



Department
for Education

Guidance on the review of post-16 qualifications reforms (L3)

**Route-by-route review and notification
process**

18th December 2024

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Background

In July 2024, The Secretary of State for Education announced a review of post-16 qualifications reform, the [outcomes](#) of which were published on 12th December 2024. The review considered the level 3 qualifications due to have public funding removed on either 31 July 2024 or 31 July 2025 under the policy of the previous government. The Government has central missions to drive forward opportunity and growth, which rely on people having the skills needed to thrive in life and work.

The current post-16 skills system in England is too confusing. Learners and employers need a simpler range of high-quality qualifications, which provide them with the skills they need. The government undertook a review of qualifications reform, to see where alternative qualifications need to be retained for longer, such as applied general qualifications or BTECs.

This government is seeking to bring a more pragmatic approach to qualifications reform, that is based on the needs of learners and our economy. This includes moving away from blanket restrictions, such as removing funding from all technical qualifications that were assessed to overlap with T Levels and instead, taking a practical, evidence-led approach, looking at the qualifications route by route. This will ensure that there are high-level choices for learners.

Defunding was planned to take place across 9 routes: Health and Science; Construction and the Built Environment; Education and Early Years; Digital; Engineering and Manufacturing; Legal, Finance and Accounting; Creative and Design; Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care and Business and Administration.

We began the review by identifying qualifications that had either no or below 100 enrolments per year over the last 3 years in the first 5 routes listed above. The other 4 routes were excluded from this process due to defunding only being announced for qualifications that had been assessed to overlap with the T Levels. Following the opportunity for awarding organisations to appeal, we will remove funding from 216 qualifications with low and no enrolments after 31st July 2025. We then conducted a route-by-route review of the remaining qualifications across all 9 routes in scope of the review, considering both the needs of learners and the economy when deciding whether qualifications should be retained for longer. The review concluded that 157 qualifications (circa 70 per cent of those that remained in scope) should have funding retained for longer. More details are set out below route by route.

This guidance

This guidance sets out:

- the criteria against which you can notify us that a qualification should not have its funding approval removed from 1st August 2025 (as an outcome of the route-by-route review)
- the process, evidence requirements and timescales for you to notify us

You must notify us by 5:00pm on 24th January 2025, if you believe a qualification meets the criteria set out in the guidance. We will be accepting notifications through Galaxkey. To be able to set up your access on Galaxkey, we need you to confirm the email addresses of people in your organisation that will need access by 5:00pm on 10th January 2025.

Expiry or review date

The guidance document will expire on 31 March 2025.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for awarding organisations.

Qualifications in scope of the review

We define a qualification to be one that is listed on [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#) with a unique Qualification Number (QAN).

The qualifications in scope of this review are level 3 qualifications that were due to have post-16 funding approval removed on either 31 July 2024 or 31 July 2025. This includes:

- The list of level 3 qualifications in scope for funding approval withdrawal in cycle 1 of the qualification reforms
- Qualifications which you identified in your cycle 1 submissions as being replaced by a reformed qualification (even where the replacement qualifications were not approved for funding).
- The lists of qualifications assessed as overlapping with T Levels in:
 - [Waves 1 and 2](#) (following funding approval being extended in 2024/25)
 - [Wave 3](#) and [Wave 4](#)

Due to the timing of the review the published cycle 1 and Wave 4 lists were still subject to procedural reviews and appeals respectively. The review did not consider qualifications where procedural reviews or appeals have been upheld since publication of these lists. Affected qualifications have already had their funding approval extended into 2025/26 on the [DfE list of qualifications that are approved for funding](#).

The review has considered the qualifications in scope for funding for all post-16 offers. Qualifications that have been retained, have been retained in all the offers for which they

were approved. Qualifications that have not been retained will be defunded in all post-16 offers. This is to ensure, for instance, that providers can combine cohorts for retained qualifications.

Criteria applied prior to the route-by-route review

Qualifications will continue to have funding approval withdrawn after 31 July 2025, for students aged 16 and over, where:

- qualifications are not approved for funding in a post-16 offer in 2024/25
- qualifications have an operational end date before 1 August 2025
- qualifications are replaced by a reformed Technical Occupational Qualification (TOQ) or Alternative Academic Qualification (AAQ), and that has been approved for funding from 1 August 2025
- qualifications are on the published [low and no enrolment list](#) of the review, unless
 - you have successfully submitted a notification for a qualification on the grounds outlined in the guidance on the low and no process, or
 - our latest data shows that a qualification now has 100 or more enrolments in 2023/24.

In both these cases you would have been notified on 15 November 2024.

These qualifications were not considered as part of the route-by-route process. You will not be able to submit a notification for the above decisions.

Route-by-route review

The route-by-route review considered 223 qualifications and whether they should have funding retained for longer based on the needs of learners and the economy. The review also considered stakeholder feedback and evidence.

