



Department
for Education

Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England

Government consultation response

October 2022

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Foreword by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills.

This Government is committed to transforming the outdated perceptions of technical education in England.

It is vital in a fast-moving and high-tech economy that technical education closes the gap between what people study and the needs of employers. Priorities change rapidly and we need a technical education system that is dynamic and forward-looking. It needs to deliver the skills we will need in the future to strengthen the economy, not only as we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic but as we move forward in the 21st century.



As we set out in our *Skills for Jobs*¹ White Paper, reforming post-16 further education and skills is at the heart of our plans to level up this country. We are determined to create a technical education system that competes with the world's best. Every individual, in every corner of this country, should be able to access high-quality qualifications that help them develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to get great jobs and contribute to a thriving economy.

In July 2021, following two consultations, we published a [policy statement](#)² that set out the changes we will implement to streamline and improve the quality of level 3 qualifications. The changes will lead to once in a generation reform, helping young people make positive choices in further education and supporting adults looking to upskill or retrain through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

We must now ensure that the qualifications at level 2 and below, that underpin this reformed landscape, are of equally high quality.

Qualifications at level 2 and below are an important part of our further education landscape - not just for their value to the economy but also for their potential to improve social mobility, inclusion, and lifelong learning. For many years, these qualifications have helped individuals enter work, upskill, specialise, or gain essential English, maths, and digital skills. They also play a key role in preparing students for progression to level 3 and

¹ [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#)

² [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England - note that the delivery timeline proposed in this document has subsequently been moved back by one academic year.](#)

thereby benefitting from the higher wage returns associated with achieving at this level.

We started our journey to transform the level 2 and below qualification landscape by publishing a call for evidence in November 2020, which set out our ambitions for level 2 and below study. We used this to develop the proposals set out in the consultation published in March 2022. I am grateful for the positive engagement and the responses we received to this consultation which have helped shape our response.

I am now delighted to introduce the Government response to the consultation. We have listened really carefully to your views and made changes based on what we have heard, including more flexibility on our proposal for a two-year study programme for qualifications leading to employment at level 2, funding 'vocational taster' qualifications at entry levels 1 and 2 and changing the delivery timeline so that first teaching of reformed qualifications will begin in 2025 rather than 2024. Like our reforms at level 3, our decisions are bold. Tinkering around the edges will not be enough if we are to improve our pipeline of skills. The qualifications available for 16 to 19-year-olds and adults in future will be different from those available today.

Young people will benefit from clear progression pathways and high-quality qualifications that provide the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their aspirations.

Adults will benefit from high-quality qualifications that are flexible enough to meet their varying needs, supporting them to upskill, retrain and progress into employment or further study.

Employers will benefit from a clearer skills system, which is based on employer-led occupational standards so they can be confident qualifications will provide the skills they and the economy need and can adapt to meet the needs of the future.

I believe the decisions we have taken, in light of your views, offer a huge opportunity to transform the lives of young people and adults across the country. I look forward to working with employers of all sizes, students, and post-16 providers as well as awarding organisations and others across the FE sector to successfully implement these changes.

Andrea Jenkyns MP

Introduction

On 2 March 2022, the government launched a public consultation to gather views on proposals to reform post-16 qualifications at Level 2 and below.

At present, the level 2 and below qualifications landscape is complex to navigate, with a high volume of qualifications on offer. In May 2020, there were around 8,000 qualifications approved for funding at level 2 and below, the majority being technical or vocational qualifications. We have already made progress in streamlining the landscape by removing funding for nearly 3,700 of these qualifications, which have had low or no enrolments in each of the last three funding years. Whilst many of the remaining qualifications are of a high standard, the large quantity available makes it difficult for students, employers, and providers to know which qualifications are high quality and will lead to good outcomes.

The current review aims to simplify the system to make it easier for all those with an interest in qualifications at these levels to understand. It also aims to ensure that all qualifications available within the new landscape are high quality and have a clear purpose, giving students the knowledge and skills to achieve positive outcomes, whether they are progressing to further study, on to an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship, or into employment.

A total of 410 online and emailed responses to the consultation were received by the department. The responses were analysed both internally by department officials and by an external consultant, Tonic Consultants Ltd.

Structural format of this response

The following sections of this document summarise the responses received to the public consultation via the online questionnaire, email responses, and topics raised at stakeholder events during the period in which the consultation was open. The percentages quoted of those who agree or disagree with specific proposals are taken from the online questionnaire. We have taken a thematic approach to the analysis of text-based responses.

Consultation exercise

The consultation launched on 2 March 2022 and closed on 27 April 2022. It consisted of a total of 37 questions, the first five of which asked for the respondents' details, such as name, job role, and which organisation (if any) on whose behalf they are responding. Of the 32 main questions, 30 contained at least one quantitative response format (Yes/No, Option A/Option B), and all questions invited respondents to expand upon their answer with a qualitative, text-based comments section.

Profile of respondents

The consultation received 410 responses in total. Of these, 390 completed the online consultation form. A further 20 responded via email. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of respondents by 'respondent type'.

Of these 410 responses, 177 (43%) gave responses on behalf of an organisation, representing the views of the organisation as a whole. 225 (55%) responses were received from individuals expressing their personal viewpoint. 8 people (2%) did not answer this question.

The analysis of the consultation included:

- Reviewing the quantity of closed responses to each question in the consultation
- A full, thematic analysis covering key themes – some responses were coded to more than one theme. The responses received by email also often combined responses into areas of specific interest

The consultation generated a high level of interest, with a variety of opinions expressed. Some questions produced a higher response rate than others.

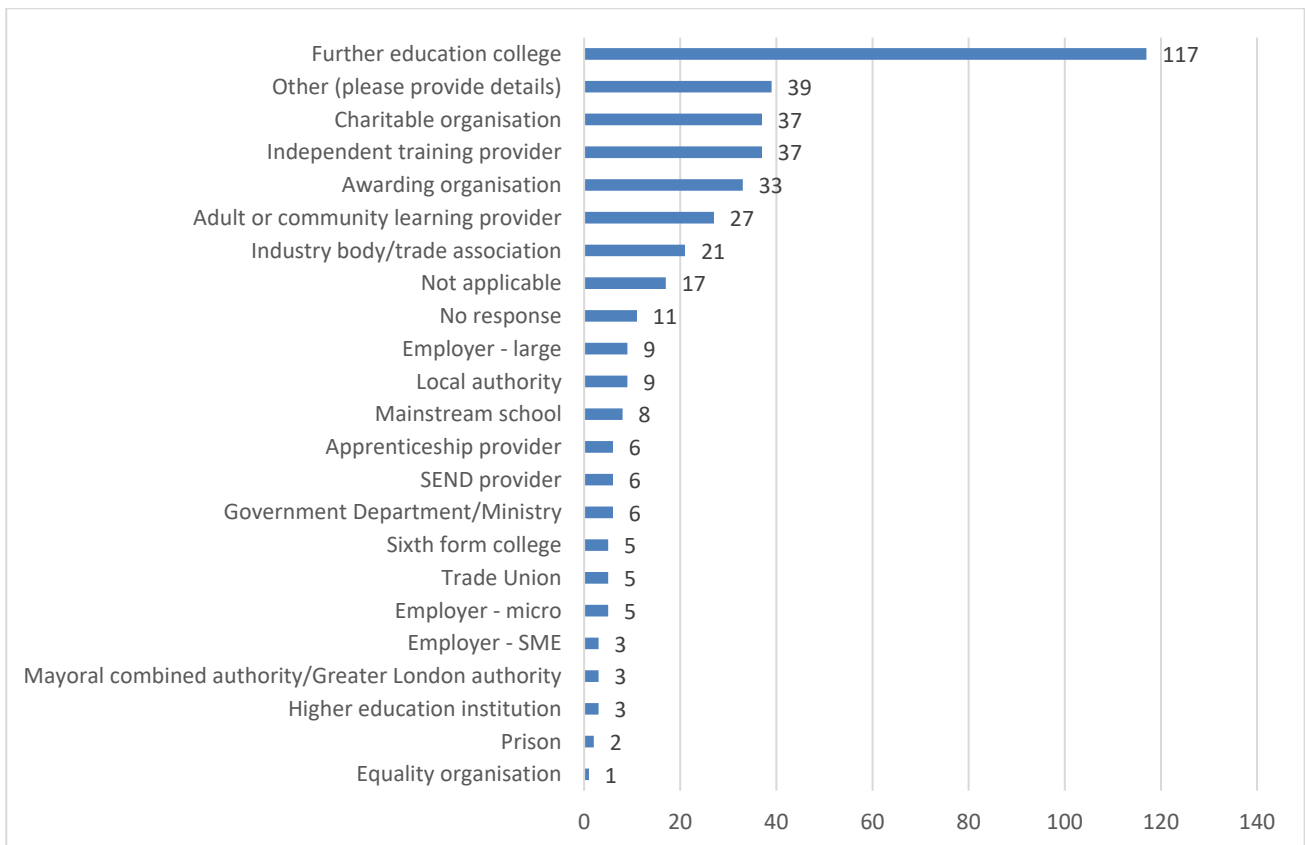


Figure 1: Consultation respondent by type.³⁴

Stakeholder engagement

During the consultation period, the department held a wide-ranging stakeholder engagement process. This included:

- Two large-scale consultation launch webinars
- A number of sessions with organisations who have a specific interest in the level 2 and below qualifications landscape, such as the Institute’s employer route panels, and membership associations for learning providers.
- In-person provider visits

³ The majority of those who did not respond to the question or selected ‘not applicable’ identified themselves as a parent or guardian in answer to another question.

