Department for Education

Digital Learner Journeys




We want every learner to study high quality qualifications which prepare them for their next step– whether this is entering skilled employment or progression onto higher levels of technical or academic study.

Alongside T Levels and A levels, newly reformed qualifications will become available for delivery at level 3 at the start of the 2025 academic year. These are high-quality, aligned to occupational standards in technical routes, and offer learners clear routes to higher education or skilled employment.

Reformed Technical Qualifications are also available at level 2, alongside the existing level 2 offer, including the T Level Foundation year.

These qualifications are:

Alternative academic qualifications (AAQs) which are small AAQs (150-420 guided learning hours).

Reformed technical qualifications which can be Technical Occupational Entry qualifications and Technical Additional Specialist qualifications.

The new qualifications are in the following sector subject areas (SSAs):

· Building and construction
· Child development and well-being
· Engineering
· Health & social care
· ICT practitioners
· Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine
· Science
· Sport, leisure and recreation
· Transport operations and maintenance

You can review which qualifications at level 2 and level 3 are available in each SSA by accessing the lists of approved qualifications.

The Education and Early years Learner Journeys within this document have been developed to provide possible examples of the ways these new qualifications can be combined to create study programmes for 16–19-year-olds and adults. They also highlight progression opportunities as a result of studying the qualifications but are not formal guidance.

You can find out more about study programmes by using the 16-19 study programme guidance.

Department for Education

Learner Journey: Digital

Sandeep (16 years old) likes computers and information technology (IT) and would like to explore a career around this but doesn't want to go into Higher Education.

He achieved 8 GCSE grades 6-9 in all subjects, including English and Maths.

Sandeep enrols on the Digital Support Services T Level (**New name from September 2025 Digital Support and Security).*

Sandeep's industry placement as part of his T Level gives him an insight into working in the sector and he applies for a degree apprenticeship.

He uses his industry placement and prepares a portfolio documenting tasks and skills gained.

He also joins a coding club to build projects and solve real problems. Sandeep takes part in tech competitions and develops his soft skills in customer service, communication and problem-solving- important for support role.

Sandeep enters **employment** on an apprenticeship scheme at a local company, which includes studying towards a **Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ).**

Find out more about Qualifications Reform

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2024 to 2025 academic year.

Department for Education

Learner Journey: Digital

Sophie (16 years old) would like a career working in computer science and would like to go to university.

Sophie achieved 8 GCSE grades 7-9 in all subjects, including English and Maths.

Sophie enrols on a L3 study programme, which could include:
A level Maths (360 GLH)
A level Physics (360 GLH)
Alternative Academic Qualification e.g. AAQ in Computing (360 GLH)
EPQ
Work experience (140 GLH).

As part of her study programme, Sophie completes work experience and enrichment activities (e.g. visits to universities). This includes shadowing IT professionals in college and attending 'Girls into Tech days' at university.

She joins the coding club at college to deepen her coding skills and develop her collaborative problem-solving.
Her tutor encourages her to explore entering national competitions and she works on personal coding projects (e.g. web apps, games, Python automation).
She takes additional online courses to enhance her university applications and demonstrate self-driven learning.

She attends university taster days and outreach events to increase her exposure to university-style teaching and the subject field.
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She also applies to programmes like Sutton Trust Summer Schools, and STEM Smart.

She takes part in STEM volunteering to mentor younger students in a local primary school in coding or maths and build communication skills and assists with computing classes or digital literacy projects.

Sophie also joins a young enterprise tech project to demonstrate her innovation and problem-solving skills.

Sophie progresses onto **university** to study Computer Science.

Find out more about Qualifications Reform

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2024 to 2025 academic year.

Department for Education

Learner Journey: Digital

Kiera (16 years old) is interested in software development. She achieved 5 GCSEs grades 4-6, including English and Maths.

Kiera has caring responsibilities.

Kiera enrols on the Digital Production, Design and Development T Level (*New name from September 2025 Digital Software Development)

To support with her caring responsibilities while ensuring progress, Kiera has access to online learning platforms, and she works with a personal tutor for one-on-one support in key areas. She has access to mental health support for managing stress or challenges which includes:

- guidance on managing both college work and caring responsibilities through support services or young carers.
- access to financial or practical support, such as bursaries available for students with caring responsibilities.
- career guidance to support her when exploring future career paths while managing her responsibilities.
- access local support services for young carers that provide resources, guidance, and emotional support.

In addition, her tutor suggests wellbeing courses to help her to manage her work-life balance and develop healthy study habits, such as online courses on mental health awareness, stress management, or time management for students with caring roles and resources on maintaining a work-life balance.

Kiera enrols at a **university** to study a degree in Digital Production

Find out more about Qualifications Reform

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2024 to 2025 academic year.

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Learner Journey: Digital

Alex (16 years old) would like to work as a data analyst. Alex achieved 7 GCSEs (Grade7 Maths, Grade 7 Computer Science and Grades 6-9 in others) Grade 3 in English.

