



Department
for Education

Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels

Consultation on qualification content

Launch date 26 January 2023

Respond by 6 April 2023

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Introduction

The Department for Education is seeking views on the content for level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels.

Who this is for

This consultation 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

Duration

This consultation will be open for 10 weeks starting on 26 January 2023 and ending at midnight on 6 April 2023.

Enquiries

For enquiries about this consultation, you can email the team at TLevelTransition.PROGRAMME@education.gov.uk

How to respond

Please use the [online questionnaire](#) if possible, to submit your response. If you are unable to use the online questionnaire, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, please email the team and a Word version can be provided, which you can return by email or post.

By email

TLevelTransition.PROGRAMME@education.gov.uk

By post

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London, SW1P 3BT

The response

The results and the Department's response will be published in summer 2023.

Background to the consultation

The Department's post-16 qualifications review 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 learners who take them. This will ensure there are clear pathways through the education system. To support the progression pathway to T Levels, we will consider for funding those qualifications at level 2 designed to support learners' preparation to move onto a T Level in a particular T Level route; approved qualifications would be available for first teaching from 2026.

These qualifications could be taken by young people as part of a broader T Level Transition Programme (TLTP), or by adults outside of a TLTP. It is important that these qualifications help to support young people to prepare for and progress onto a T Level. Existing level 2 qualifications with funding approval will not have been designed specifically for the TLTP or to support progression to a T Level route¹. It is therefore likely that there will be a need for new or reformed qualifications whose content aligns with a T Level route and the TLTP.

The Department has recently developed national content for the TLTP – called [national technical outcomes](#) (NTOs). These set out what learners are expected to be able to do by the end of the programme to prepare for a particular T Level route. We have published NTOs for the first 11 T Level routes² and will publish NTOs for the twelfth route (which covers the T Level in Marketing) later in 2023.

We intend that the NTOs become the framework for the content of qualifications designed to support progression to T Levels and we are seeking views on how we would expect this to work.

In parallel, Ofqual is consulting on how it proposes to regulate qualifications designed to support progression to T Levels, and the proposed purposes of these qualifications. This document should therefore be read in conjunction with [Ofqual's consultation](#).

¹ Since 1 September 2020, we stopped automatically considering all new regulated qualifications at level 3 and below for funding approval, for students aged 16 and over, except where exemptions apply. Please see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-funding-approval/changes-from-the-qualification-reviews>

² Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care; Business and Administration; Catering and Hospitality; Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Design; Digital; Education and Childcare; Engineering and Manufacturing; Hair and Beauty; Health and Science; Legal, Financial and Accounting.

Proposals at a glance

We intend to make some general revisions to the NTOs for each T Level route so that they provide a clearer framework that can be used as the basis for the content of level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels. This framework will set the high-level scope for the content of the qualifications for each T Level route.

For these qualifications, the Department proposes:

- Proposal 1: that awarding organisations will have discretion to elaborate on the content that must be covered within the revised NTOs to determine the detailed content of a qualification; and will have some limited flexibility to make minor changes to the NTO content where they consider there to be a strong justification.
- Proposal 2: that 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.

The T Level Transition Programme (TLTP)

The TLTP is a one-year level 2 study programme intended to provide a high-quality route onto T Levels. There is a TLTP for each T Level route because the programme aims to provide a broad foundation to support progression onto any T Level in a route³. It is for young people who would benefit from additional study time and preparation before doing a T Level. The programme has six components:

- diagnostic, monitoring and guidance
- English, maths and digital
- experience of the workplace
- technical knowledge and skills
- personal development and enrichment
- pastoral support

The [Framework for Delivery](#) sets out clear national expectations about the knowledge, skills and behaviours that, as a minimum, we expect learners to develop on the programme, to help them to progress onto, and succeed on, a T Level.

Technical knowledge and skills component

The purpose of this component is to give learners a broad introduction to their chosen T Level route, through industry-relevant knowledge and practical skills, as a stepping-stone to what they will cover on the T Levels within that route. It also allows them to explore whether they are interested in pursuing this route as a career and, where relevant, which T Level in that route they wish to pursue. Learners should cover the NTOs for their T Level route. This is to ensure a level of consistency for learners, wherever they are taking the TLTP. They should also do a small project related to their T Level route, based on a real issue relevant to employers and, if feasible, informed by an employer, with opportunities for employer interaction during the project. Whilst this project is not like a T Level Employer Set Project (ESP) it provides an opportunity to help learners prepare for the ESP.