⁴ Upon reviewing the responses, some of those who answered ‘other’ to this question included awarding organisations, industry bodies/trade associations and providers of 16 to 19 educational qualifications.

Summary

Background and aims of the review

This document sets out the government's response to the consultation on the review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England. This document should be read alongside the original [consultation document](#) for a holistic view of the aims of the consultation response, and for full background on the reforms. A summary of the proposals we consulted on is set out in this section, along with a summary of the main policy decisions we have made following the consultation. A detailed response to each question is set out in the rest of the document.

At post-16, level 2 and below consists of level 2, level 1, and entry level qualifications, with entry level being subdivided into entry levels 1, 2 and 3. Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) and GCSEs are also taken post-16 and together represent 3% of the qualifications currently available at level 2 and below and 43% of enrolments. Both FSQs and GCSEs are out of scope of this review, as are Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs), which were introduced in the 2020/21 academic year.

Our updated impact assessment, published alongside this consultation response, estimates that 72% (c. 1530) of 'in scope'⁵ level 2 qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds, 61% (c.1290) of 'in scope' level 2 qualifications for adults, and 56% (c.626) of 'in scope' level 1 and entry level qualifications currently available may not fit into the future landscape. We recognise that this represents a significant reduction to the number of qualifications offered at present. We believe the new landscape will offer a good choice of high-quality qualifications to meet student and employer needs and will be easier for students and employers to navigate than the current offer of around 4,000 qualifications.

The current landscape at level 2 and below is extremely complex, with a large volume of qualifications currently on offer. Whilst recognising the importance and value of choice, the reforms proposed in our consultation aim to simplify the system, making it easier for students, providers, employers and awarding organisations to understand the benefit of each programme of study. They also mean that students will develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve strong outcomes, whether they are progressing to higher levels of study, into employment or into an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship, or aiming for independent living. Our proposals divide qualifications into groups according to their primary purpose. This is in line with the approach taken at

⁵ Out of scope of this impact assessment are GCSEs, FSQ, EDSQs, qualifications identified for removal as part of the low and no enrolments process, and Personal, Social and Employability qualifications.

level 3 and makes it clear where each qualification will lead to progression to further study or employment.

Level 2 qualifications proposed for funding

To offer students clear progression pathways we proposed that eight distinct groups of qualifications will be in scope for public funding at level 2 in the future, alongside GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs). Qualifications will be grouped according to whether they support progression to level 3 study, provide access to employment at level 2 or deliver English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). ESOL qualifications are addressed separately within question 29 of the consultation, for level 1, level 2, and entry level.

The eight groups are comprised of six groups which we intend to offer to both young people (aged 16-19) and adults (19+), as well as two groups which we intend to offer to adults only.

The six groups of qualifications which we proposed to offer for both young people and adults include:

- Qualifications that support students to progress to level 3 technical qualifications which provide entry to an occupation, including T Levels (group 1 – addressed in question 6)
- Occupational-entry qualifications supporting progression into employment in an occupation at level 2 (group 2 – addressed in question 7)
- Specialist qualifications which enable students to build on an employer-led occupational standard and develop specialist skills and knowledge (group 4 – addressed in question 10)
- Qualifications supporting students to develop cross-sectoral skills that add value across multiple occupational standards, such as stand-alone health and safety qualifications (group 5 – addressed in question 11)
- Qualifications that have content that is substantially different from GCSEs and that support students to progress to level 3 academic qualifications, such as performing arts qualifications (group 7 – addressed in question 12 and 13)
- English qualifications for speakers of other languages (group 8 – addressed in question 29)

In question 8, we consulted on two options for young people aiming to exit to employment at level 2. The first is that they should take an occupational-entry qualification (group 2) which will give them a broad introduction to the occupational route and, in addition, the knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers have said are needed in particular occupations.

The second option is that young people have a choice between studying a group 2 qualification or studying two slightly smaller qualifications (from group 3 – see next paragraph) in two different occupational routes, with each qualification leading to a different occupation and each offering as much occupational competence as can be delivered in a classroom-based setting. This might be beneficial for those students who are unsure about the occupation and occupational route into which they want to progress.

The two additional groups of qualifications which we proposed to offer to adults only include:

- Smaller occupational-focus qualifications supporting progression into employment in an occupation at level 2 (group 3)
- Qualifications where there is clear demand from employers and good prospects for progression, but no employer-led standard (group 6)

We are aware that adults may struggle to access larger qualifications, and that those with prior work experience may already have knowledge of some of the skills contained within a longer programme of study. We proposed that qualifications in group 3 will focus on the essential knowledge, skills, and behaviours for that occupation. They will be smaller than the occupational entry-level qualifications in group 2, as they will not include the breadth of route-wide content or transferable skills that are included in the larger qualification.

Level 1 and entry level qualifications proposed for funding

We proposed that the primary intended outcome of study at both level 1 and entry level should be progression on to a level 2 or higher qualification, or progression to a work-based pathway (for example, apprenticeships). We recognised, however, that whilst the majority of students will be able to progress directly on to qualifications at level 2, some students will need additional support to accomplish their end goal. We also recognised that some students will exit to employment or other outcomes without achieving level 2.

On level 1 and entry level qualifications, students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and adult learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) are overrepresented. Many of these students will need to begin their study at these levels and, for some, level 1 or entry level will be an ambitious aim. We recognised that the reforms need to cater to a wide range of student need in order to engage these students in learning so that they achieve to the best of their ability.

We proposed that five groups of qualifications at level 1 and four groups of qualifications at entry level will be considered for funding in the future, and that all these groups should be open to both young people and adults. This does not include PSE qualifications which were discussed separately.

The five groups of qualifications which we proposed to offer at level 1 are:

- Pre-technical qualifications which support direct progression onto a level 2 technical qualification which in turn either provides entry into an occupation or progression to a level 3 technical qualification (group 9)
- Qualifications that serve as a prerequisite to employment (group 10)
- Qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme (group 11)
- English and maths qualifications (non FSQ/GCSE) (group 12)
- English qualifications for speakers of other languages (ESOL) (group 13)

The four groups of qualifications which we proposed to offer at entry level are:

- Entry level 3 qualifications which lead directly to a level 1 pre-technical qualification (group 14)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications delivering skills that are complementary to a study programme (group 15)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications in English and maths (non FSQ/GCSE) (group 16)
- Entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3 qualifications in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) (group 17)

Level 2 and below English, maths and ESOL qualifications

English and maths qualifications

We anticipate that GCSEs and FSQs will be the qualifications of choice for most students. However, responses to the call for evidence indicated that alternative English and maths qualifications play an important role in delivering literacy and numeracy skills to some young people and adults who cannot yet access GCSEs or FSQs. They are particularly important for students with SEND.

While the benefits of these qualifications are clear for level 1 and entry level students, they have had very little demand at level 2. This lack of take up suggests that alternative qualifications at level 2 are not needed.

We therefore proposed to continue to fund non FSQ/GCSE qualifications in English and maths at level 1 and below, for the small cohort who cannot access GCSEs and FSQs directly, and to remove funding approval from these qualifications at level 2.

We also proposed that all alternative qualifications in English and maths should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and that we consider the need to update the standards as part of this process.

ESOL qualifications

We proposed to continue funding high-quality ESOL qualifications up to and including level 2. These qualifications are designed specifically for speakers of other languages who live in the UK, with the aim to increase proficiency in the English language.

Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) Qualifications

PSE provision is an integral part of a study programme for many young people, in particular those students with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds. For those with low or no prior attainment, including adults furthest from the labour market, this study can represent their first step towards re-engaging with education and training. For some students, especially those who may not achieve at level 2 or above, these qualifications could offer evidence of their achievements that, when recognised by employers, can enable them to compete for positions with their peers.

We proposed to develop a set of national standards for PSE qualifications. These standards, similar to the Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ) standards, would include core content, key skills, and behaviours, and set out a clear continuum of skills development and progression across the levels. In future, only qualifications which meet these standards would be eligible for public funding.

Government response on digital skills consultation

In the consultation document we confirmed our decision to remove post-16 funding from level 2 ICT User qualifications and level 2 ICT Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) for new starters from August 2022. This is because, following our essential digital skills reforms, these skills are now gained up to level 1 through new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) or, once introduced, through reformed digital FSQs.

Summary of our response

We can confirm that we will proceed as set out in our consultation with the following:

- We intend to fund all the qualification groups set out in the consultation at levels 2, 1 and entry.
- We intend to keep the guideline size ranges as proposed, however emphasize that these are intended to be guidelines and not hard rules.
- We will continue to fund high quality English and maths qualifications at level 1 and below for those who cannot directly access FSQs or GCSEs. We will also continue to fund high quality ESOL qualifications at level 2 and below.
- We will continue with our proposal to develop national standards for PSE qualifications and will include a broad range of stakeholders in their development.

Following the development of these standards, we will consult again and gather further evidence on their merit.

