



Department  
for Education

# **Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels**

**Response to consultation on  
qualification content**

**July 2023**

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## Introduction

The Department for Education ran a targeted consultation, from 26 January 2023 to 6 April 2023, seeking views on the content of level 2 qualifications designed to support progression to T Levels.

## Who this is for

This document is for anybody with an interest in the content of qualifications supporting progression to T Levels. This includes:

- Schools, colleges, training providers and their representative bodies
- Awarding organisations and their representative bodies
- Third sector and representative organisations
- Employers

## Enquiries

For enquiries about this document, you can email the team at [TLevelTransition.PROGRAMME@education.gov.uk](mailto:TLevelTransition.PROGRAMME@education.gov.uk)

## Background to the T Level Transition Programme

The T Level Transition Programme (TLTP) was introduced alongside T Levels from September 2020. It is a one-year level 2 study programme designed to provide a high-quality route onto T Levels for students who would benefit from the additional study time and preparation that it will give them before they start their T Level. The Department has taken a phased approach to implementing the programme alongside the introduction of T Levels. We worked closely with early TLTP providers to explore different approaches to delivery, to help determine the shape of the programme. In December 2021 we published a revised [Framework for Delivery](#) setting out the national expectations for the TLTP from September 2022 onwards, based on evidence from early delivery and wider evidence.

Alongside this, the Department published national content for the TLTP – called [national technical outcomes](#) (NTOs). These set out what students are expected to be able to do by the end of the programme to prepare for a particular T Level route. The NTOs were developed in collaboration with a wide range of TLTP providers, other providers, employers, education specialists and other stakeholders, in a multi-stage development process. This was to help ensure they capture the right balance of outcomes, knowledge, skills and behaviours that support progression to T Levels. The NTOs also ensure a level of consistency for students, wherever they are taking the TLTP.

Through this consultation response, we are announcing that the national name for the T Level Transition Programme is changing to **T Level Foundation Year**. Whilst this change will take effect immediately, we will not expect providers to reflect it locally until next academic year, 2024/25. We are making the change to strengthen the relationship with T Levels and signal clearly that this is the first step on a 3-year path to achieving a T Level, for those students who need to take a foundation year first. Further information can be found on page 15.

## Background to the consultation

The Department's review of post-16 qualifications is reforming the qualifications landscape at level 3 and below in England to ensure that qualifications that are approved for funding in the future are high quality, necessary, have a clear purpose and lead to good outcomes for the students who take them. This will ensure there are clear pathways through the education system.

As part of this review process, and to support the progression pathway to T Levels, we will consider for funding qualifications at level 2 that are specifically designed to support students' preparation to move onto a T Level in a particular T Level route. Approved qualifications will be available for first teaching from 2026. These qualifications could be taken by young people as part of a broader TLTP, or by adults outside of a TLTP. In light of the TLTP becoming the T Level Foundation Year, these qualifications will collectively be called T Level Foundation Qualifications. It is important that these qualifications help to support young people to prepare for and progress onto a T Level and the Department has stated its intention for the content of these qualifications to be based on the NTOs developed for the programme.

We ran a targeted consultation, from 26 January 2023 to 6 April 2023, to seek feedback on the flexibilities that awarding organisations (AOs) would have in using the NTOs to develop qualifications. We sought feedback from T Level and TLTP providers, AOs and other sector stakeholders. 52 respondents provided feedback via an online questionnaire and we received one written response. We also held focus groups for AOs, education providers and employer T Level ambassadors and spoke with the Association of Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges Association, Association of School and College Leaders, Gatsby, Joint Council for Qualifications and Federation of Awarding Bodies.

This document provides a high-level summary of the feedback on our proposals and the actions we have taken in response. It does not report on every issue raised in the feedback but provides an overview of the main themes. The consultation document can be found [here](#).

In parallel, Ofqual consulted on its proposals for regulating these qualifications. Ofqual has published the analysis of the responses received [here](#) and its decisions for how it will regulate these qualifications following the consultation [here](#). Ofqual is now consulting on the draft conditions, requirements and guidance intended to put into effect those decisions, which can be found [here](#).