National technical outcomes

The focus of each set of NTOs is a small number of practical outcomes that learners should be able to do by the end of the programme. There are broadly three outcomes for

³ There isn't a separate TLTP for every T Level or for each occupational specialism within T Levels.

each route⁴ that, together, provide a carefully balanced introduction to T Levels across the route, not an individual T Level⁵ or occupational specialism. This outcome-based structure is an important design feature of the NTOs, to prepare learners for the practical nature of T Levels and is consistent with the approach for T Level occupational specialisms (though the NTOs do not aim to develop occupational competence). Although each outcome in a route can be demonstrated independently, they have been designed to work in combination; for example, several outcomes could be combined into a project.

Learners will be expected to apply the specified knowledge, skills and behaviours to demonstrate the outcomes; typically acquiring knowledge and skills through realistic employment-related contexts and situations. The knowledge, skills and behaviours within each outcome relate to the content of the T Levels in a particular route and are appropriate for level 2 study.

The NTOs for each route were designed to ensure that the overall learning required could be covered in 120-150 guided learning hours (GLH) in total; and approximately 30-50 hours per outcome. This is to ensure that the curriculum time given to delivering the NTOs is proportionate within a one-year TLTP and allows enough time for the other important components of the programme.

The NTOs are currently drafted as guidance for education providers. The outcomes are worded in a way that allows them to be applied in different practical contexts; education providers can choose the specific contexts to cover for teaching and learning purposes. The NTOs also include additional information that education providers can use to support their teaching of the NTOs and the wider design of their TLTPs:

- examples of specific content that could be covered within the knowledge and skills topics, which is indicative rather than essential or exhaustive
- examples of where additional breadth can be developed by applying knowledge and understanding to different contexts, and depth by using higher order skills (such as analysing information and ideas from across the contexts to draw conclusions and make judgements)
- references to English, maths and digital skills, to identify opportunities for the contextualised application of these skills and help learners understand the relevance to their chosen occupational area

⁴ The Health and Science route has four smaller outcomes as they include an extra knowledge-based learning outcome to ensure effective coverage of content across this route.

⁵ A small number of routes contain only one T Level: Business and Administration, Catering and Hospitality, Education and Childcare, Hair and Beauty, Sales, and Marketing and Procurement.

The NTOs were developed in collaboration with a wide range of T Level Transition Programme providers, other providers, employers, education specialists and other stakeholders, in a multi-stage development process. This was to help ensure they capture the right outcomes, knowledge, skills and behaviours that support progression to T Levels. We intend to review any future updates to T Level content and assess the need to update the NTOs, as necessary.

There are no national assessment requirements for the NTOs as they are a guide for teaching and learning. Nor is there a requirement for education providers to deliver the NTOs through using an existing ESFA-funded qualification(s), given that existing qualifications were not designed to fit with the NTOs per se. Where providers want to use a qualification, they can decide which to use based on what they consider to be the best fit for the NTOs, for their wider TLTPs and for their learners. Providers can also take a non-qualification based approach to delivery or combine qualification and non-qualification based delivery. Decisions have not been made on whether, post-qualifications review, teaching the NTOs through a non-qualification approach will continue to be an option. Most providers delivering the TLTP are using a qualification, of varying types and sizes, although there is a shift towards smaller qualifications that allow more time for the rest of the programme.

Level 2 qualifications supporting progression to T Levels

As part of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England, the Department intends to fund level 2 qualifications that are designed to support progression to T levels.

The [Department's letter to Ofqual](#) sets out the ministerial intentions for these qualifications. In summary, these qualifications should:

- provide a breadth of knowledge, understanding and skills that will prepare learners for study in a T Level route
- be engaging and motivating for the learners who take them
- help prepare learners for what they will experience on T Levels, so should allow learners to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in a practical context
- appropriately balance modularity with the need for assessments to draw together the knowledge, understanding and skills developed through the content; and the frequency of assessment not to distract from, or predominantly drive, teaching and learning
- be large enough to cover broad content relevant to a route, but not so large as to overly restrict all the other important elements of the programme, as these qualifications will form just one part of the TLTP
- have a single consistent grading approach

Ofqual is consulting on how to regulate these qualifications to take account of these ministerial intentions. The Department is consulting on how we intend to use the national technical outcomes as the basis for the content of these qualifications.