As a result of reading, analysing, and reflecting on responses to the consultation, we have made the following changes to our proposals:

- We will offer more flexibility by allowing the group 2 qualifications to be taken by 16-19 year olds in under two years if that better meets the needs of those learners. This will be at the discretion of providers, and we expect their decisions to be dependent on the size of the reformed qualification and other elements of the study programme.
- Concerning the options outlined in question 8 of the consultation, we will proceed with 'Option B' - to allow 16 to 19 year old students the flexibility to take two smaller occupational-focus qualifications (from group 3), if they do not wish to complete one of the larger, group 2 qualifications.
- We will give further consideration to the feedback on the importance of smaller courses at level 2 and below. Whilst we do want to set guideline size ranges, we are keen to emphasise that our guideline size criteria are guidelines only, not hard rules, and the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives.
- At entry levels 1 and 2, we will fund 'vocational taster' qualifications (that provide students with an opportunity to explore industries and occupations), giving an additional option to those studying at the lowest levels.
- First teaching of reformed qualifications at level 2 will now start in 2025, rather than in 2024, with additional reformed qualifications being phased in from 2026 and 2027. We have also reviewed the proposed timeline for 2025-27 in light of the timeline for level 3 reform and have included a full timeline in this document.

The full details of our responses are set out under each question.

Who this is for

This consultation response is for anyone with an interest in post-16 education and training for young people and adults in England. The broad groups for whom these reforms will be most relevant include potential students, parents, or carers, awarding organisations (AOs), providers and employers.

Question analysis

This section provides a summary of the responses to each of the consultation questions. It should be read alongside the consultation document (available at Gov.uk⁶) given some of the questions relate to specific paragraphs of the consultation. The percentages are based on the responses to the online questionnaire while the other information summarises feedback from the online questionnaire, email responses and from the consultation events.

Questions 1 to 5 of the consultation included standard questions capturing respondent details, including name and capacity in which they were responding. A summary of respondent categories (role) is included on page 9.

Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical study

Question 6 i:

Do you agree that we should fund qualifications that support progression to level 3 technical provision?

- 92% of people responded to this question. There was broad support for the proposal to fund qualifications supporting progression to level 3 provision, with 97% of respondents who answered this question agreeing with the proposal. Only 3% disagreed.
- Some respondents remarked that progression was not always linear and said the system should be flexible enough to allow students to change their mind and move between pathways.
- There was some concern, particularly from providers and representative bodies, around the viability of having separate qualifications for progression and preparation for employment.

⁶ https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-2-and-below/supporting_documents/Consultation%20Review%20of%20post16%20qualifications%20at%20level%20and%20below%20in%20England.pdf

Question 6 ii:

Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH?

- 89% of consultation respondents answered this question. Of these, 67% agreed with the proposed size range, whereas 33% disagreed.
- Among those who disagreed, there was no clear consensus about the optimum size of these qualifications, but the current proposal was generally perceived as being too restrictive. There was a widespread call for flexibility within the system in order to respond to the range of learner and employer needs.
- There was a clear view that the current proposals do not recognise the value of smaller- or larger-sized qualifications. Many respondents raised the point that the size of a qualification should be appropriate to its purpose and not arbitrarily pre-determined.

Government response to question 6

Given the strong support for this group of qualifications we intend to proceed with our recommendation to fund qualifications for 16-19 year olds and adults that support progression to further technical study at level 3, including T Levels and apprenticeships.

We have taken on board comments about the viability of having separate qualifications for progression to level 3 and progression to employment. This is addressed in the response to question 7.

We recognise the concerns around size. We would emphasise that the size criterion was always intended to be a guideline rather than a hard rule, however we would not anticipate high volumes of qualifications of different sizes. We want to make this clearer and emphasise that the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives. How the qualification sits within a wider study programme for 16-19 year olds is especially important for study programmes supporting progression to level 3, where additional time is needed to support a broad range of learning and development needs in preparation for progression to a higher level. The guideline size is there to illustrate what might be an appropriate size for a qualification within a broader study programme. Each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and how its proposed size is appropriate for that purpose. This applies to all of our guideline size criteria.

We are still considering whether the national technical outcomes developed for the T Level Transition Programme should be the basis of qualifications supporting progression to T Levels.

Qualifications leading to employment at level 2 (occupational-entry qualifications)

Question 7 i:

Do you agree that we should fund occupational-entry qualifications leading to employment at level 2?

- 91% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 98% of respondents agreed that we should fund occupational-entry qualifications leading to employment at level 2. 2% disagreed with this proposal.
- It was felt that such qualifications would allow for a broad introduction early on for those learners with a clear occupational route in mind. Respondents recognised the value of these qualifications in providing a stepping stone either directly into employment or to further progression at level 3.

Question 7 ii:

Do you agree that these qualifications should include broad route-specific content as well as the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to enter an occupation?

- 89% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 88% of respondents agreed with this question whilst 12% disagreed.
- Those who agreed were generally supportive of the extra development opportunity this would allow, whilst those who weren't in support highlighted that this could cause problems with retention for particular groups of learners who may not manage the broader content. It was felt these learners may benefit more from occupationally focused qualifications.

Question 7 iii:

Do you agree that these qualifications should be large in size (minimum 540 GLH)?

- 86% of respondents answered this question. The response was evenly split, with 50% in agreement and 50% against the proposed size of these qualifications. Two in three (65%) awarding organisations did not agree with the proposed size of the qualifications.
- Those who agreed mentioned that the proposed size will provide the right space for occupational competence, enabling the learner to gain all the knowledge, skills and behaviours required.

- There was concern expressed that the size of the qualifications would be a disincentive to disadvantaged learners and adult learners, thus creating a further barrier to access for these groups.
- There was not consensus amongst those who disagreed on whether the size of these qualifications should be smaller or larger, but in general there was a request for more flexibility dependent upon the sector and learner.

Question 8:

For 16-19 year olds aiming to enter employment in an occupation at level 2, do you agree that the main qualification offer that should be available is:

Option A: Group 2 qualifications only?

OR

Option B: Group 2 qualifications and the alternative of taking two smaller occupational-focus qualifications from group 3 (around 350 GLH) in two different occupational routes?

- 75% of respondents who answered this question chose option B whilst 25% were in favour of option A. Overall, 82% of people replied to this question.
- It was felt that option B would provide learners with a broader focus and wider opportunities to learn as opposed to specialising in a particular occupational route early on. Respondents felt Option B would allow students to pursue alternative pathways and would benefit those who may not yet be sure of a career path. Offering two qualifications at this level would offer learners greater flexibility and broaden, rather than narrow, their options for employment and/or progression.
- Of those who favoured Option A, responses raised issues with Option B. These included a concern, particularly among employers and their representative bodies, that learners may not be sufficiently prepared for a particular occupation if they take two smaller qualifications in different routes. For those who have a clear career pathway in mind this would not be relevant or attractive.
- Providers also raised several concerns about the logistics of delivering Option B which could require them to offer multiple subject combinations which could pose significant logistical and resourcing implications. Smaller providers in particular would be at a disadvantage.
- Many were also concerned that the broader route-wide content and transferable skills in group 2 qualifications would be of benefit, particularly for 16-19 year old learners and that taking two of the smaller qualifications would mean this content was missing.

Question 9 i:

Do you agree that these qualifications should be delivered to 16 to 19 year olds over two academic years as part of a wider study programme leading to employment?

- 84% of respondents answered this question. The responses given were mixed, with 54% agreeing that these qualifications should be delivered to 16 to 19 year olds over two academic years, and 46% disagreeing.
- Those in agreement recognised the value in a two-year programme supporting the development of the learner, providing content that will help them become better prepared for work, as well as the alignment with best practice in other qualifications such as GCSEs and at Level 3 where it is common practice that the qualification would take two years.
- Of those who disagreed, there was a strong view that a two-year qualification would create an unnecessary barrier for particular groups of learners. As a result, it was felt that two-year study programmes could significantly impact retention and be a disincentive to enrolment.

Question 9 ii:

If you believe there are any groups of students or occupational routes for which a substantial qualification taken as part of a two-year study programme would be unsuitable, please provide details.

- The most commonly cited groups for which a two-year study programme was considered unsuitable included:
 - o Disadvantaged or vulnerable students at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET)
 - o Students with SEND
 - o Carers / parents
 - o Students studying English as a second language
 - o Adult returners / career changers
 - o Learners with low academic confidence/negative learning experiences
 - o Young people who want to work alongside study
- Providers and a number of Employer/Industry bodies felt that for many sectors one year of classroom-based learning is sufficient to enter the workforce. Many providers raised the question of what added value an additional year of classroom-based study would bring, particularly where current smaller qualifications sufficiently cover the content

- There were also a number of occupational routes cited as being unsuitable for a two-year study programme. Particular sectors mentioned included those in which sub-sector pathways are distinct and where broad general qualifications were not considered suitable. For example, these included, but were not limited to:
 - o Land based
 - o Hair and Beauty
 - o Hospitality and Catering

Government response to questions 7, 8 and 9

Overall:

We acknowledge the concerns raised about the viability of having separate qualifications for progression to level 3 study and progression to employment.

Providers are already able to choose which subjects they offer and how they combine teaching of content where it is appropriate, and this may be enough to address the concerns.

Therefore, we do not intend to change our original intention to have two distinct pathways. We will however continue to work with providers to ensure we're supporting them to best utilise the new qualification groups that they will be able to offer.