## Using the NTOs as the basis for qualification content

There was general support for the principle of using the NTOs as the basis for the content of T Level Foundation Qualifications. Some of the general messages from the feedback included the following:

- Whilst AOs generally felt that they would need to see the revised NTOs before commenting on the benefits and opportunities arising from the proposals, the benefits cited by other respondents included national consistency and standardisation, exposing students to the type of learning they will experience on T levels, supporting progression to T Levels, and supporting qualification currency by providing confidence that a student has achieved a core standard of knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Some challenges were also noted, which included ensuring that the NTO content is kept up to date; the potential for inconsistencies across qualifications and AOs, as the NTOs are high level and AOs will be able to make minor changes; and the challenge for AOs of having these qualifications ready for 2026 as qualification development cannot begin without the final NTOs.
- Some respondents felt that the revised NTOs should be tested before they are published. AOs asked for information on how DfE will maintain the NTOs over time.
- Whilst there is provider support for creating qualifications based on the NTOs, there were some views that the introduction of these new qualifications must not lose sight of what is different about the TLTP or result in a loss of the flexibility and innovation that the TLTP has enabled, which allows the programme to be different from other provision.

## Response

We are pleased that there is general support for using the NTOs as the basis for T Level Foundation Qualifications.

We have now finalised the NTOs for the 12 T Level routes<sup>1</sup>, tested them with education providers involved in their original development and have published them [here](#). The NTOs were not originally drafted to be used as the basis for qualifications so we have made them clearer for awarding organisations to use. The changes are mostly presentational and do not change the focus of the NTO content itself. Please see Appendix A for a full explanation of the changes made.

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<sup>1</sup> Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care, Business and Administration, Catering and Hospitality, Creative and Design, Education and Early Years, Construction and the Built Environment, Digital, Engineering and Manufacturing, Hair and Beauty, Health and Science, Legal, Finance and Accounting, and Sales, Marketing and Procurement.

There will be no further consultation on these, which means that awarding organisations now have the final NTOs in advance of the launch of the cycle 2 qualification approvals process in the autumn.

As the NTOs are high level and relevant across the route, we envisage that they should need updating only where there are significant changes to T Level content. We will review the need for this if and when new T Levels are developed or when substantial changes or updates are made to existing T Levels. Should the NTOs need revising, we would expect AOs to review their qualification specification.

We are taking steps that will minimise inconsistencies whilst allowing some variation across qualifications. On page 9 we have set out the principles that we expect AOs to adhere to when creating their qualification specifications. We are also setting the guideline size for T Level Foundation Qualifications at 120 to 150 guided learning hours, to reflect the relatively small size of the NTOs. See page 12 for further details.

## Feedback on the proposals

### **Proposal 1: Awarding organisations will have discretion to elaborate on the content that must be covered in the revised NTOs to determine the detailed content of a qualification, with some limited flexibility to make minor changes to the content where they consider there to be a robust justification**

The NTOs set out content at a high level, in the form of knowledge and skills topic headings and the underpinning content to be covered under those headings. AOs will therefore need to elaborate on this high-level content to create the level of detail and clarity necessary for a full qualification specification. We proposed that AOs will have limited additional flexibility to make minor changes to the high-level content itself, where they consider there to be a robust justification.

Most respondents agreed that AOs should have some flexibility to make minor changes to the NTO content when creating qualifications based on the NTOs. Respondents gave a variety of reasons for this, which included to reflect local needs and labour markets, provider resources available to deliver specific content, learner needs and evolving industry standards. However, respondents also flagged that this flexibility could lead to inconsistencies across qualifications.

AOs requested more clarity on what is meant by a minor content change, the parameters for AO flexibility, what will count as a robust justification and what evidence they will be expected to provide to support any proposed changes. It was also noted that if the justification is from employers, who may have differing views, it risks creating issues around comparability and consistency in these qualifications. Feedback from education providers was that there should be a clear rationale for any changes AOs propose, they wanted to be involved in determining any changes and felt that any changes needed to have broad provider support. There was some caution about allowing changes that fundamentally impact on the outcomes in the NTOs.

## Response

Consistency is an important aim of requiring T Level Foundation Qualifications to be based on the NTOs. So we have set out some general principles that we expect AOs to adhere to when using the high-level NTOs to develop the detailed content of their qualifications. These principles are set out below. The NTOs were carefully developed in collaboration with education providers and employers, so we will require qualifications to include all the outcomes and the specified knowledge and skills.



**Table 1: Principles for developing the NTOs into qualification content**

**Principle 1: Qualification content must include all the outcomes for the route and the specified knowledge and skills**

This will ensure an overall level of consistency across different qualifications in the same route. Assessment must focus on the demonstration of these outcomes. The knowledge and skills topic areas headings and the underpinning bullets reflect the minimum needed to demonstrate the outcomes, so this is expected to be included in the qualification content. All the optional content will need to be developed, where optionality between or within an outcome is specified in the NTOs for the route, and this optionality must be available to students taking the qualification.