For the route-by-route review, qualifications were categorised in 3 sizes:

- Small qualifications: up to 420 GLH,
- Medium-sized qualifications: 421-719 GLH and
- Large qualifications: 720 and above GLH.

Routes where qualifications will have funding retained until 31 July 2027

We will not proceed with defunding qualifications in Engineering and Manufacturing; agriculture, environmental and animal care; legal, finance and accounting; business and administration; and creative and design before 31 July 2027. In Engineering and Manufacturing, this is to allow the employer-designed occupational standards which underpin this large and complex route to be updated and for new qualifications to be

established which will meet the needs of learners, providers and employers. In the other 4 routes, we reserve the right to undertake a further low and no enrolment exercise in these routes if required. In 2027 we will at least remove funding from large qualifications in these 5 routes, to direct learners to the T Level(s). We will publish further information about wider reforms from 2027 onwards in these routes in due course, considering the recommendations of the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

Extension of funding approval beyond 2025/26 for all qualifications in the above routes will be subject to qualifications remaining operational and continuing to meet eligibility requirements at the point of funding extension. This is indicated on the list of extended qualifications published alongside this guidance.

Education and Early Years route

We will remove funding from qualifications where alternative qualifications, including reformed qualifications, will be available from 2025 (e.g. T Levels, TOQs or AAQs); or, in the case of Early Years Educator qualifications, where they no longer meet the [department's criteria for counting in the early years foundation stage framework staff:child ratios](#). This ensures that where available, reformed qualifications remain the primary option. We will also remove funding from qualifications with less than 150 GLH to ensure qualifications have a clear purpose within study programmes.

Funding will be retained for small qualifications in subjects where there was a clear and unmet need, until 31 July 2026 when we expect new reformed options to become available. This provides learners with greater choice where needed.

Digital route

While we work with the Awarding Organisation delivering the Digital T Level to make assessments more manageable and we apply changes across the board on industry placements, we will retain funding for the large qualifications that were in scope until 31 July 2026. This will allow time for these improvements to be embedded to the T Levels, at which point funding will be removed from these large qualifications.

The department will continue to remove funding from medium sized qualifications unless the review established a clear need for them to be retained, e.g. because the qualification enables entry into an occupation not covered by any other qualification.

We will remove funding from qualifications in subjects where alternatives, including reformed qualifications will be available from 1 August 2025 (e.g. TOQs or AAQs), ensuring that where available, reformed qualifications remain the primary option. We will also remove funding from qualifications with less than 150 GLH to ensure qualifications have a clear purpose within study programmes.

The department expects that where funding is being retained for qualifications in this route, this will be until 31 July 2026.

Health and science route

In Health and Science, we recognise that there is a need for qualifications that are aligned with the occupational standards in the Care Services route. As a result, we will retain funding for large qualifications in Health and Social Care and medium qualifications in adult care until new reformed Adult Social Care qualifications can be introduced. We will also retain funding for qualifications in science-related subjects until reformed options are available.

The department will continue to remove funding from medium sized qualifications unless the review established a clear need for them to be retained, e.g. because the qualification enables entry into an occupation not covered by any other qualification.

We will remove funding from small qualifications where a reformed alternative will be available from 1 August 2025 (e.g. TOQs or AAQs), ensuring that where available, reformed qualifications remain the primary option. We will also remove funding from qualifications with less than 150 GLH to ensure qualifications have a clear purpose within study programmes.

Construction and the built environment route

In Construction and the Built Environment (CBE), 2 of the construction T Levels continue to grow and are meeting the needs of learners and the sector. The Onsite Construction T Level is also providing valuable education, industry experience and a positive route into employment to those who take it. However, its success has been limited because of a lack of overall demand for a large qualification at level 3.

As a result, we have concluded that the needs of learners and the economy are best met through apprenticeships and other classroom provision, including at level 2. We will, therefore, cease taking new enrolments for the Onsite Construction T Level.

We will retain funding for an existing large qualification in this route to reduce the short-term impact of the withdrawal of the Onsite Construction T Level. This will sit alongside reformed qualifications in Construction at levels 2 and 3 which will be available for delivery from 1 August 2025. This qualification will remain funded until 31 July 2026 when the department expects that reformed options (including at level 2) will meet the needs of learners.

The department will continue to remove funding from medium sized qualifications unless the review established a clear need for them to be retained, e.g. because the qualification enables entry into an occupation not covered by any other qualification.

We will also remove funding from small qualifications where other options are available. We will also remove funding from qualifications with less than 150 GLH to ensure qualifications have a clear purpose within study programmes.

Criteria for notification for qualifications removed through the route-by-route review

You can submit a notification for qualifications which are not extended into the academic year 2025/26 as a result of the route-by-route review. If your qualification has not had funding extended for another reason, for instance because it is no longer operational or due to low or no enrolments, we won't accept notifications as part of this process.

