



Department  
for Education

# **Using the new level 3 qualifications in the reformed landscape from 2025**

**Questions and answers linked to the  
publication of the first list of approved  
qualifications at level 3 in May 2024**

**May 2024**

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## Summary

This publication answers questions we anticipate ESFA funded providers may have in response to our publication of the list of new level 3 alternative academic qualifications (AAQs) and technical qualifications (TQs) that have been approved for public funding in England from 1 August 2025.

## Who this publication is for

These questions and answers are for ESFA funded providers who will deliver the new level 3 AAQs and TQs. They may also be useful to others, such as awarding organisations.

## Main points

The questions and answers are linked to the first list of approved level 3 qualifications published in May 2024.

We have tried to anticipate questions linked to the announcement.

We have already published a wider set of [Post-16 Qualifications Reform FAQs](#) as part of our [Information and support resources for qualification reform](#). These include questions about qualification reform more widely. We have not duplicated those questions here.

## Document history

This is the first version of this Q&A document.

We will keep these questions and answers under review and publish any updates.

# Questions and answers

## The qualification reform process

### What are the cycles of reform?

The process of reforming post 16 qualifications at level 3 and below has three phases.

- In Phase 1, which was completed in August 2022, we removed public funding from around 5,500 qualifications in England at levels 2 and 3 with low or no enrolments.
- Phase 2 focusses on removing 16-19 public funding from level 3 technical qualifications in England that overlap with T Levels, which are the core of the new technical education offer at level 3. Public funding will be removed from qualifications which overlap with waves 1 and 2 T Levels on 31 July 2024 and from qualifications overlapping with waves 3 and 4 T Levels on 31 July 2025. This is the list of [qualifications overlapping with T Levels in waves 1 and 2](#). This is the [wave 3 overlapping qualifications list](#) and this is the [provisional wave 4 overlap list](#) (which is still subject to appeal by awarding organisations).
- Phase 3 is the introduction of new funding approval criteria for technical and non-technical qualifications in scope of the review at level 3 and below. In this phase we will approve new qualifications for public funding in England and remove funding from existing qualifications that have not been reformed, in cycles.
  - **Cycle 1** covers education and childcare, construction and the built environment, health and social care, engineering and manufacturing, and digital. Existing qualifications in these areas will not be publicly funded in England after 31 July 2025. New qualifications that have been approved for public funding in England will become available on 1 August 2025. This means the last day for publicly funded enrolments on existing qualifications in these routes will be 31 July 2025 and students will be funded through to completion on these courses. We have published a [list of Level 3 qualifications](#) which will have public funding removed after 31 July 2025 due to being in cycle 1 routes and which have not been reformed. Where awarding organisations told us that existing qualifications would be replaced with newly reformed qualifications, these qualifications do not appear on this list. They will also have public funding removed after 31 July 2025. You can find the list of newly approved Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) and Technical Qualifications (TQs) at level 3 that will be available for first teach from 1 August 2025 here. This will be reflected on [DfE's database of publicly-funded qualifications](#), which will be updated in July following the opportunity for awarding organisations to request a procedural review.
  - **Cycle 2** covers the other technical occupational routes. It also includes the development of a limited range of larger AAQs. We may also approve qualifications in the cycle 1 routes in cycle 2. This is a final opportunity for

- awarding organisations to propose qualifications in cycle 1 routes. Existing qualifications in cycle 2 routes will have public funding withdrawn in England on 31 July 2026 and new qualifications that are approved for public funding in England will be available from 1 August 2026. We will publish the respective lists of cycle 2 qualifications once the funding approval process for this cycle has concluded, expected to be in May 2025.
- **Cycle 3** will consider cross-cutting skills qualifications in all routes. Qualifications in this space will be approved for public funding in England from 1 August 2027.

### **Where can I find out more about the post-16 qualifications reform process?**

Our [Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond](#) contains information on this.