**Principle 2: Elaboration of the detailed qualification content must fit within the guideline size of 120 to 150 GLH for these qualifications, be relevant to demonstrating the outcomes and must not constrain skills development**

The guideline size reflects that the NTOs were designed so that the minimum knowledge and skills required to demonstrate the outcomes can be taught within this range, excluding assessment time. The knowledge and skills within the NTOs are expressed in high-level terms so they will need to be elaborated on to develop the detailed content to be taught. Detailed content should not be included where it is not relevant to demonstrating the outcome. Skills development takes time and is an important part of the NTOs as preparation for T Levels, so this should be allowed for when determining the detailed qualification content.

**Principle 3: Additional content may be proposed but we would expect this to be minimal; it must be relevant to demonstrating the outcome and fit within the size guideline**

The rationale for proposing to include any additional content, above the minimum content set out in the NTOs, must be clear. Any extra content that is proposed should ensure the qualification size still fits within the size guideline for these qualifications and it does not change the nature of the outcome. Additional skills content, particularly transferable skills, should be prioritised over proposing extra knowledge content, as skills development is important preparation for T Levels. No additional outcomes may be introduced.

## **Proposal 2: Awarding organisations will need to determine the scope of assessment needed to assess the outcomes in the NTOs for that route, through the practical application of knowledge and skills**

We set out that these qualifications must assess how well students can demonstrate the outcomes in the NTOs for a particular T Level route, through the practical application of knowledge and skills. The NTOs focus not on demonstrating knowledge or skills in isolation but on what students are able to do with their knowledge and skills. The outcomes are designed to be applicable to a range of contexts and situations, so AOs will need to determine how to assess them.

We asked whether AOs would need any further information on the NTOs to support them. AOs felt that they needed further guidance on expectations for assessment, to develop qualifications, facilitate consistency across AOs and ensure consistent funding approval of these qualifications. This included expectations for approaches to assessment (for example, synoptic), assessment methodology, exam versus non-exam assessments, external versus internal assessment, how much time is considered proportionate for assessing the outcomes.

Education providers generally felt that these qualifications should be different from existing qualifications, particularly in terms of having various assessment options (to support student development and T Level preparation), having fewer assessments, a focus on skills, preparation for synoptic assessment, and being more outcomes driven than assessment focused.

### **Response**

Whilst the phrasing of the outcomes may have been revised, as we have finalised the NTOs, their original focus remains the same, to ensure that they remain applicable to different contexts. However, we do not expect summative assessment to cover multiple contexts and AOs will therefore need to consider how the outcomes will be assessed in a proportionate way.

Setting parameters around assessment design falls to Ofqual and we shared the feedback we received in relation to assessment with Ofqual. Ofqual has announced its decisions for how it will regulate these qualifications following its consultation and is now consulting on the draft conditions, requirements and guidance intended to put into effect those decisions, which can be found [here](#). AOs will need to refer to Ofqual's final conditions, requirements and guidance for these qualifications when they are published later in the year.

We will consider what we can do to facilitate AOs' understanding of the NTOs, the original vision and principles behind their design and how the outcomes could work together, to help AOs in designing their qualifications and assessments to reflect the NTOs.

## Impact of the proposals

We asked respondents whether our proposals would have the potential to impact, positively or negatively, on specific groups, particularly those with protected characteristics.

Most of the feedback related to the post-16 qualification reforms more generally. Whilst respondents noted that protected or disadvantaged groups disproportionately take level 2 or below qualifications, only a few responses were specific to our NTO proposals. These responses indicated that the impact will depend on the design and access arrangements for qualifications based on the NTOs, and that the proposals may be 'too large' and disadvantage students with special educational needs (SEN) and adult returners.

## Response

In relation to assessment design, Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition (GCR) requires AOs to ensure their qualifications are accessible to students and that no groups of students who share a particular protected characteristic are disadvantaged. Last year Ofqual issued this guidance on the design and development of accessible assessment. [Ofqual Handbook: General Conditions of Recognition - Section D - General requirements for regulated qualifications - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Whilst we expect qualifications based on the NTOs to be taken primarily by young people as part of the TLTP, they can be taken by adults outside of the TLTP. In relation to their size, our decision to set the guideline size for T Level Foundation Qualifications at 120-150 GLH, is to ensure that education providers will have sufficient time for all the components of the TLTP, which are needed to support student progression.

We will continue to review any potential equalities considerations in line with further policy development and any further evidence that becomes available through the consultation or otherwise.