You can submit a notification, if one or more of the following criteria are met:

- We have made a technical error
- There is potential significant adverse impact on students with protected characteristics, significantly different to the potential impacts identified in the [Equality Impact Assessment](#)
- The qualification provides progression into an occupation not covered by any funded alternative qualifications.

The sections below explain these criteria and the evidence required to support your notification.

Technical error

You can notify us if:

- An incorrect GLH has been used to assess your qualification or the size criteria set out in this guidance has been incorrectly applied in respect of your qualification
- Your qualification has been assigned an incorrect route

What you need to do

If you want to notify us on the basis of incorrect GLH, you must send us clear evidence that identifies what the GLH was on the 25 November on the Ofqual Register and that it is different to what is published on the list.

If you want to notify us on the basis of incorrect route, you must send us clear evidence that shows which occupation your qualification maps to and therefore which route the qualification maps to.

Potential significant adverse impact on students with protected characteristics

You must show that the removal of funding approval:

- will have a significant adverse impact on a qualification primarily designed or delivered to support specific groups of students who are covered by the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010,
- there is no other suitable alternative provision for those students, and
- the impact is expected to be significantly different to the potential impacts identified by the [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) published on 12 December 2024

What you need to do

You must submit evidence from yourself and supported by other institutions that clearly explains:

- the specific groups of students with protected characteristics that will be affected adversely
- that this specific group of students is funded through 16 to 19 study programmes, adult skills funds or advanced learner loans and therefore not funded through other government departments
- how the students will be affected (for instance what access to support would no longer be available)
- why there is no other appropriate qualification in that sector, which students can alternatively access, and that access to that occupation would not normally be at level 2
- which qualification is impacted – qualification title and qualification number

Alternative qualification is not appropriate

You can notify us if:

- The content in your qualification is mandatory for students to reach occupational competence in a particular occupation or progress into a specific HE programme and
- that content is not available in alternative funded qualifications

Alternative qualifications are A levels, T Levels and other qualifications outside the overall qualifications review, those that have had funding approval retained in 2025/26 or reformed technical or alternative academic qualifications.

What you need to do

You must submit a qualification specification for the qualification that is having funding approval removed and submit a statement that:

- identifies the qualification content in the qualification that is to have funding approval removed that is not available in alternative qualifications,
- maps that content across to alternative qualifications to explain why that content is not available in alternative qualifications, and
- explain why the content is necessary in that occupation or to support progression to HE.

You must provide supporting evidence or statements from employers or sector body in the relevant occupational area, referencing the specific content which is not available in alternative qualifications.

You will not be able to submit a notification where you declared that your reformed technical or alternative academic qualification replaces a qualification.

Submitting a notification

Submitting notifications

You must notify us by **5:00pm on 24 January 2025**, if you believe a qualification meets the criteria set out in the guidance. If a qualification meets this criteria it can be extended either into 2025/26, or into 2026/27, depending on the route.

We will be accepting notifications through Galaxkey. To be able to set up your access on Galaxkey, we need you to confirm the email addresses of people in your organisation that will need access by **5:00pm on 10 January 2025**.

We will not accept late submission of forms, evidence or other supporting information.

You can email us on: qualifications.approval@education.gov.uk.

Once we have received your notification, we will tell you if we require any further clarification.

We will not consider notifications that do not have supporting evidence.

Evidence you need to include

The [criteria section](#), explains what evidence you need to submit.

In general, your evidence should include a clear statement explaining which criteria you are notifying against and how this criterion is met.

Your evidence may include supporting statements from employers, providers and other representative bodies, (as appropriate for the criteria you are applying against).

If you submit supporting statements from employers, providers and other representative bodies they must:

- Specifically reference the qualifications in question
- include the name and address of the organisation
- be signed by a named person who has the authority to sign on behalf of that institution and include details of their position and contact details
- be dated and be recent rather than historical letters of support from when you were first developing the qualification
- be clear about which qualifications it relates to

You may use templates for your evidence but if you do, you must make sure that each piece of evidence is specific to the qualification and the criteria you are notifying us against. Your evidence must be specific about why funding approval for the qualification should not be removed.

Assessing notifications

We will review the notifications you submit against the [criteria](#) set out in this guidance. If the qualifications meet the criteria. Your qual be in-scope to be retained until 2025/26 or 2026/27, subject to the route.

As part of the assessment of the notifications, we may also seek further external advice regarding qualifications, if we need to. This could be from an appropriate employer-led body or other representative body.

We will tell you the outcome of your notifications in February 2025.

Contact us

If you have any queries about the removal of funding approval from qualifications, or about the notification process, please send them to qualifications.approval@education.gov.uk.



Department
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