Question 7:

Level 2 technical qualifications are a valuable part of the qualifications landscape, whilst some are an important stepping stone to further study, others will provide entry to an occupation in many sectors. There are many students for whom achievement at level 2 is a rewarding and fulfilling aim, this might be because level 2 is an ambitious aim for that student and/or because level 2 is the most appropriate route into a sustainable and fulfilling career.

The majority of the responses to the consultation agreed with us that it is right to fund occupational-entry qualifications at level 2 which support progression to employment (group 2), therefore, as proposed, we will fund these qualifications for 16-19 year olds and adults.

Whilst we recognise that there are some concerns around the inclusion of broader, route wide content and transferable skills as part of the qualification, we know from responses to the consultation that the majority agreed these skills would be beneficial. We know from employer responses to the consultation that they value those who have a broad understanding of the sector they will be working in, because this helps them to understand their own role and how their role interacts with other employees that they'll be working with. It is also of benefit to the learner, by better preparing them for career progression or changes in the future.

Early delivery of T Levels shows that qualifications which start broad before focusing on the occupation are successful and we are aiming to develop a level 2 landscape which mirrors the best practice at level 3, providing all learners with the opportunity to progress.

Therefore, on balance, we will continue with our proposal and include broad route wide content and transferable skills within the group 2 qualifications.

As with qualifications that support progression to level 3 study, we have taken on board the concerns expressed about the need for greater flexibility with regards to the size of these qualifications. We still believe the proposed size guideline is appropriate. This is so qualifications can be taken as part of a broader 16 to 19 study programme of up to two years (with other elements also playing an important role in addressing barriers to progression) and are large enough to include all the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for occupational entry and the broad, route wide content and transferable skills.

We would however emphasise that this criterion was always intended to be a guideline rather than a hard rule. We want to make this clearer and emphasise that the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives, and how it aligns to the employer led occupational standards. The guideline size is there to illustrate what might be an appropriate size for a qualification within a broader study programme. Each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and, whilst some variation may be justified, we would generally expect these qualifications to be broadly the same size. This applies to all of our guideline size criteria.

Question 8:

We appreciate the comments provided on this question and understand the division of opinion here.

We have listened to views on the two options and conclude that it is important we allow learners to choose between one qualification or two to accommodate differing student needs. Therefore, we conclude we should proceed with option B.

Question 9:

We still believe that a two-year study programme has many benefits including:

- Employers value the broad route-wide content and transferable skills that help develop the learner's knowledge
- We know that learners leaving with a level 2 qualification have a more difficult transition to work than level 3 learners, so an extra year of development should help to better prepare these learners for work

- The study programme is a vital part of preparing the learner for the workplace and can include content such as work experience, digital provision, maths, and English.
- It would bring us in line with other best practice including in other European countries, such as France and Germany, and Level 3 and other qualifications such as GCSEs.

However, we have listened carefully to concerns expressed through the consultation responses and in our conversations with stakeholders. We recognise the challenge of retaining some learners over two years and the concerns that our proposals might hold learners back. We also acknowledge that qualifications will vary in size depending on the subject area and the employer-led standard they are aligned to.

We will offer more flexibility by allowing the group 2 qualifications to be taken in under two years if that better meets the needs of learners. This will include some qualifications that may be completed in one year. Use of this flexibility will be at the discretion of providers, and we expect their decisions to be dependent on the size of the reformed qualification and other elements of the study programme, and the needs of the learner.

Whilst we are offering this flexibility, it is important to note that the reformed qualifications will need to have currency in the labour market. To ensure this is the case they will need to align to employer-led standards and cover the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that employers determine are required to enter an occupation. This will include, where appropriate, broader, route-wide content and transferable skills. We know that the size of this content will vary by sector, so qualifications in some sectors will be more suitable for delivery in under two years than others.

The law requires that all young people must stay in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, therefore, those completing a qualification in one year must move on to either further study, a job with training which leads to a regulated qualification or an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship.

We will monitor how reformed qualifications are delivered and gather more evidence on the potential benefits of a two-year study programme.

Specialist qualifications

Question 10:

Do you agree that we should fund specialist qualifications at level 2?

If you agree, are there any examples of qualifications that you think might fall into this group?

- 88% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 95% agreed that specialist qualifications at level 2 should be funded and 5% disagreed.
- Responses were provided from most sectors and gave examples of qualifications that could fit into this category in the future. Land-based, construction, horticulture, health and social care, children and early years qualifications were most cited. Other occupations that were covered included hair and beauty, hospitality, digital, automotive, textiles, counselling, and mentoring.
- In particular, respondents wanted to see these qualifications being smaller and running alongside larger qualifications, such as those in groups 1 and 2, as part of the wider study programme, but also being available as stand-alone qualifications for adults.
- A number of respondents cited the need for these qualifications to be clearly led by employer need, with a focus on skills gaps in industry, and their use by providers to be informed by labour market intelligence.

Government response to question 10

We will continue with our proposal to fund specialist qualifications (group 4) at level 2, as we recognise the importance of these qualifications for learners to build on the content covered by an employer-led occupational standard to further develop their skills and knowledge. It is clear from responses received, that many respondents agree these qualifications are valued across different sectors.

We expect that these qualifications will build on employer led occupational standards and meet criteria that includes employer demand.

Some respondents questioned whether these qualifications would be available alongside the study programme for students who are taking an occupational-focused qualification. We expect that individuals who take one of these qualifications will already be competent in an occupation or be working towards competence. We therefore agree that these qualifications may be appropriate for 16–19-year-olds if they are also taking, or have taken, a linked qualification that proves entry to an occupation.

Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills

Question 11:

Do you agree that we should fund qualifications at level 2 that develop cross-sectoral skills for young people?

If you agree, are there any examples of qualifications that you think might fall into this group?

- 87% of respondents answered this question. Of those who answered, 93% were in favour of funding qualifications at level 2 that develop cross-sectoral skills for young people.
- Many cited Health and Safety related qualifications as a key example of qualifications that fall into this category, alongside first aid, food hygiene and customer service. Other qualifications mentioned in response to the second part of the question include those that, whilst specific to one sector of employment, are advantageous for a young person to have for a number of professions within that sector – such as the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) required for working on a construction site.
- The small number of people who disagreed with this question felt that stand alone cross-sectoral courses may not appeal to young people, and that these skills should be embedded within a larger programme of study.

Government response to question 11

The vast majority of respondents agreed that we should continue to fund qualifications that develop cross-sectoral skills (group 5) for young people. Qualifications such as workplace health and safety are a vital part of a learner's preparation for the workplace, as such, many of the qualifications that are designed to support entry to an occupation may already include such skills, however some of the qualification groups may not include them and therefore we think it is right that they are available as a standalone qualification. We will therefore continue with our proposal to fund cross-sectoral qualifications for 16-19 year olds and adults.

Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study

Question 12 i:

Do you agree that we should fund qualifications to support progression to specialist level 3 academic qualifications?

- 87% of respondents answered this question. Within these answers, there was strong support for this group of qualifications (94%) with 6% of respondents disagreeing.
- It was felt these qualifications would benefit learners who had not achieved the required prior attainment at Key Stage 4, supporting their progression to specialist level 3 academic qualifications and providing a useful pathway to higher level study.

- Those that disagreed felt there would be few examples of this type of qualification and therefore, outside of a well-structured GCSE re-sit programme, there may not be a viable need for this group of qualifications.

Question 12 ii:

Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-240 GLH?

- 80% of respondents answered this question. There were mixed views on the size of the qualification with 68% agreeing with the proposal. While some believed the size of the qualification would allow the study programme to achieve an adequate depth of knowledge, skills and understanding, others felt the proposed GLH were too low to achieve the necessary foundation for progression to Level 3 academic study.
- Again, there was a strong view among respondents that the size of the qualification should be determined by the particular skills, knowledge and understanding needed for individual specialisms rather than driven by the type of qualification or level per se.

Question 13 i:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 2 performing arts graded exams in their current form?

- Of those who responded to this question, 81% agreed that funding should be continued for level 2 performing arts graded exams in their current form, and 19% disagreed. A higher than usual number of respondents (32%) did not provide an answer to this question with many citing lack of relevance.
- Of those that supported continued funding, there was a strong view that maintaining the availability of these qualifications will support a broad and balanced education that will help young people to learn creative skills and widen their social and professional horizons. In some cases, these graded exams were seen as important both for curriculum enrichment and progression to performing arts conservatoires.
- The importance of maintaining access and training in the arts was cited as important not only for personal development and breadth of learning but also as a vital pipeline for progression into the Creative Industries.
- Of respondents who disagreed with the proposal to retain funding, some made the point that these qualifications did not support progression to employment as clearly as other qualifications at this level.

Question 13 ii:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 2 Higher Project Qualifications in their current form?

- Of those who responded to this question, 81% agreed that funding should be continued for level 2 Higher Project qualifications in their current form and 19% disagreed. Again, a high number of respondents (34%) did not provide an answer to this question with many citing lack of relevance.
- Of those that supported continued funding, it was felt these offered choice to learners who may not perform well through other means such as written exams. There was also a strong view that these qualifications provide valuable transferable skills, including independent study and research skills as well as project management.
- Respondents who disagreed had varying views, and most were responding as individuals rather than representing an organisation. Many suggested that project work was best embedded within a larger qualification rather than being stand alone, thereby ensuring projects are relevant and support a wider project-based approach. Some also felt that the level of independent study required is too demanding at level 2.