The review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England is subject to an impact assessment, which can be found [here](#).

## Feedback on wider issues relating to the proposals

This section covers the two common themes from the feedback relating more generally to T Level Foundation Qualifications.

### Qualification size

There was general support for qualifications based on the NTOs to be small. English and maths are seen as the main barrier to level 3, not technical knowledge or skills, and a small qualification allows the time to focus on these subjects and other components that are required to progress to level 3. However, it was also noted that students are more interested in technical content, so it is important to get the balance right.

### Response

The revised NTOs have been stripped back to contain the minimum knowledge and skills areas essential for demonstrating the outcomes. They are designed to be taught in approximately 120-150 guided learning hours (GLH) to fit within the TLTP. Although the recommendation of the government's consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England is that progression qualifications should be between 120 and 240 GLH, we have decided that the guideline for T Level Foundation Qualifications will be 120-150 GLH, to align with the NTOs. It will ensure qualifications are big enough to cover the NTOs without restricting the flexibility of education providers to sufficiently deliver all the components of the programme. It will also support greater consistency across qualifications, by limiting the potential for significant amounts of additional, discretionary content to be added, and ensure that the assessed content is proportionate for a one-year qualification.

### Expectations on what qualifications can be used on the TLTP

Respondents asked for clarity on whether these qualifications based on the NTOs will be a requirement for the TLTP; and whether other qualifications could also be used.

### Response

Level 2 qualifications based on the NTOs will be available for teaching from 2026. At that point, there will be an expectation that one of these qualifications, for the relevant route, should be taken as part of the TLTP. This will ensure consistency for students, wherever they are taking the programme. As these qualifications will be small, it will also ensure providers have the flexibility they need to deliver the rest of the programme; and the flexibility to use the additional material in the NTOs if they wish to do so. As now, we would expect providers to have the flexibility to include additional qualifications in their TLTPs, where they feel this will support students' progression to T Levels and there is time in the programme to take them alongside a qualification that is based on the NTOs.

## Feedback on the wider post-16 qualification reforms

Respondents to the consultation provided feedback relating more generally to the post-16 qualification reforms. This section covers the two common themes from the feedback.

### Viability of running multiple level 2 programmes

Education providers and sector stakeholders raised concerns about the viability of running different level 2 qualifications supporting different pathways. A related concern was whether different pathways will narrow students' choices and inhibit progression opportunities for students.

#### Response

The Department acknowledges the concerns raised about the viability of having separate qualifications for progression to level 3 study and progression to employment in its consultation response, which can be found at [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-2-and-below).

The reforms will ensure that each programme and qualification has a clear purpose so that students can make an informed decision about which pathway best meets their needs. We recognise that there will be some components of a study programme that are common to all of these pathways and there may also be some overlap in qualification content. Providers are already able to choose which subjects and qualifications they offer and how they combine teaching of content, where it is appropriate, and this flexibility will remain in the future so providers can choose which of these pathways to offer to best meet their students' needs in each subject area.

### Wider review of post-16 qualification reforms

Respondents commonly asked for clarification on wider qualification reforms, future landscape and where the TLTP fits within this wider landscape.

#### Response

At level 2, alongside apprenticeships, GCSEs and FSQs (which are out of scope of the reforms) two main groups of reformed qualifications will receive public funding in future:

1. Progression qualifications. These qualifications will be available for first teaching from September 2026 and will include:
  - Qualifications supporting progression to technical study at level 3 – including, but not only, T Level Foundation Qualifications.

- Qualifications supporting progression to academic study at level 3. Alongside GCSEs, other qualifications at level 2 can be funded in the same subject areas as level 3 Alternative Academic Qualifications.
2. Technical qualifications. These qualifications will be available for first teaching from either September 2025 or 2026, depending on the occupational route. They will support entry to skilled employment at level 2, and will be aligned to occupational standards (these can be funded in any area where there is a [level 2 occupational standard](#)). For 16-19 year olds the primary option here will be a large technical occupational entry qualification, which will include additional introductory sector knowledge and employability skills.

Further details on the wider reforms can be found in the [Guide to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## New name for the Programme

We are changing the name of the programme to **T Level Foundation Year**. Whilst this has immediate effect, we would not expect providers to reflect this change locally until academic year 2024/25, when the new name can be reflected in marketing materials. We are changing the programme name to strengthen its relationship with T Levels and signal clearly that this is the first step on a 3-year path to achieving a T Level, for those students who need to take a foundation year first.

