Department for Education

Student learner journeys for Higher Education Institutions

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.

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

The learner journeys within this document have been developed to provide possible examples of the ways AAQs can be combined to create study programmes for 16–19-year-olds. 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: 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 enrols 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).

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.

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.

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 enrols 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.

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

Department for Education

Learner Journey: Education and Early years

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

Chris enrols 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).

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 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"

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

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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.

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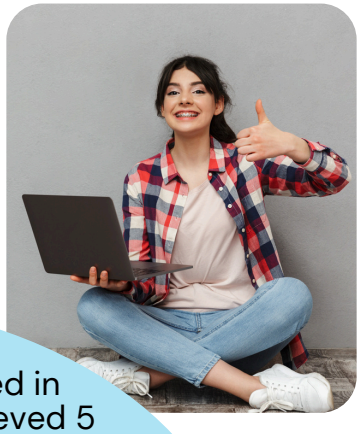
Learner Journey: Digital



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

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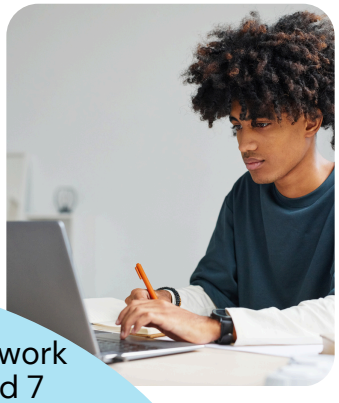
Learner Journey: Digital



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.

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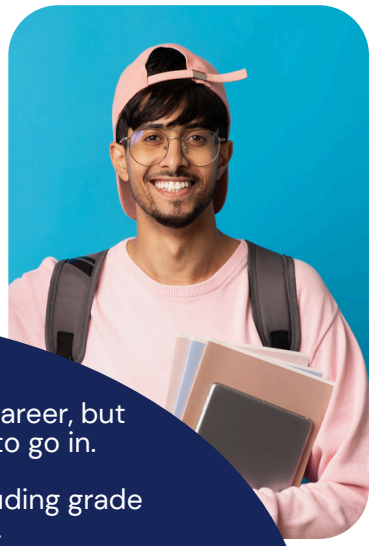
Learner Journey: Health and Science



Anil is interested in a Science based career, but isn't sure yet the direction he'd like to go in.

He achieved 8 GCSEs Grades 6-9, including grade 7's in Chemistry and Biology.

Anil enrols on a L3 study programme, which could include:
A level Biology (360 GLH)
A level Chemistry (360 GLH)
A level Psychology (360 GLH)

Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) (120 GLH): He could research a forensic science-related question (e.g., "How reliable is DNA evidence in court?").

Anil takes part in enrichment opportunities including visits to Higher Education institutions and a STEM visit which includes an interactive workshop on Forensic Science, which sparks his curiosity.

Anil joins a science and forensics enrichment STEM Club which explores topics like DNA analysis, toxicology, or crime scene investigation.

He takes free online short courses on forensic science, criminology, and criminal psychology.

Anil enters a national science competition with a forensic-themed investigation (e.g. fingerprint analysis, fake blood testing) and undertakes some laboratory work experience (some NHS trusts, universities, or STEM Learning hubs offer work experience or virtual internships in forensic or biomedical science.)

Anil joins a debating club: since forensic science often intersects with the legal system, debating or mock trials can develop analytical thinking and communication skills.

He takes part in problem solving challenges: Activities like UKMT Maths Challenges or escape rooms help develop logical reasoning—key for forensic analysis.

Anil enrols at university in a degree in Forensic science.

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Asmita (16 years old) is interested in forensics and would like to explore a career in this area.

She achieved grades 5/6 across her GCSEs.

Asmita enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include
A level Sociology (360 GLH)
A level Psychology (360 GLH)
Alternative Academic Qualification- e.g. AAQ in Applied Science (360 GLH)

As part of enrichment activities, Asmita attends a visit tailored to young people interested in a career in the Criminal justice system.