Government response to questions 12 and 13

We intend to proceed with our plans to fund qualifications that support progression to level 3 academic qualifications, to support specialist routes into higher education. We anticipate most students studying at level 2 post-16 with the aim of progressing to academic level 3 (in particular students wanting to take A levels) will take GCSEs, so we expect the number of qualifications in this group to be relatively small.

Some respondents asked for further clarity around which qualifications would be classed as academic rather than technical in the future. The response to the [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674247/Review_of_post-16_qualifications_at_level_3_in_England.pdf) sets out that qualifications will be considered technical if they are designed primarily to lead to skilled employment, such as T Levels and qualifications that sit alongside T Levels. Academic qualifications are those that primarily support progression into HE or other higher level study, such as A levels and qualifications that sit alongside A levels. At level 2 we have adopted the same approach, so academic qualifications at level 2 are those designed to support progression to an academic qualification at level 3.

We recognise the concerns around size. We would emphasise that the size criterion is intended to be a guideline rather than a hard rule. We want to make this clearer and emphasise that the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives. The latter is especially true for study programmes supporting

progression to level 3, where students will often require additional support for English and maths alongside subject-based qualifications that develop their study skills before progressing to a higher level. The guideline size is there to illustrate what this might look like. Each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and, whilst some variation may be justified, we would generally expect these qualifications to be broadly the same size. This applies to all of our guideline size criteria.

Performing Arts Graded exams

We understand that performing arts graded exams are not widely delivered in post-16 settings. Whilst they can deliver curriculum enrichment, building confidence and communication skills, and support progression to performing arts conservatoires, they do not in themselves deliver the broad and deep cognitive skills required across the creative sector for progression to Higher Education (HE). Also, there will be learners working at level 2 in other subjects who take performing arts graded examinations at other levels as it is not an age/stage model.

However, there is clear support for retaining funding for these qualifications in their current form so that they are available to all students, irrespective of their financial means. Maintaining the availability of these qualifications will support a broad and balanced education that will help young people to learn creative skills, widening their horizons. We therefore propose to retain funding for these qualifications at level 2, as we have at level 3.

Higher Project Qualifications

Given respondents' support for these qualifications, and their potential role in developing transferable skills, we will retain funding for level 2 project qualifications and they will be out of scope of the qualifications review.

Level 1 qualifications

Question 14 i:

Do you agree that we should fund level 1 pre-technical qualifications which focus on progression to level 2 and provide an introduction to the relevant occupational route?

Question 14 ii:

Do you agree that qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH?

Summary of responses to question 14

- 87% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 89% agreed with the proposal. Those who agreed valued a broad overview of the route, however some raised concerns about students who may want to focus on specific skills within a particular sector.
- Respondents also noted different progression routes for different learners at level 1, particularly for students with SEND who may not want to move to level 2 and skilled employment.
- Respondents raised a further question about how recognising prior learning for learners moving from level 1 pre-technical qualifications to the two year level 2 to employment programme would work in practice. Nesting of qualifications, i.e. recognition of success in a smaller award, which can lead to a larger Certificate or Diploma size qualification had been suggested as a way of progressing a level 1 learner into a level 2 to employment programme.
- 80% of respondents answered part ii. 67% of those who replied agreed with the proposal. Those who agreed noted the importance of having some flexibility to meet the diverse needs of the level 1 cohort. Of the 27% who disagreed, there were concerns that some learners do not engage well with larger courses and so the GLH proposed for this group may be too high, particularly for those who may need smaller, bitesize qualifications to help give them confidence and to re-engage those who have been out of education.

Question 15:

Do you agree that we should fund level 1 qualifications which act as a prerequisite to employment?

Summary of responses to question 15

- 88% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 94% agreed with this proposal, with broad consensus on the value of these qualifications.
- Many felt this type of qualification would help young people who have been out of work or are starting work for the first time, to develop the necessary 'work-ready' skills to get them into employment. Respondents also believed a generic pre-employment qualification would be valuable for general employability and life skills that would not have been covered through secondary education.
- It was also noted the importance of these qualifications for some specific sector routes, notably the Level 1 Award in Health and Safety in a Construction Environment for learners wanting to move into the construction sector.
- Of those who disagreed, many felt that a 'pre-requisite to employment' at Level 1 would create an additional barrier to occupational entry for many learners. In general, the view was that any pre-requisites to employment should sit at Level 2

Question 16 i:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 1 graded qualifications in performing arts in their current form?

Question 16 ii:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund level 1 Foundation Project Qualifications in their current form?

Summary of responses to question 16

- For question i, 79% of respondents to this question agreed with continued funding for level 1 graded performing arts qualifications and 21% disagreed. A higher than usual number (33%) of respondents did not answer the question with many stating lack of relevance.
- For question ii, there was support for funding level 1 Foundation Project qualifications with 83% of those who responded agreeing with the question. 66% of those who responded to the consultation answered this question.
- For performing arts qualifications, there was broad consensus from those responding on the value of these qualifications to provide specific skills for creative sectors such as media and digital, as well as generic skills, such as teamwork, self-expression, and confidence-building, for the personal and social development of learners.
- For project qualifications, respondents agreed that the qualifications provided key skills such as independent study skills and project management.
- For both performing arts and project qualifications, respondents felt these qualifications offered tailored and individualised learning opportunities for learners at this level and improved access for a wide range of learners, including learners with SEND or other disadvantaged learners.

Government response to questions 14, 15 and 16

Question 14:

For part i:

There was broad support for our proposals on level 1 pre-technical qualifications. In agreeing with us, respondents recognised the value of students having a broad understanding of the sector, which helps them understand their role and prepares them better for career progression or changes in the future. However, we recognise there are learners who want to get on with focussing on more specific skills. Therefore, as

proposed, we will fund 'route specific' qualifications which provide both a broad overview of the occupational route and specific introductory technical skills.

We recognise from the views of respondents that some students may not be able to progress to level 2, and, for them, level 1 will be their highest achievement. Although we do not think there are skilled employment opportunities at level 1, we want to ensure that students who leave education with level 1 as their highest aim are given the best chance to prepare for employment. We believe this can be addressed by having flexibilities in place to ensure all students can access the groups proposed, recognising that, although the primary purpose of pre-technical is progression to higher levels, they will still give learners valuable skills and knowledge they can take with them into employment if they do leave at level 1.

Through the funding approval process, we will regularly review the mix and balance of qualifications approved to ensure we are meeting the needs of all learners.

We also acknowledge the support for nested qualifications, as well as options for recognising prior learning for learners moving from route-specific level 1 pre-technical qualifications to the level 2 to employment programme. We had already recognised in the consultation that there could be the potential for pre-technical qualifications (groups 9 and 14) of different sizes within the same occupational route, to meet the diverse needs of students studying at these levels. At the same time, we want to ensure qualifications contain sufficient content to be of benefit to the learner and to deliver on the qualification's purpose. We want to continue to engage with the sector on these issues as we develop detailed approval criteria for level 1 and entry level qualifications, including where approaches like nesting could be appropriate.

For part ii:

We have taken on board the concerns expressed about the need for greater flexibility. – As a guideline, we still believe the proposed size range is appropriate. We would emphasise that the size range is intended to be a guide rather than hard rules. We want to make this clearer and emphasise that the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives. The guideline size ranges are there to illustrate what this might look like for different qualification groups. For pre-technical, the guideline size range would enable these qualifications to be taken as part of a broader one-year 16 to 19 study programme (with other elements also playing an important role in addressing barriers to progression) whilst still allowing the potential for some qualifications of different sizes within the same occupational route to meet the diverse needs of students at this level. Each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and we would not anticipate high volumes of qualifications of different sizes.

Question 15

In the consultation we emphasised the importance of qualifications relevant to occupational regulation, helping individuals gain access to employment where they may be able to then learn on the job and become competent in an occupation, for example qualifications in health and safety. This sentiment was echoed in consultation responses, which referenced the key sectors such as construction which require these qualifications for entry. However, in relation to the view that any pre-requisites to employment should sit at level 2, we believe that securing a qualification at level 1 would benefit students who exit to employment at this level. For others, this could be taken as part of a wider study programme, for example as part of the T Level Transition Programme where they could be taken alongside a level 2 qualification from group 1.

After considering this feedback from the consultation, we will therefore continue to fund level 1 qualifications which act as a pre-requisite to employment.

Question 16:

We highlighted in our consultation document that funding this group would be in line with our approach at level 2 and emphasised the importance of these qualifications which offer additional and complementary skills as part of a 16 to 19 study programme at level 1, or potentially for use by students studying other qualifications at higher levels. Following general agreement with this rationale from respondents, we therefore believe this approach is the right one to take and will continue to fund these qualifications.

Entry level qualifications

Question 17 i:

Do you agree that we should fund entry level 3 pre-technical qualifications that support progression to level 1 study?

Question 17 ii:

Do you agree that, for 16- to 19-year-olds, qualifications in this group should be small to medium sized, with a guideline size of 120-280 GLH?

Summary of responses to question 17

- 84% of respondents answered this question. There was support for funding entry level pre-technical qualifications with 93% of those who responded agreeing with the question. Respondents agreed with the principles set out on page 63 of the consultation document, valuing a broad overview at this level, as well as the importance of having entry level 3 as the threshold to progression to level 1 pre-technical study.