Using the national technical outcomes as the framework for qualification content

We intend that the NTOs become the framework for the content of qualifications supporting progression to T Levels.

The scope of the NTOs for each route has already been carefully developed through a rigorous process, to ensure they provide a balanced foundation to prepare learners for a T Level in a particular route. It also ensures consistency for learners taking these qualifications as a steppingstone to T Levels.

Whilst existing level 2 qualifications in similar areas to T Levels may cover some of the content in the NTOs, their overall scope and outcomes will differ. We therefore expect that new or significantly reformed qualifications will be needed to ensure there are level 2 qualifications that align with the TLTP.

Developing the NTOs into a framework for qualification content

We intend to make some general revisions to the NTOs for each T Level route so that they provide a clearer framework for the content of these qualifications.

The NTOs were not originally drafted to be used as the basis for qualifications so we need to make them clearer for awarding organisations to use. This section explains the changes we intend to make. The changes are mostly presentational. We do not intend to change the focus of the NTO content itself as it has already been subject to a multi-stage development process.

Through these revisions we intend to ensure that:

- the language across all NTOs is consistent, clear and not open to interpretation
- it is clear which knowledge and skills are required to demonstrate an outcome and must be covered in the qualification
- we clearly distinguish the content that must be covered in the qualification from the extra information provided for exemplification or additional reference. This extra information was carefully developed for education providers to support teaching and learning, so we want to keep it in the documents.
- we provide an expanded rationale for the outcomes, the content selected within them, and how the outcomes for the route work together

Table 1: Changes that will be made to the NTOs

Type of change	Rationale for the change
Clearly distinguishing what content must be covered in the qualification	<p>We will change the format within the NTO documents to make it clearer what content must be covered for each outcome, by separating this out from the extra reference material.</p> <p>The extra information includes illustrative examples of content that <i>could</i> be included within a knowledge or skills topic (see below), examples of how breadth and depth could be developed, signposting opportunities for behaviours to be developed, or for developing and applying English, maths and digital skills.</p>
Clearer wording of knowledge and skills that must be covered in the qualification	<p>We will ensure the wording of the knowledge and skills topics is clear; of an appropriate level of detail; consistent in language, terminology and coverage of the principles and practical concepts across routes (e.g., health and safety); and written in a way that can be contextualised to different scenarios, such as to reflect the interest of learners.</p>
Expanding the Introduction and Rationales for the NTOs	<p>We will provide an expanded explanation of why the outcomes for that route were selected, and how they can work together in combination. For the individual outcomes, we will explain why the specific knowledge and skills topics were selected, the suitability of the content for level 2 study, and potential project opportunities.</p>
Bringing together all the illustrative content in one place	<p>Some of the knowledge and skills topics include examples of specific content that <i>could</i> be covered in these areas, or examples of contexts in which they can be applied. These are only illustrative examples and are not comprehensive. We do not expect these examples to limit the scope of what is covered in a qualification nor for all the examples to be covered. Awarding organisations could, of course, include any of this content if they consider it appropriate.</p> <p>As these are still useful examples of the breadth of potential learning opportunities within each outcome – at least for education providers – we will separate them out from the content that must be covered in a qualification, so that all the illustrative content relevant to an outcome is in one place.</p>
Separating the behaviours from the content that must be covered in a qualification, unless they can be	<p>The behaviours are enabling attributes and attitudes regarded as important by employers for achieving the outcomes. Many of the behaviours are difficult to assess so would not be in scope of assessment within a qualification.</p> <p>Where behaviours are assessable in context, they will be incorporated into the skills that will be assessed; for example,</p>

assessed appropriately	behaviours such as “reflective” may be included as a skill such as “self-reflection” that could be incorporated into the qualification.
Separating English, maths and digital skills from the content that must be covered in the qualification, unless they are necessary to achieve the outcome	<p>The NTOs include reference to English, maths and digital (EMD) skills covered in GCSEs and functional skills qualifications in these subjects⁶. 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 must be covered in the qualification. We will separate out the references to EMD skills that support wider opportunities for the contextualised teaching and application of these skills, to make it clear that these do not need to be covered in the qualification.</p>

Question 1: Will the intended changes to the NTOs be sufficient for awarding organisations to use the NTOs as the framework for developing the content of a qualification for a particular route? If not, please explain what further changes or information would be necessary.