The focus of, and target group for, the programme remains unchanged. The T Level Foundation Year is for those students who have the potential to progress onto a T Level with the extra support and preparation that the programme can provide. Specifically, it is for students who, for example:

- demonstrate an aptitude and keenness to progress onto a T Level
- could realistically be prepared, during the programme, for the step up to level 3 technical study on a T Level
- would benefit from the additional time to build their knowledge and skills in English and/or maths, where they don't already have at least GCSE grade 4 in these subjects
- learn better in a predominantly classroom/workshop-based environment rather than the workplace.

The programme name change will mean that future qualifications that are designed to support progression to T Levels – based on the NTOs – that will be taken as part of the T Level Foundation Year, will be collectively called T Level Foundation Qualifications.

## Next Steps

Ofqual is now consulting on its draft conditions, requirements and guidance for progression qualifications, including T Level Foundation Qualifications. This consultation can be found [here](#). Ofqual's final conditions, requirements and guidance for these qualifications will be published later in the year.

T Level Foundation Qualifications will be part of Cycle 2 of the qualifications reforms at level 3 and below. Full details of the criteria and process for approving qualifications submitted in Cycle 2 will be published in the autumn and this will include a detailed timeline. Qualifications approved in Cycle 2 will be available for first teaching in 2026. The Department will continue to engage with AOs and support them in understanding the NTOs and their purpose during the development of these qualifications.



## Appendix A: Changes that have been made to the NTOs

Type of change	Rationale for the change
Redrafted some outcomes to signal clearly what learners should be able to do on completion	<p>We have redrafted some outcomes for clarity and consistency but their focus remains the same.</p> <p>We have reduced the number of outcomes in the Health and Science route to three, to remove duplication and bring together related content into one purposeful outcome, that can be delivered in the time available.</p>
Clearly distinguished what content must be covered in the qualification	We have stripped back the NTOs to the essential knowledge and skills needed to demonstrate the outcomes. We have changed the format within the NTO documents to make it clearer what content must be covered for each outcome and separating this from the supplementary information to support teaching and learning.
Clearer wording of knowledge and skills that must be covered in the qualification	Across all NTOs, we have ensured the wording of the knowledge and skills topics is clear, consistent and of an appropriate level of detail); and written in a way that can be contextualised to different scenarios, such as to reflect the interest of learners.
Expanded the Introduction and Rationales for the NTOs	<p>We have included an introduction to each set of NTOs that explains how they prepare for progression to T Levels in the route, how they can work together in combination and the suitability of the content for level 2 study.</p> <p>We have expanded the rationale for the individual outcomes and knowledge and skills topics selected.</p>
Brought together all the supplementary information relevant to each outcome in one place	<p>Supplementary information is included for education providers to use, at their discretion, to support teaching and learning. This is to distinguish it from the content that must be covered in the qualification.</p> <p>For each outcome there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an explanation for the combination of outcomes selected for the route</li> <li>• the rationale for each outcome</li> <li>• how the outcomes could be delivered in combination</li> <li>• how to set the level of demand to meet students' development needs</li> <li>• illustrative examples of how breadth and depth could be introduced into teaching and learning</li> <li>• opportunities to support the contextualised development and application of English, maths and digital skills, and</li> <li>• examples of behaviours that are integral to the outcome but not expected to be assessed explicitly</li> </ul>

Type of change	Rationale for the change
<p>Separated the behaviours from the content that must be covered in a qualification, unless they can be assessed appropriately</p>	<p>Many of the behaviours, identified as important by employers, are not assessable and therefore not in scope of assessment within a qualification. Where that is the case, these have been included in the supplementary section information.</p> <p>Where behaviours are assessable in context, they have been incorporated into the skills that will be assessed. Two behaviours have been included on that basis: “self-reflecting” and “self-managing”.</p>
<p>Separated English, maths and digital skills from the content that must be covered in the qualification, unless they are necessary to achieve the outcome</p>	<p>The NTOs include reference to English, maths and digital skills covered in GCSEs and functional skills qualifications in these subjects<sup>2</sup>. These references signpost opportunities for developing or applying these in a practical context.</p> <p>Where specific EMD skills are necessary to achieving an outcome, they have been included in the knowledge and skills and must be covered in the qualification.</p> <p>We have moved the references and mapping to English and maths GCSE and Functional Skills and subject content to the supplementary information section. These references support wider opportunities for the contextualised teaching and application of these skills.</p>

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<sup>2</sup> Digital skills are now mapped to the latest Digital FS qualification subject content (Level 1), rather than essential digital skills subject content.



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