- Given these qualifications are significant for students with SEND the need for flexibility and individualised learning was highlighted. Respondents noted progression routes for entry level learners may vary, with some not able to progress past entry level due to their own particular needs. They emphasised that some learners may find the progression upwards from entry level 3 and level 1 quite challenging, and there should be consideration of opportunities at entry level and level 1 that support stepping off into employment for learners with SEND.
- In relation to the proposed guideline size criterion, there were again mixed views among respondents. 79% of respondents answered this question, with 68% of those who answered agreeing with the proposed size. There was no clear agreement on the size range proposal, with some believing it to be too high and others too low.

Question 18:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund entry level graded qualifications in performing arts in their current form?

Summary of responses to question 18

- Responses to this question were consistent with responses provided to Q13 and Q16 in relation to performing arts at level 2 and level 1, respectively. 75% of respondents agreed with funding performing arts graded qualifications at Entry level 3. 65% of respondents answered this question.
- Respondents who agreed with the proposal noted the importance of these qualifications for learners with SEND and the value of the qualifications to offer learners key transferable skills to support positive further study and employment opportunities.

Government response to questions 17 and 18

Question 17:

Response to part i:

We will fund route-specific qualifications at entry level 3 as we believe this level is the natural step before progressing onto similar route-specific level 1 qualifications, and we received broad agreement in the responses to this question. Having these qualifications at entry level 3 will allow for a clear quality bar and a more focused progression route to technical study (via a related level 1 qualification). The concerns relating to progression and supporting those studying at these levels into employment were expressed by respondents to other questions and are addressed in our response to question 14.

Response to part ii.

We have taken on board the concerns expressed about the need for greater flexibility. As a guideline, we still believe the proposed size range is appropriate. We would emphasise that the size range is intended to be a guide rather than hard rules. We want to make this clearer and emphasise that the qualification should be an appropriate size to ensure it fulfils its purpose and objectives. The guideline size ranges are there to illustrate what this might look like for different qualification groups. For pre-technicals, this is so qualifications can be taken as part of a broader one-year 16 to 19 study programme (with other elements also playing an important role in addressing barriers to progression) whilst still allowing some flexibility in size, with the potential for some qualifications of different sizes within the same occupational route to meet the diverse needs of students at this level. Each qualification will still need to demonstrate purpose and necessity and we would not anticipate high volumes of qualifications of different sizes.

Question 18:

Respondents' views chime with the rationale we set out for these qualifications: to support students to develop the foundations of practical performance skills and progress to equivalent qualifications at higher levels. We therefore believe this approach is the right one to take and will approve these qualifications for funding in future.

Supporting adults

Question 19:

Do you agree that the design and delivery principles outlined in paragraphs 150 to 155 will ensure that level 2 technical qualifications are accessible to adults?

Summary of responses to question 19

- 74% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 81% of respondents agreed with the proposed principles for delivery of level 2 technical qualifications for adults, namely that there should be
 - modular delivery of content,
 - recognition of prior learning and experience,
 - appropriate assessment of occupational entry competence.
- Those who agreed emphasised the importance of the above factors to ensure the flexibility needed for adult learners. Respondents wanted to ensure that these principles were applied for all adults, including those who are skilled career changers as well as for low skilled, low paid and disadvantaged groups.
- In particular, the idea of modular delivery was strongly supported. However, there was some concern that requiring a commitment to large qualifications could be off-putting for many adults so learners should be able to commit to smaller modules,

for which learning would be accredited, rather than a whole qualification. This would support learners who need to take breaks for family reasons or who need space between modules before they are able to move to the next one, ensuring their learning is recognised. Some respondents wanted to see an approach where learners received accreditation after each module, either through certification as a standalone bite-size qualification or as achieved credits towards gaining a larger qualification over time.

- Whilst respondents supported the principle of recognition of prior learning as a priority for adults, they also noted the challenges that this poses to providers as it requires additional cost and resource, and can make delivery and assessment fragmented. Some respondents also highlighted that it can be more difficult to evidence skills developed in the workplace against occupational standards and that, in some cases, this should not negate the need for 'skills refreshment' qualifications.
- There was general support for an assessment approach that brings skills together, but some respondents noted the challenges faced by some learners in relation to end of programme competence assessments.

Government response to question 19

We will continue with the principles of modular delivery, recognition of prior learning and appropriate assessment of competence as the key design and delivery principles to support adult learners taking level 2 technical qualifications. This mirrors the approach we are taking at level 3. However, we note the difficulties that recognition of prior learning can present, and we will work to limit the burden on providers where possible.

We note the concern that large qualifications may be off-putting for some adults. Firstly, as set out earlier, our size ranges are intended to be guidelines rather than hard rules. At level 2, we are confirming that we will approve for funding smaller qualifications that will be aligned to employer-led occupational standards and can be taken by adults as an alternative to the larger qualifications (see our response to Question 21). We believe that the guideline size range for these qualifications is a good reflection of the potential size needed to deliver an appropriate level of occupational competence and smaller qualifications are not appropriate at this level. These qualifications may, however, be suitable for delivery on a modular basis to maximise flexibility.

For level 1 and entry level, we address this issue in the response to Question 14.

Question 20:

Do you agree that we should fund the following level 2 qualification groups for adult learners:

- **Group 1: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 technical study**
- **Group 2: Occupational-entry qualifications**
- **Group 4: Specialist qualifications**
- **Group 5: Qualifications supporting cross-sectoral skills**
- **Group 7: Qualifications supporting progression to level 3 academic study**

Summary of responses to question 20

- 85% of respondents answered this question. From these responses, there was strong support (96%) for all of these groups to be available to adults as well as young people
- Respondents felt that access to the above groups provided the scope for adult learners of all ages and stages in their careers to develop new skills and knowledge and gain qualifications relevant to a sector.
- However, many providers raised the issue of viability and the tension between needing to ‘infill’ adult groups with 16–19-year-olds to ensure viable numbers, against the need for different pedagogical approaches for adult and young adult learners.
- On balance, providers called for greater flexibility to offer either discrete or shared delivery. There was also recognition that the learning style of younger adults would be more akin to that of 16–19-year-olds whereas older adults may require a different approach.

Government response to question 20

There is clear support for the full range of qualifications to be available to adults as well as young people. We will proceed with our proposals to make all of these groups available to adults.

We acknowledge the challenges around viability and providers will retain the flexibility to decide how best to deliver these qualifications for adults, i.e. whether discrete provision or in-filling is the most appropriate option.

Question 21 i:

Do you agree that we should fund occupational-focus qualifications at level 2 for adults?

Summary of responses to question 21 i

- 85% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 98% agreed that we should fund these qualifications for adults.
- Whilst respondents agreed with the question, there was a clear view that the same qualifications should be available to adult learners and 16–19-year-old learners. Flexibility to deliver as discrete provision or as infill was highlighted by providers.

Question 21 ii

Do you agree that these qualifications should be medium sized, with a guideline size of 200-540 GLH?

Summary of responses to question 21 ii

- 77% of respondents replied to this question. Of these, 65% agreed with the proposed guideline sizes for these qualifications.
- In particular, some respondents felt that the proposed guideline size criteria were too large and would act as a disincentive for many adults returning to learning. Smaller qualifications may also be needed at level 2 as stepping-stones.
- Respondents again called for a flexible approach to size criteria to enable consideration of what different sectors require and the needs of a wide range of learners, rather than impose a restrictive, one-size-fits all guideline. It was felt important for learners to be able to access both bite-sized and larger qualifications in this area as this will suit the wide range of learners.

Government response to question 21

We will continue with our proposal to make these qualifications available for public funding. Adults will be able to study a single Group 3 qualification which leads to occupational entry-level competence in their chosen sector.

We recognise that many respondents felt these qualifications should also be available for 16–19-year-olds. We have listened to these comments and will make these qualifications available to young people also, in the circumstances described in Option B (see response to question 8).

We have taken on board the concerns expressed about the need for greater flexibility with regards to the size range of these qualifications, see previous section. However, we still believe the proposed size range is appropriate as a guideline. This is so that qualifications are large enough to include all the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for occupational entry.

Question 22:

Do you agree that we should consider requests to fund level 2 qualifications for occupations for which an employer-led occupational standard does not currently exist?

Are you aware of any occupations that are in demand by employers but where an employer-led standard does not currently exist?

Do you agree that these qualifications should be available to adults only?

Summary of responses to question 22

- 85% of people responded to the first part of question 22, 74% of those people who answered this question agreed that we should consider requests to fund these qualifications.
- Those in support of this part of the question felt that funding these qualifications encourages flexibility within the system. There were concerns that qualifications focussed solely on occupational standards could be off-putting to students at lower levels.
- Others in agreement cited that, by only funding qualifications for which there are pre-existing occupational standards, we risk neglecting emerging industries – specifically those around digital skills and sustainability.
- The response to the second part of the question was more mixed, with 26% of replies omitting to answer this question at all. Of those who did respond, 42% said they are aware of in-demand occupations where an employer-led standard does not currently exist. 58% said they are not.
- Amongst those who replied to part 3 of the question, there was a significant disagreement that these qualifications should only be funded for adults – 79% did not think that this was acceptable.
- Some of those who disagreed felt strongly that, on the basis of equality, these qualifications should be open to all. Many – notably those responding on behalf of a college or independent training provider – believe that funding these qualifications solely for adults would render the courses unviable, as student numbers would not be high enough to run the qualification.