We have also brought all our [information and support materials for providers](#) together in one place. This includes key information about the reforms, timelines, practical resources, access to support, upcoming events, frequently asked questions and a glossary of key terms. We have begun to publish a monthly Qualifications Reform Update which you can also access through the link above.

### **What is happening at Level 2 in the reform programme?**

We understand that a high-quality offer at level 2 and below is particularly important. We will be providing a comprehensive offer that enables students to progress. New technical qualifications at level 2 will support those who want to enter key level 2 occupations such as those in social care, health or construction. New T Level Foundation Year qualifications and other level 2 progression qualifications will support those who want to progress to level 3 study. We are also reforming qualifications below level 2 including personal social and employability qualifications.

## **The new qualifications at level 3**

### **Where can I find the list of level 3 qualifications you have just approved for public funding in England?**

You can find the list of new level 3 alternative academic and technical qualifications that have been approved for public funding in England from 1 August 2025 in our [information and support for providers on qualifications reform](#).

You will also be able to find them in our [List of Qualifications approved for funding](#). This website has funding approval information for all of the qualifications that are approved for public funding in England by the Department for Education.

## **What is a small AAQ?**

Small AAQs are academic qualifications of between 150 and 420 GLH that we will approve for public funding in England in strategically important subjects where there are no A levels and where they demonstrate clear progression to related higher education. Our [Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond](#) confirms the permitted subjects. Small AAQs can be taken as part of a mixed study programme alongside A levels.

## **What is a large AAQ?**

Large AAQs are academic qualifications of between 720 and 1,080 GLH that we will approve for public funding in England in a permitted list of subjects. This is where there are no T Levels, where there is a need for a large qualification enabling entry to more specialist areas of higher education such as performing arts, and where they demonstrate clear progression to related higher education. Again, our [Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond](#) confirms the permitted subjects.

## **What is a technical occupational entry qualification - 16 to 19 and adult, and adult only?**

A technical occupational entry qualification (TOQ) is a type of TQ that aims to support a student to enter into, or to progress within a role in employment. These qualifications will be funded in England for 16–19-year-olds and adults where they do not overlap with a T Level but will only be funded for adults in T Level areas.

## **What is an additional specialist qualification?**

A technical additional specialist qualification is another type of technical qualification. It allows a student to develop additional knowledge and competencies and specialise within a sector. These qualifications will build on knowledge covered by a T Level or other occupational entry qualification. For example, low-carbon construction design building on the Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction T Level. As they do not overlap with T level content they will be funded in England for 16-19 and adult learners.

## **Why are there so few technical qualifications available on the approved list?**

The new landscape will look quite different from how it looks now. This is because T Levels will be at the core of the technical education offer, and these are large qualifications with only one awarding organisation providing them. This contrasts with current qualifications where different awarding bodies can offer qualifications in similar areas, and where those qualifications are not based on employer led occupational standards and do not have to contain a work placement.

At this stage in the process, we would not expect a considerable number of technical qualifications to be approved for 16 to 19 public funding, because this cycle of approvals

deals only with T Level areas. This means that only technical qualifications relating to occupational standards in those routes which are not included in the T level and additional specialist qualifications would be funded. However, there are more technical qualifications funded for adults because they do not study T levels.

### **When will the first students take these new level 3 qualifications?**

All the new level 3 qualifications that have been approved for public funding in England in cycle 1 will be available from 1 August 2025. This is the first date from which students can be enrolled on them. The timescale allows providers to prepare for delivery including marketing the new qualifications to students.

### **What is the UCAS points tariff for the new level 3 AAQs and TQs?**

We know that acceptance of the new qualifications by UCAS and the points allocated to them will be a key factor in preparation for their delivery. We are working with UCAS and universities to ensure that they understand the new qualifications landscape. All level 3 qualifications in the Ofqual register are included in the UCAS Tariff and that will include the new qualifications. UCAS publish an update to the Tariff Tables each year in May and the [2025-tariff-tables](#) have been published.

