



Department
for Education

Education and Early years 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](#).



Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Aria (16 years old) wants to work with children.

She has achieved 8 GCSEs, all grade 5 and 6, including English and Maths.

Aria enrolls on a L3 study programme, which could include:

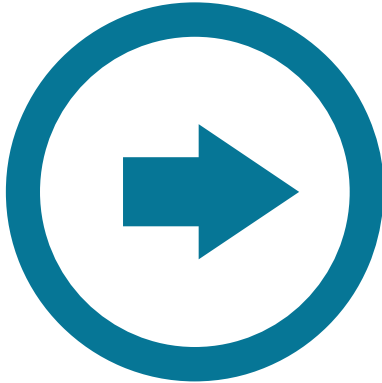
A level Sociology (360 GLH)

A level Psychology (360 GLH)

Small AAQ in Early childhood development (360 GLH)

Extended Project Qualification (120 GLH)

Work Experience at a local primary school (140 GLH).



She becomes a Peer Mentor, further developing her empathy, and peer support skills, this specifically involves support younger students at a local primary school transitioning to secondary school. To do this she undertakes safeguarding and child protection training, taking part in a basic safeguarding awareness course.

As part of enrichment, Aria volunteers at a local after-school club, which includes helping with homework and children's reading.

She also gets involved with her local Brownies club. She loves her work experience, and it inspires her to continue her studies in Early Childhood Studies.

Aria focuses her EPQ on how children learn and their early development. She also attends child development or psychology enrichment workshops and lectures at university to support her understanding of how children learn, behave, and grow.

To encourage self-reflection and application of theory in real-world settings she starts a creative project with a psychology focus and creates a child-friendly booklet on emotions and mindfulness.

Aria enrolls on a degree course at university in Early Childhood Studies, with a view to studying at a higher level and qualifying as an Educational Psychologist.





Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Chris (16 years old) wants to be a primary school teacher.

Chris enrolls on a level 3 study programme, which could include:
A level English (360 GLH)
A level Art and Design (360 GLH)
Alternative Academic Qualification-
e.g. the AAQ in Early Childhood
Development (360 GLH).

He also volunteers at a local secondary school as part of their 'buddy scheme' which builds empathy, communication, and leadership- core skills for teachers, acting as a homework buddy for year 7 students. He takes part in safeguarding and child protection awareness.

He could undertake the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) to develop research and academic skills for university, developing a project on "What makes a good primary teacher?" or "The impact of technology on early years learning"

Alongside his studies, Chris volunteers in a local primary school to gain real life experience of working with children and understanding classroom dynamics. He listens to children read, helps with group work and classroom displays, and supports lunchtime or after-school clubs

He also takes part in Mental Health first aid training to prepare himself for dealing with real-life situations in schools.

As teaching requires strong verbal communication skills he also volunteers to lead an assembly when on work experience, further developing his skills in public speaking.

Chris enrolls at university to continue studying towards becoming an Early Years teacher.





Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Tasha (16 years old) aspires to work with young children in an education setting. She achieved 5 grade 4 and 5 GCSE grades, and grade 3 in maths GCSE.

Tasha enrolls on the Education and Early Years T Level, taking the Early years educator specialism. Re-sit Maths GCSE (120 GLH).

She starts to build a portfolio to show future employers or to be used at interviews which includes evidence of planning and delivering learning activities, evidence of understanding child development stages, notes on safeguarding procedures and wide certificates achieved (e.g. First Aid, Food Hygiene, Safeguarding).

Tasha makes the most of her industry placement by keeping a reflective journal of activities and what she learns from observing children, asking to assist with EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) planning and activities, and working with different age groups (babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers).

She also gets a part time job in the college holidays where she helps at a holiday childcare club.

In addition to her face-to-face timetabled lessons, Tasha is supported with additional study support for maths GCSE resit and a personalised online maths programme.

Tasha enters employment as a nursery worker at her local preschool.





Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Bethany (16 years old) aspires to work with young children in an education setting. She achieved 2 grade 4 GCSEs and grades 3 in both English and maths GCSE.

Bethany enrolls on a level 2 Extended Technical Occupational Entry qualification for the Early Years Practitioner while resitting English and maths GCSEs.

Bethany is supported with additional study support for her English and maths GCSE resits alongside her core subject of study.

Bethany is encouraged by her careers advisor to volunteer at a local after-school club to build her confidence and add to her portfolio, which is supplemented by a mandatory work placement.

Bethany enjoys the introductory sector knowledge of professional practice included within the extended qualification, which supports the wider contextual understanding of the early years practitioner route and includes transferable employability skills.

Bethany also improves her chances at securing a job by specialising by taking a level 2 Technical Specialist qualification in Early Years Nutrition.

Bethany is employed as a classroom assistant.



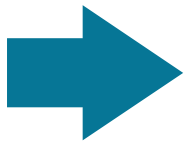


Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Sam (30 years old) would like to work in a school as a teaching assistant.

Sam enrolls on level 3 Technical Occupational Entry qualification in Supporting Teaching and Learning (Diploma).



Sam can also complete short CPD (Continuing Professional Development) courses to deepen his skills in:

- Autism Awareness- valuable for inclusive practice.
- Mental Health in Schools to help understand learner wellbeing.

To support his learning Sam he keeps a reflective log of tasks and progress to build a professional portfolio. This includes:

- Reflective placement logs.
- Lesson plans or activity support materials.
- Training certificates.
- Notes on child behaviour strategies or SEN support.

He volunteers part-time by assisting with breakfast/after-school clubs and helping with homework sessions..

Sam is employed as a teaching assistant at his local school.





Learner Journey: Education and Early years



Jen (35 years old) would like to retrain and work with children in a nursery.

Jen enrolls on the level 3
Technical Occupational
Entry for Early Years
Educator (Diploma)

Jen keeps a journal with reflections, lesson ideas, and supervisor feedback. Her portfolio shows employers Jen is reflective, organised, and proactive. It might include anonymised child observation examples, EYFS planning she contributed to, records of completed training and certificates and photos of themed activities.

Through work experience, Jen works with different age groups and takes part in planning EYFS activities and observing learning outcomes. She practices child observations, assessments, and record-keeping and gets familiar with safeguarding and health & safety procedures.

She also supports early years activities in her local library to get a more varied experience and joins online forums through which she attends free webinars on child development, creativity, and SEND.

Jen enters
employment as
a nursery
worker.





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.



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.