Further visits to Courts or Police Stations to understand the criminal justice system in more depth.

She volunteers at a local youth centre as part of further enrichment which builds empathy, communication, and awareness of crime-related social issues and inspires her to explore Criminology and Forensics as a future career.

She starts a True Crime Film Club to explore real world forensic cases critically.

Asmita takes part in forensic science workshops- offered by colleges, museums, or STEM outreach and enrols on some online short courses, e.g. 'Introduction to Forensic Science or Psychology and Crime.'

Taking part in mock trials develops her confidence and understanding the legal context of criminology.

She takes part in a work placement in a legal office to build soft skills like observation, communication, and teamwork.

Study Skills Support is provided with workshops in writing, research, and presentation skills, essential for higher education.

She also takes part in a mentoring Programme- pairing her with someone studying criminology or working in criminal justice.

Asmita enrols at university to study a degree in Criminology and Forensic Science

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Fatima (16 years old) is interested in a career as an Occupational Therapist (OT)

She achieved 6 GCSEs grade 4/5 across all subjects.

Fatima enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include:
Small AAQ in Medical Science (360 GLH)
Small AAQ in Health and social care (360 GLH)
A level Art and Design (360 GLH)
Work experience (140 GLH)

Fatima takes part in work experience at local care home and enjoys helping people find strategies to become more independent in the home. This builds her experience in supporting people with physical, learning, or emotional needs.

She completes work shadowing an OT/ Allied Health Professional (NHS or private practice) which provides insight into the OT role.

Fatima attends guest talks from healthcare professionals which provides exposure to different OT settings (mental health, paediatrics, elderly care) and completes online short courses (e.g., Introduction to Occupational Therapy) which boosts her understanding of the field.

She also joins a health & wellbeing club which encourages communication, empathy, and leadership.

She completes her First Aid certificate- this is a useful practical skill and adds value to her CV/university application.

She also takes part in team sports and creative arts activities- OT's often uses creative and physical activities as part of therapy so it is good for experience and self-awareness.

Fatima enrols on a degree course in Occupational Therapy.

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Oliver (16 years old) is interested in a career in Nursing.

He has achieved 6 grade 4s GCSE grades including 1 grade 5 in science.

Oliver enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include:
A level Psychology (360 GLH)
Small AAQ in Human Biology (360 GLH)
Small AAQ in Early childhood development (360 GLH)
Work experience (140 GLH)

As part of enrichment, Oliver has extra study support/skills added to his timetable.

He also takes part in volunteering in Health & Care Settings which includes care homes and community health organisations where he develops skills in communication, timekeeping, and emotional resilience. He applies via NHS Volunteering schemes (e.g., "NHS Youth Volunteering") and through college-supported placements.

Oliver completes first aid & emergency response training delivered by an external training provider which builds practical life-saving skills and confidence in handling emergencies.

He takes part in organising and supporting campaigns for health promotion projects including mental health awareness and healthy eating campaigns within college which develop his skills in public speaking and event organisation.

He attends talks arranged by college which include speakers from the health sector such as Qualified nurses (including degree apprentices) and paramedics.

In addition to this career skills workshops are organised by the college career team which focuses on CV writing and job application guidance as well as interview practice (mock interviews with healthcare professionals).
He is given extra pastoral support and a mentor to help him organise his time and develop his independent study skills.

Oliver decides to enrol on registered nursing degree apprenticeship.

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Martha (16 years old) isn't sure about her career path but know she wants a career working with people and enjoys essay-based subjects. She decides to study level 3 academic qualifications to keep her options open. She achieved 6 Grade 4-5 grades at GCSE, and grade 7 in English Language.

Martha enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include:
A level Sociology (360 GLH)
A Level Law (360 GLH)
Small AAQ in Health and Social Care (360 GLH)
Work experience (140 GLH)

As part of enrichment, Martha volunteers at a local youth group which develops her communication skills and practical understanding of working with vulnerable people. She also takes part in college mentoring/buddying schemes.