Government response to question 22

The majority of respondents agreed that these qualifications should be funded and can fill various gaps in provision where standards don't currently exist; this could be in emerging industries or in more niche occupations.

Whilst consultation respondents felt strongly that these qualifications should be funded for 16-19 year olds as well as for adults, we believe that given the more niche nature of these qualifications they are more likely to be suited to adult learners because we think that for 16-19 year olds, progression to employment is more sustainable where the occupation aligns to an employer-led standard. We also think that the gap in provision this may cause for 16–19-year-olds will be small given that, for the majority of 16-19 year olds the most appropriate pathway will include either a qualification that supports progression to study at level 3 or progression to employment. This is in line with our position at level 3, where we have confirmed that the equivalent group of qualifications will be funded for adults only.

Therefore, we will continue with our proposal to fund these qualifications for adults only.

Question 23:

Do you agree that we should fund the following qualification groups at level 1 for adult learners:

- **Group 9: Level 1 pre-technical qualifications supporting progression to level 2 study**
- **Group 10: Level 1 qualifications serving as a prerequisite to employment**
- **Group 11: Level 1 graded qualifications in performing arts and level 1 project qualifications**

Summary of responses to question 23:

- Group 9 – 87% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 94% agreed with the proposal.
- Group 10 - 85% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 92% were in agreement. The comments received were supportive, recognising that some adults would need support in returning to education and gaining confidence to upskill themselves.
- Group 11 – 72% of respondents answered this question. Of these responses, 83% were in agreement. There were few comments provided for this particular group, but of those received, performing arts qualifications were highlighted as being engaging for students with SEND and therefore beneficial in personal development.

Question 24:

Do you agree that we should fund the following qualification groups at entry level for adults:

- **Group 14: Entry level 3 pre-technical qualifications supporting progression to level 1**
- **Group 15: Entry level performing arts graded qualifications**

Summary of responses to question 24:

- Group 14 – 82% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 88% agreed with this part of the proposals.
- For those who disagreed, comments focused on the transferable soft skills adults already possess, suggesting most could go directly into Level 1 with the exception of learners with SEND or previously NEET.
- Group 15 – 70% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 75% were in agreement.
- Group 15 attracted a similar response to Group 11. Although the majority of those who responded agreed they were beneficial to students with SEND, others did not provide further comment, other than to say they were not familiar with the performing arts sector.

Government response to question 23 and 24

Respondents acknowledged the need for qualifications to be accessible to learners of all ages. There is clear support for the full range of qualifications to be available to adults as well as young people. We will proceed with our proposals to make all of these groups available to adults. Providers will retain the flexibility to decide how best to deliver these qualifications for adults, i.e., whether discrete provision or in-filling is the most appropriate option.

English, maths and ESOL qualifications

Question 25 i:

Do you agree we should remove funding at level 2 for non-GCSE/FSQ English qualifications?

Question 25 ii:

Do you agree we should remove funding at level 2 for non-GCSE/FSQ maths qualifications?

Summary of responses to question 25

85% of consultation respondents answered the English part of question 25 and 84% answered the maths part. Of those, 68% did not agree that we should remove funding at level 2 for non-GCSE/FSQ English qualifications and 67% did not agree that we should remove funding for equivalent qualifications in maths.

Most written responses from those who disagreed with this proposal did not focus on the Level 2 non-GCSE/FSQ English and maths qualifications themselves. Respondents highlighted:

- the continued need for English and maths GCSE and FSQ qualifications at level 2
- the continued need for English and maths qualifications at level 1 and below, which they consider to be particularly necessary for some learners with SEN and/or disabilities
- the continued need for ESOL qualifications

Those who addressed the qualifications specifically within scope of the question noted that level 2 “stepping stone qualifications” can be valuable, particularly for some students with SEND.

Those who agreed with the proposal highlighted that GCSE and FSQ represent the accepted benchmark for achievement at English and maths level 2 and are widely recognised by employers. They also emphasised the need to simplify the English and maths qualifications landscape to ensure clarity around the skills and knowledge possessed by students who have achieved level 2.

Government response to question 25

GCSE and FSQ qualifications remain the qualifications of choice for post 16 learners needing ongoing support to develop their English and maths skills at level 2. These are valued and widely recognised qualifications offering clear alternative routes to developing literacy and numeracy skills, which in turn support progression to further study and employment.

There has historically been very little demand for level 2 qualifications in English and maths that are not GCSEs or FSQs. Funding for most non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications was removed through the streamlining process which identified courses with persistently low or no enrolments. In 2019/20 only 156 students were enrolled across the eight qualifications remaining after this process that are now in scope for defunding.

Enrolment data and feedback from consultation respondents indicate that learners at entry level and level 1 benefit significantly from alternative options to FSQs/GCSEs. However, feedback from stakeholders indicates that learners who are able to reach level 2 can be supported to transition to FSQ/GCSE and will see greater benefits from these qualifications which are more widely recognised and valued.

No new evidence has emerged through this consultation or the call for evidence which preceded it to indicate that there is a need to retain the few remaining non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications at level 2. We will therefore be removing funding approval for non-GCSE/FSQ English and maths qualifications at level 2.

We will continue to fund high quality English and maths qualifications at level 1 and below for those who cannot directly access FSQs or GCSEs. We will also continue to fund high quality ESOL qualifications at level 2 and below.

Question 26 i:

Do you agree we should continue to fund level 1 and entry level English qualifications for learners who cannot access FSQs/ GCSEs?

Question 26 ii:

Do you agree we should continue to fund level 1 and entry level maths qualifications for learners who cannot access FSQs/ GCSEs?

Summary of responses to question 26

85% of consultation respondents answered both elements of this question. Of those, 96% agreed that we should continue to fund level 1 and entry level English qualifications and 95% agreed that we should continue to fund level 1 and entry level maths qualifications.

Respondents agreed that these qualifications are valuable for supporting students who cannot yet access GCSE or FSQ to develop the English and maths skills, confidence, and study skills, needed to progress to level 2 study or employment. Respondents indicated that adult learners, learners with English as an additional language, and some learners with SEND may particularly benefit from these qualifications.

Question 27 i:

Do you agree all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in English should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy?

Question 27 ii:

Do you agree all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in maths should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy?

Summary of responses to question 27

85% of consultation respondents answered the English part of this question and 82% answered the maths part. Of those, 91% agreed that all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in English should be developed against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and 90% agreed that all non-GCSE/FSQ qualifications in maths should be developed against the National Standards.

Respondents stated qualifications should be developed against the National Standards because they support:

- quality and consistency between awarding organisations and qualifications, which in turn supports transferability for learners
- clearly defined levels that in turn support learner progression
- employer understanding of the nature and content of different qualifications at different levels

Over a third of the written comments submitted by respondents who agreed indicated that the National Standards for Adult Literacy are particularly important for ESOL learners because, in addition to the reasons listed above, they support parity of esteem between English and ESOL qualifications.

Some respondents indicated that we should go further and all English and maths qualifications (including GCSEs and FSQs) should be developed against the National Standards to ensure consistency.

Question 28:

Do you agree that we should consider updating the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy before adding them to the regulation criteria?

Summary of responses to question 28

86% of consultation respondents answered this question. Of those, 85% agreed that we should consider updating the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy before adding them to the regulation criteria.

Respondents highlighted that while the core literacy and numeracy competencies that people need remain broadly unchanged, many of the examples provided in the current National Standards, which are now over twenty years old, are out of date and do not entirely reflect modern literacy and numeracy needs, particularly with regards to the workplace. Requested additions included examples linked to “critical/global citizenship”, “sustainability”, and “developments in digital technology”

Awarding organisations highlighted the need to regard the updating of all national standards not as a one-off event but to consider the need for a process ensuring they are regularly reviewed and updated. They also highlighted the potential workload implications of any substantial changes which could impact a significant number of qualifications.

Government response to questions 26, 27, 28

This consultation has confirmed that level 1 and below English and maths qualifications play a significant role in supporting the literacy and numeracy development of those not yet ready to undertake GCSEs and FSQs at level 2, including some learners with SEND. We will continue to fund high quality English and maths qualifications at level 1 and entry level (including sub levels) that deliver basic literacy and numeracy for those who cannot directly access FSQs or GCSEs.

The National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy were first published in 2000. They continue to provide a reliable framework for the development of literacy and

numeracy skills, articulating clear standards at each level and setting out a clear line of progression between levels.

While the need for the core competencies outlined in the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy have remained largely unchanged there is some indication that the examples and references included in the standards are now outdated.

We will now consider the need for updating the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

We will also work with Ofqual as they review the regulation of level 1 and below English and maths qualifications, ensuring that all non-GCSE/FSQs in these subjects continue to support those who cannot access FSQ/GCSE.

Question 29:

Do you agree that we should continue to fund ESOL qualifications at each of the following levels:

- i) Level 2**
- ii) Level 1**
- iii) Entry level (including sub levels 1,2 and 3)**

Summary of responses to question 29

88% of consultation respondents answered each part of this question. Of those who responded, 94% agreed that we should continue to fund ESOL qualifications at level 2, and 96% agreed that we should continue to fund ESOL qualifications at level 1 and entry level.