### **Will more approved qualifications be added to the level 3 list?**

The list contains all the new qualifications at level 3 that have been approved for funding in England from August 2025 in cycle 1. It does not, however, provide a full overview of all publicly funded qualifications in England at level 3. This is confirmed by the [List of Qualifications approved for funding](#). Cycle 2 of the process for approving new qualifications starts in June 2024 and will see more new qualifications added to the approved list. These will be for first teach from August 2026, with further qualifications at level 3 becoming available in 2027.

### **What qualifications will be approved in Cycle 2?**

This depends on the qualifications awarding organisations propose for approval. You can see a list of the routes and subjects in which qualifications can be put forward in cycle 2 in the [Guide to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England](#). We are also allowing awarding organisations a final opportunity to propose qualifications in cycle 1 subjects in cycle 2.

### **Where can I find more information on the new level 3 qualifications?**

Awarding organisations will publish information on the new qualifications on their websites. We encourage you to contact awarding organisations directly if you have any questions about their qualifications.

## **Will the new level 3 qualifications be funded for both 16–19-year-olds and adults?**

This depends on what the awarding organisation asked for when they proposed the qualification and what is possible under the different funding offers. You can see the funding approval position of a qualification by looking it up on [Find a learning aim](#).

## **Using the new qualifications**

### **Will there be rules of combination for using the new level 3 qualifications?**

There will be new rules of combination for how the new level 3 qualifications can be used in 16 to 19 study programmes. We are developing guidance on these rules of combination which we will share shortly as part of our [information and support for providers on qualifications reform](#). The study programmes guidance for 2025-26 and the funding rules will also contain further information.

### **Can a small AAQ be taken with a T Level?**

There could be a small number of students who will want to take an A or AS level alongside their T Level. The [T Levels funding guide 2024 to 2025](#) provides more information on this. We expect that a small AAQ could similarly be taken with a T Level by a small number of students, but this will be confirmed through a future version of the T Levels funding guide

### **Can a technical additional specialist qualification be taken with a T Level?**

An additional specialist qualification could be taken with a T Level, as these qualifications provide specific skills that go beyond occupational entry competence.

### **Can we deliver 1 A level and 2 small AAQs in a study programme?**

From August 2025 mixed academic study programmes using the new AAQs should include 2 A levels wherever possible and appropriate. However, they can consist of 1 A level and 2 small AAQs to meet the needs of individual students, such as those on a part-time study programme, with lower prior attainment at level 2, with special educational needs and disabilities or with exceptional circumstances. If you do include multiple small AAQs with A levels, the small AAQs must be in different sector subject areas

### **What do you mean by ‘low prior attainment’ in relation to planning a study programme for a student?**

When we talk about “low prior attainment” at the end of GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education), we are referring to students who achieve lower results based on their overall attainment at the end of secondary education. Providers should take care to tailor study programmes to individual aspirations and needs, in discussion with each student. While we expect to continue to see programmes comprising purely of A levels or T Levels, study programme composition will be varied and may include a mix of



academic and technical qualifications, or a mix of levels where, for instance, a student needs to retake level 2 English or Maths alongside a level 3 qualification. Students may also need to spend longer at level 2 if it means improved progression prospects to higher levels, for example, taking the T Level Foundation Year before taking a T Level, or studying a level 2 academic progression qualification before moving to a mixed academic programme at level 3. Students with 'low prior attainment' are also able to study 2 AAQs alongside 1 A level if that is a suitable study programme for them.

### **Why can't we deliver two AAQs in the same sector subject area (SSA)?**

The government's priority is that most study programmes should consist of A levels and T Levels, because these offer the best opportunity for progression. We think it is unlikely that effective study programme combinations offering the best progression would be achieved by allowing learners to select AAQs in the same SSAs. We will be using the level 2 numbered categories in qualification SSAs when we look at this. You can see these in the [Qualification descriptions](#) and on [Find a learning aim](#). These rules apply to academic programmes not technical programmes.