Proposals for using the NTOs as the framework for qualification content

We intend that the revised NTOs for each T Level route will become the framework that awarding organisations will need to use to develop qualifications. This framework will set the high-level scope for the content of the qualifications for each T Level route.

This means that the outcomes and all the associated essential knowledge and skill topics must be covered by the qualification content (subject to proposal 1 below). The scope of a qualification must not be expanded by adding extra outcomes. Where the NTOs specify optionality, within or between outcomes, this optionality must be incorporated into the qualification design for that route. In keeping with the NTOs, these qualifications should allow education providers the flexibility to tailor their delivery to different contexts and scenarios, as appropriate for their learners and localities.

Proposal 1: Awarding organisations will have discretion to elaborate on the content that must be covered in the revised NTOs to determine the detailed

⁶ Digital skills are now mapped to the latest Digital FS qualification subject content (Level 1), rather than essential digital skills subject content.

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 provide a high-level framework, not fully specified content for a qualification. The knowledge and skills under each outcome are high level topics. Awarding organisations will need to determine the specific content to be included within each of these knowledge and skills topics, to ensure learners are able to achieve each of the outcomes. In developing the detailed content, awarding organisations could refer to the extra exemplification information that we will include for each outcome, and reflect any of that specific content in a qualification. However, this is not a requirement.

Although the knowledge and skills topics for each outcome have been selected carefully, we would envisage allowing awarding organisations to make minor changes when developing full qualifications, where there is a robust justification for any changes. For example, removing or adding a knowledge or skills topic to achieve an outcome, or covering a knowledge or skills topic under a different outcome.

We would also expect awarding organisations to meaningfully involve education providers, who are delivering the TLTP and T Levels, in determining the detailed content in the full qualification specification.

Question 2: Do you agree that awarding organisations should have some flexibility to make minor changes to the content where there is a robust justification? Please explain why.

Assessment

Ofqual's consultation on regulating qualifications supporting progression to T Levels sets out their regulatory proposals relating to assessment. Awarding organisations will therefore need to refer to Ofqual's proposals on assessment. The Department also has one proposal relating to how the NTOs should be interpreted for the purpose of assessment.

It is worth reiterating that the [Department's letter to Ofqual](#) states that these qualifications should appropriately balance modularity with the need for assessments to draw together the knowledge, understanding and skills developed through the content; and that the frequency of assessment should not distract from, or predominantly drive, teaching and learning. Education providers should have sufficient time within the overall TLTP to focus on teaching and learning and formative assessment, to ensure learners are developing the knowledge and skills and their ability to apply them to the outcomes.

We intend that qualifications supporting progression to T Levels must assess how well learners can demonstrate the outcomes in the NTOs for that T Level route through the practical application of knowledge and skills.

This is because the outcomes are the foundation of the NTOs. They specify what the Department expects TLTP learners to be able to do by the end of the programme, through applying their knowledge, skills and behaviours in contexts that are authentic and meaningful to employers. The NTOs focus not on demonstrating knowledge or skills in isolation but what learners are able to do with their knowledge and skills. Awarding organisations will therefore need to consider the approach to assessment that would most validly demonstrate the outcomes, in line with Ofqual's General Conditions and the proposed requirements for these qualifications that Ofqual is consulting on.

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

The outcomes were not written for the purposes of summative assessment so awarding organisations will need to determine the scope of assessment needed to demonstrate the outcomes. For example, the outcomes as drafted imply that learners should develop the capacity to perform them more than once, in different contexts; but for assessment purposes, we would expect no more than one context to be assessed at any one time. When determining the scope of assessments, awarding organisations will also need to take into account any assessment requirements or guidance issued by Ofqual.