After CEIAG discussions in college she decides to apply to study Social Work at university.

Martha joins the college debating club to develop persuasive communication and confidence- essential for advocating on behalf of others.

She is also given the opportunity to participate in college student voice to build leadership and insight into policy, equality, and student welfare- related to advocacy in social work.

She joins in with college citizenship projects, helping to build further understanding of social justice, safeguarding, rights, and responsibilities. This involves participating in campaigns around mental health awareness or anti-bullying and creating information resources on social issues. She also takes on a part-time job in a people facing role which builds responsibility, resilience, and interpersonal skills.

Martha progresses to university to study social work.

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Simon (16 years old) would like to work as Physiotherapist.

He has 8 GCSE grades 4-6, including 6's in sciences.

Simon enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include
A level Biology (360 GLH)
A level Physical Education (360) GLH)
Alternative Academic Qualification- e.g. AAQ in Health and Social Care (360 GLH)

Simon takes part in work experience in a health setting to gain first-hand exposure to patient care and rehabilitation settings. This includes shadowing a physiotherapist (NHS, private practice, or sports physio) and volunteering at a care home.

He takes part in taster days at university which includes anatomy and sports science workshops, to deepen his understanding of the human body and movement.
Simon undertakes CPR training which builds essential practical skills for emergencies- valuable for physiotherapists.

He could also take the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) which provides an opportunity to research an area of interest and considers topic ideas such as "The impact of physiotherapy on recovery after sports injury" and "Comparing rehabilitation approaches in NHS and private practice."

He joins the college council to develop his communication skills and also volunteers as a reading buddy at a local primary school to develop his soft skills.-

Simon enrols at university to study for a degree in Physiotherapy.

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Learner Journey: Health and Science

Becky (16 years old) is interested in a career as a Midwife.

She achieved 5 GCSEs grade 5.

Becky enrols on the Health T Level, taking the midwifery specialism.

As part of her industry placement Becky gains experience in women's health and shadows midwives, health visitors, or maternity support workers where is able to observe consultations, birth plans, postnatal care, and family support.

Becky keeps a reflective journal to track key learning, challenges, and observations to help with future university applications and interviews.

She builds confidence in teamwork, communication, time management, and emotional resilience through her industry placement and practices note-taking, observation, and reflective writing.

She also takes part in mock interviews and careers enrichment through her college.

To prepare for applying for university Becky gets advice on drafting a strong personal statement focused on: her T Level placement experiences, communication and empathy, her passion for women's health and volunteering/work.

To help her understand career routes she attends an NHS Careers workshop to help her understand career routes that would be open to her.

Becky enrols at university to continue studying to become a midwife.

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Learner Journey: Construction and the Built Environment

David (16 years old) wants to do A levels and eventually work in the construction sector.

He has achieved 8 GCSEs Grades 4-6.

David enrols on a level 3 study programme, which could include:
Alternative Academic Qualification- e.g. AAQ in Construction and the Built Environment (360 GLH)
A level Business Studies (360 GLH)
A level Design and Technology (GLH)
Core Maths (180 GLH).

David takes part in work experience in construction which gives him a real-world insight into the construction environment, roles, and teamwork. Part of this involves shadowing a quantity surveyor. Construction managers need leadership, budgeting, and organisational skills so David takes part in Young Enterprise in college to develop these skills.

He attends construction expos, careers fairs, or local regeneration project tours, building familiarity with current practices, regulations, and innovation in construction.

He also completes CAD short courses independently and free online awareness courses on safe working practices.

To develop his leadership, teamwork and communication skill David joined the student council in college and starts a sustainability group because the construction sector is rapidly evolving environmental standards.

He studies a level 3 Core Maths qualification to demonstrate strong numeracy skills that would be essential for managing budgets, measurements, and planning.

David enrols at university to study a degree in Construction Management

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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.