### **Can we deliver a study programme combining the new technical and academic qualifications?**

A mixed technical study programme at level 3 is a combination of a large TQ and small AAQs or A levels. These programmes must provide coherent learning in a clear individual learning plan and the outcome must be technical competence and progression to skilled employment. The guidance on rules of combination in 16 to 19 study programmes will say more about this when we share it on our [information and support for providers on qualifications reform](#).

### **I have a question about using the new qualifications that is not covered here. Where can I find out about how the rules of combination and study programme guidance apply to the new qualifications?**

We are producing guidance to begin to show how the new level 3 academic and technical qualifications approved for funding in England from August 2025 can be combined in study programmes and we will publish this shortly. The 16-19 study programmes guidance will also be amended ahead of the 2025 to 2026 academic year and will confirm the rules of combination. Meanwhile, you can use our guidance to begin to plan your offer.

## **Qualifications at level 3 that are being defunded**

### **Where can I see the list of level 3 qualifications that are having public funding withdrawn through cycle 1 of the reforms?**

Alongside approving new qualifications for public funding at level 3, we have also published a list of 318 qualifications which will have public funding removed on 31 July 2025 due to being in the cycle 1 routes, and which have not been reformed. Where

awarding organisations told the department that existing qualifications would be replaced with newly reformed alternative academic or technical qualifications, these qualifications do not appear on this list. They will also have a public funding end date of 31 July 2025. This will be reflected in DfE's [database of publicly-funded qualifications](#) on gov.uk.

We will update the database again in July following the opportunity for awarding organisations to request a procedural review regarding public funding outcomes from cycle 1 of the reforms.

### **Why are these qualifications being defunded?**

The aim of the post-16 qualifications review is to introduce new qualifications that are high quality, have a clear purpose and lead to meaningful progression outcomes – either into skilled employment or into higher education. Qualifications approved for public funding in England from 2025 must meet new funding approval criteria, including a clear demonstration of purpose and demand for these qualifications.

Awarding organisations are developing new qualifications which meet the new criteria. In cycle 1, we have considered new qualifications in education and childcare, construction and the built environment, engineering and manufacturing, health and social care, and digital. More new qualifications will follow in cycles 2 and 3.

Unlike existing applied general qualifications (AGQs), technical qualifications must also be based on level 3 occupational standards which have been co-designed with employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). This means that young people can be more confident that they are gaining the knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers need for the future.

Qualifications which have not been reformed to meet our new funding criteria, will have public funding removed in England ensuring that all qualifications in future are high quality and provide good progression outcomes for students.

### **Will there be any gaps in provision?**

The new landscape will look different to the landscape you are used to. One of the biggest changes is that students should study A levels and T Levels where possible, so the choice available reflects that intention. Another key principle is that technical qualifications should link to occupational standards, which means the qualification will be at the same level as the standard. The new qualifications available from August 2025 also reflects what qualifications awarding organisations submitted, and whether they met the new criteria. We have considered whether provision is sufficient against a range of criteria, including current learner numbers and trends in other areas of provision such as our world class apprenticeships scheme, and we are not anticipating gaps in the system following our reforms.

## **New qualifications at Level 2**

### **When will we find out more about level 2 qualifications**

The government is reforming level 2 and below in cycles, as with level 3. We will tell you about the first level 2 qualifications to be approved in England, and those to have funding removed, in July 2024. These will relate to occupational entry qualifications in construction and the built environment, engineering and manufacturing, health and social care and education and childcare. Reform of other level 2 areas and qualifications below level 2 will follow in subsequent cycles.

## Keeping up to date

### How can I keep up to date with the latest information or guidance you are sharing?

We will share everything, or a link to anything we publish elsewhere on GOV.UK, in our [information and support for providers on qualifications reform](#).

We publish a monthly update which you can find on the [Qualifications Reform news and updates](#). You can see the latest update there as well as past updates. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for the monthly update, send your request by signing up here [Post 16 Qualification Reform Updates](#).

You can also send a general query to [qualifications.approval@education.gov.uk](mailto:qualifications.approval@education.gov.uk).



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