue to analyse enrolment figures to identify any disproportionate effects or improvement on protected characteristics
- policy adjustment – we may make necessary adjustments to our policies to ensure they are fair and equitable



Department
for Education

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