Question 3: For awarding organisations: Would you need any further information from the Department on the outcomes within the NTOs, in order to determine the scope of assessment for demonstrating the outcomes? Please explain why.

Qualification size

We do not expect the technical component to be the largest part of the TLTP, as its purpose is introductory rather than equipping learners with occupational competence. As such, the NTOs for each route were designed to ensure that the required learning could be covered in 120-150 guided learning hours (GLH), based on the minimum knowledge and skills required to demonstrate the outcomes. This excludes assessment time. To provide some perspective, this is approximately equivalent in size to one GCSE or the minimum GLH for a level 2 technical award.

As set out in the Government's response to the review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below, the guideline size range for level 2 qualifications that support progression to level 3 technical qualifications (including T Levels) is 120 to 240 GLH; approximately equivalent in size to one to two GCSEs. This guideline ensures that these qualifications are large enough to cover broad content relevant to a technical education route but not so large that it would unduly squeeze the time available for the other important elements of a study programme.

We would expect qualifications based on the NTOs to be within the Department's guideline size range of 120 to 240 GLH for these qualifications. There would be some scope for qualifications to cover the NTOs (knowledge and skills) in more detail than the minimum envisaged in their original design, whilst remaining within the size guidelines. For example, teaching and learning could cover the application of knowledge and skills in different contexts. However, it is important that the size of these qualifications does not constrain the ability of education providers to deliver all the other important components of a one-year TLTP, so we would not expect the guidelines to be exceeded.

Consultation questions

1. Will the intended changes to the NTOs be sufficient for awarding organisations to use the NTOs as the framework for developing the content of a qualification for a particular route? If not, please explain what further changes or information would be necessary.
2. Do you agree that awarding organisations should have some flexibility to make minor changes to the content where there is a robust justification? Please explain why.
3. For awarding organisations: Would you need any further information from the Department on the outcomes within the NTOs, in order to determine the scope of assessment for demonstrating the outcomes? Please explain why.
4. What are the benefits and opportunities of using the revised NTOs as the framework for the high-level content for qualifications supporting progression to T Levels?
5. Are there likely to be any significant delivery challenges or support needs, for education providers or awarding organisations, arising from the proposals? If yes, please explain why and indicate whether these relate to a particular route.
6. Is there anything else about the proposals that you would like to provide feedback on? Please explain.
7. Do the proposals have the potential to impact, positively or negatively, on specific groups, particularly those with protected characteristics⁷? If yes, please explain why.
8. For awarding organisations: Would your organisation potentially be interested in developing qualifications to support progression to T Levels that are based on the NTOs? If yes, which route(s)?

⁷ Characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

Glossary

Below is an explanation of terms used in this document.

Term	Definition
Behaviours	The enabling attributes, attitudes and behaviours were developed for T Levels, available from the Operating Instructions for the Creation of Outline Content . Those selected are regarded as important by employers and may be achieved through the outcomes.
Breadth and depth	<p>Developing breadth supports the consolidation of knowledge and skills at the same level, by applying concepts, facts and theories in broader contexts.</p> <p>Developing depth provides stretch and challenge to move students towards the next level, by analysing information and ideas from across the contexts, to draw conclusions and make judgements.</p>
Formative assessment	Formative assessment is a teaching and learning strategy, to monitor student progress and support their further learning. Formative assessment materials and standards are usually determined by education providers. Feedback that goes beyond a grade or a mark is a critical element of formative assessment.
Knowledge	Knowledge refers to both knowledge and understanding, which relate to the theoretical facts, principles, concepts, procedures and techniques that students should acquire.
Outcomes	<p>These describe, at a high level, what all students 'can do' by the end of the programme. The outcomes bridge three elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities that students will do to demonstrate their learning • content being learnt (knowledge) • skills and behaviours being developed
Skills	<p>Different types of skills are included in the NTOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technical skills, which are occupation specific. Most of the technical skills in the NTOs are practical, hands-on skills • employability skills, also known as transferable skills or, in some cases, soft skills. These include English, maths and digital skills.
Summative assessment	Summative assessment is used to formally evaluate where a student is against an established standard or benchmark. It is usually associated with achievement of a qualification or some form of external accreditation or validation.



Department
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