Alex enrols on a L3 study programme, which could include:
GCSE English resit
A level Maths (360 GLH)
A level Computer Science (360 GLH)
Alternative Academic Qualification AAQ in IT: Data Analytics (360 GLH).

Alex has additional enrichment and pastoral support as part of his level 3 study programme. He also has extra independent study support timetabled for English GCSE resit, alongside his timetabled lessons. To develop his digital literacy and communication skills he also takes part in communication skills workshops (especially to support GCSE English resit).

Alex attends free workshops or online tutorials in excel (pivot tables, formulas, charts), data handling & visualisation workshops because data analysts use tools like excel, tableau, and power BI.

He joins a coding club to analyse real-world datasets and present findings.

He undertakes work experience with a local company doing admin or reporting tasks and shadows someone in a data-related or IT role. He also takes part in Young Enterprise creating a fictional company and analyses "mock" customer or web traffic data.

To strengthen his statistical thinking and logic he joins a college problem-solving group and takes part in UKMT Maths Challenge.

Alex enrols at **university** on a Data Science degree.

Find out more about Qualifications Reform

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2024 to 2025 academic year.

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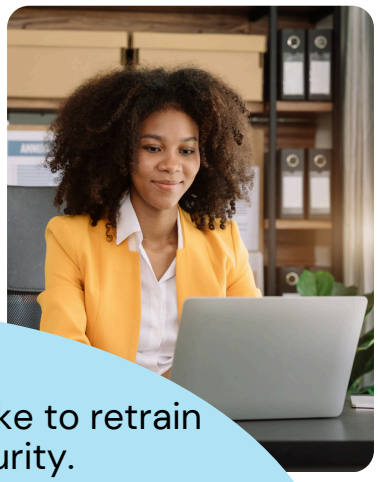
Learner Journey: Digital



Maya (36 years old) would like to retrain to work in cyber security.

She completed level 2 qualifications and has worked in business administrative roles since leaving school and wants to change career.

Maya enrols on the level 3 Technical Occupational Entry qualification for Cyber Security (Diploma).

Alongside her studies, Maya accesses careers advice and guidance, identifying transferable skills and undertakes a short internship in the field of Cyber Security.

She also joins cyber security communities and networks to support job opportunities, mentorship, and insight.

She works with a careers advisor on the transferable skills she developed from working in business administration which highlights data handling and compliance, familiarity with standards, and policy writing and experience in communicating technical info to non-technical users.

She explores gaining a mentor to provide her with support for women transitioning into tech roles, which helps her with interview readiness, career planning and professional confidence.

Maya enrols to study a **Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ)** in Cyber Security.

Find out more about Qualifications Reform

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2024 to 2025 academic year.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
A level	Qualification available in a range of subjects at level 3. Usually studied over two years and recognised as meeting entry requirements for further and higher education courses like degrees.
AS level	An AS level is a standalone qualification, available in a range of subjects at level 3 and usually taken after GCSE level in year 12. It is usually studied over one year and is the equivalent of half an A level.
Academic qualification	A qualification with the primary purpose of supporting a student to progress to higher academic study.
Alternative academic qualification (AAQ)	A new academic qualification in strategically important subjects like STEM or those less well served by A levels.
Applied General Qualification (AGQ)	Applied learning qualification for Higher Education (HE) or work; often taken with A levels.
Core Maths qualification	A Core Maths qualification is a level 3 post-16 mathematics course designed for students who have passed GCSE Maths (usually grade 4 or above) but are not taking A Level Maths. It is the equivalent of half an A level.
Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)	An Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is a level 3 qualification that allows students, typically in Year 12 or 13 (ages 16–18) to choose a topic of interest and complete an independent research project. It is the equivalent of half an A level.
Guided Learning hours (GLH)	The time a learner spends being taught or instructed by – or otherwise participating in education or training under the immediate guidance or supervision of – a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training.
Level (of qualification)	One of nine qualification levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The higher the level, the more difficult the qualification. Level 3 qualifications include A levels, T Levels, advanced Apprenticeships and AGQs, as well as newly reformed AAQs and Reformed Technical Qualifications.

Department for Education

Glossary

Term	Definition
Sector Subject Area (SSA)	A classification system for the sectors in which qualifications sit such as 'Health, Public Services and Care'.
STEM	Collective term for the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths.
Study programme	The combination of qualifications and other activities funded for 16–19-year-olds in England by the Department for Education.
T Level	A two-year qualification at level 3, equivalent in size to three A levels and supporting progression to employment or higher education. Based on the same standards as Apprenticeships and available in over 20 subjects.
T Level Foundation Year (TLFY)	This study programme provides a high-quality route onto T Levels for students who would benefit from additional preparation or study time before a T Level.
Reformed Technical qualification	A qualification with the primary purpose of supporting progression to or within employment.
Technical Additional Specialist qualification	Qualifications that allow 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, e.g., low-carbon construction design, building on the Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction T Level.
Technical Occupational Entry qualification	A qualification based on an occupational standard that supports entry to employment in that occupational area.
Total qualification Time (TQT)	The GLH plus all other time taken in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training but not under the direct supervision of a lecturer, supervisor or tutor.