The existing framework for ESOL qualifications was broadly supported with respondents noting that it offers clear and flexible pathways supporting learner confidence and progression to further education and employment. They also noted that qualifications are well-known, understood and recognised by employers and learners.

Government response to question 29

The consultation confirmed that the existing framework of ESOL qualifications at level 2 and below is highly valued for supporting a diverse range of learners to meet their social, educational, and employment aims. We will continue to fund high quality ESOL qualifications at level 2, level 1, and entry level (including sub levels). Qualifications named ESOL Skills for Life are in scope of the review. ESOL International qualifications are out of scope.

ESOL Skills for Life qualifications are currently mapped against the National Standards for Adult Literacy with the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum providing additional detail to support teaching that is responsive to the particular needs of ESOL learners. Responses to questions 27 and 28 of this consultation indicated that the National Standards and the Core Curriculum continue to provide a valuable basis for regulating ESOL qualifications

and that while some updating might be needed wholesale change is not needed. These qualifications will continue to be mapped against the National Standards for Adult Literacy and the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum and we will consider the need to update them as part of this process.

Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) qualifications

Question 30 and 31:

Do you agree that we should develop national standards and set broad core content at level 1 and entry level (including entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3) for:

- i) Personal and social development**
- ii) Employability skills**
- iii) Independent living and life skills**

- The consultation responses reflected broad support for PSE standards, with 90% in agreement. 87% of respondents answered this question. Many cited the potential to improve the quality of this provision through the rigour, consistency, and the broad value that standards could confer. It is felt that particular groups would benefit from PSE qualifications including students studying ESOL, those who are NEET and those far from the labour market.
- However, consultation respondents have placed importance on having standards that allow flexibility to tailor qualifications to the needs of the students, employers, and their region. Responses suggested standards should enable the creation and regulation of a range of qualifications to tailor provision, whilst ensuring quality. To achieve this, there was a widely expressed desire for standards to be co-created by a broad group to recognise the range of stakeholders invested in these standards. These include employers, education providers, SEND organisations, students, and education experts.

Question 32:

Do you agree the national standards set out above will cover the range of skills needed by students?

Do you believe there is a need to develop additional national standards? If so, please tell us what the standard would contain and which students it would benefit.

- 72% of respondents answered this question. Within these replies there is broad support to implement national standards for PSE - 74% of respondents felt the

proposed subject areas (Personal Development, Independent Living Skills, and Employability) were sufficient for the needs of students. 26% of respondents disagreed.

- Those who disagreed viewed the list provided in the consultation as indicative and not exhaustive of the proposed standards, and many felt more information was needed before a judgement on this could be made. Beyond the areas proposed, respondents offered a range of recommendations which could contribute to creating comprehensive standards. The most popular suggestions included mental health resilience, digital safety, environmental awareness, citizenship, and equality.

Question 33:

Thinking specifically about employability skills:

- i) As an employer, do you currently recognise or value any qualifications in employability skills? If so, how do you recognise them and what aspects of these qualifications do you value?**
- ii) Will the proposed national standards make a difference to the way these qualifications are perceived, valued or recognised by employers?**
- iii) If so, what difference will they make and how would employability qualifications aligned to standards be used by employers in the future?**

- 60% of respondents answered this question. Of these, 70% replied that they do recognise employability skills qualifications, and 75% felt national standards would improve the perception, value, and recognition of these qualifications.
- The low rate of response to this question may be due to it being aimed at employers, however, as only 5% of total consultation responses came from those who self-identified as employers, it is clear to see that other sectors were keen to express an opinion.
- Respondents felt time and communication about the standards would be necessary investments for these benefits to be realised.
- These findings echo the views expressed on these points during our conversations with employers prior to and during the consultation period.

Question 34:

Is it necessary to have standalone qualifications at entry level 1 and entry level 2 that provide students with an opportunity to explore industries and occupations?

- 82% of respondents answered this question. There was broad support for these standalone ‘vocational taster’ qualifications in the consultation response with 77% in agreement.
- Of those in favour of these qualifications, many felt they would provide an inclusive route which enables exploration of an industry and sets the student up for progression into further study or work. However, these would need to be broad to enable the experience to be transferable and many thought this offer should extend beyond entry levels 1 and 2.
- Of those who did not support this proposal, some felt the level would be too low to be meaningful.

Government response to questions 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34

We proposed PSE standards to streamline PSE provision at entry level and level 1 and reduce proliferation in order to improve quality, outcomes, and recognition of qualifications. The responses to the consultation confirmed support for this, but many topics beyond those proposed have been suggested and will need due consideration.

Based on the employer responses to the consultation and our discussions during the consultation period, we have found that some employability qualifications are recognised by some employers.

Therefore, we will continue with our proposal to develop these national standards and will include a broad range of stakeholders in their development. This will include employers, educators, and representative bodies, including those from the SEND community. Following the development of these standards, we will consult again and gather further evidence on their merit. This is to ensure we can consider PSE provision in full before we proceed with the implementation of standards.

In response to question 34, we set out in our consultation document that some students at entry level 1 and 2 can benefit from provision that allows them to explore a range of industries and occupations, giving an opportunity to gain information to support future career and study decisions. The consultation responses showed support for these qualifications and, on balance, we will fund these ‘vocational taster’ qualifications at entry levels 1 and 2. However, we still expect this group of qualifications to be streamlined as current proliferation has led to a system where it is difficult to identify qualifications with a specific and necessary purpose or to identify quality provision.

Where respondents suggested that these ‘vocational taster’ qualifications should also exist at entry level 3, levels 1 and 2 as well, we believe that from entry level 3, qualifications should only focus on one occupational route and not offer a range of different routes. However, within the pre-technical qualifications at entry level 3 and level 1, there could still be a focus on providing tasters of different occupations within that one

route. This would help students decide which one to progress onto and specialise in at level 2 and above.

Delivery timelines

Question 35:

What support is needed to smooth the implementation of the proposed reforms to level 2 and below qualifications?

- There was a strong view that information provided in the consultation on implementation was not sufficient. Respondents want to see more detail on the key milestones and timelines that lead up to implementation, the roles of different organisations, dates for further consultations and the publication of criteria against which funding decisions will be made.
- There was a strong view that the timing of the proposals was ‘too rushed’ and the roll out timescale too short, risking significant disruption to the system. In particular, respondents felt the consultation did not take sufficient account of the scale of the proposals alongside the significant change already taking place within the system (e.g., the level 3 qualification reforms).
- Respondents favoured a more phased approach to implementation, with extensive piloting and evaluation expected before national implementation.
- The Department was urged to consider lead-in times more carefully and to provide clear transitional plans and adequate resourcing for staff training and development.
- Providers and awarding bodies, in particular, expressed a need for clear communication and guidance in relation to which qualifications will no longer be funded, reforming current qualifications to match new specifications, gaining technical approval for new qualifications and more information for centres on how changes will be rolled out.

Government response to question 35

We appreciate the detailed responses we received to this question and understand that the changes proposed across the system are a significant undertaking for many providers, awarding organisations and others. Whilst we acknowledge that there is a lot to do, this is a once in a generation reform, helping young people make positive choices in further education and supporting adults looking to upskill or retrain.

We know that timely information, and good communication and guidance will be crucial to the success of implementing this reform. We will continue to release information,

including key dates and timelines, and further detail on the approvals process for new and reformed qualifications as soon as we are able to.

Having considered the timeline for implementation in light of feedback to this consultation we can confirm that first teaching of reformed qualifications at level 2 will now be from 2025, rather than in 2024. We have also reviewed the proposed timeline for 2025-27 in light of the timeline for level 3 reform, and can confirm we will proceed with the following delivery timeline:

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding removed from
September 2025	<p>Level 2 qualifications⁷ in construction, education and childcare, engineering and manufacturing, and health and science in the following qualification groups:</p> <p>Group 2 - Occupational-entry qualifications for young people and adults</p> <p>Group 3 – Occupational-focus qualifications for adults</p> <p>Group 4 – Specialist qualifications</p>	Level 2 qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of groups 2-4, but are not approved through the reform process

⁷ Level 3 will have digital qualifications in the earlier phase, however, there are no level 2 standards in digital and so there cannot be group 2,3,4 qualifications in digital.

Date of first teaching	Reformed qualifications approved	Funding removed from
September 2026	<p>All other level 2 qualifications in groups 2 to 6 (technical groups)</p> <p>Group 1 and Group 7 qualifications (which support progression to level 3) relating to level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2025, and relating to all wave 1-4 T Levels</p>	Level 2 qualifications in these subject areas which are in scope of groups 1-7 (except those scheduled for first teaching in 2027), but are not approved through the reform process
September 2027	<p>Group 1 and Group 7 qualifications relating to level 3 routes/academic subject areas reformed in 2026</p> <p>All qualifications at level 1 and entry level in groups 9 to 17</p> <p>All English, maths (level 1 and entry level) and ESOL (level 2, level 1 and entry level) qualifications</p> <p>All PSE qualifications</p>	All remaining level 2 and below qualifications

We also said we would confirm which organisation will lead the approvals process for each group of qualifications at level 2 and below. As set out in the consultation, and in line with the extension of their powers in the Skills Act 2022, IfATE will lead the approvals process for the following groups of technical qualifications at level 2:

- Qualifications preparing for a related level 2 occupation (groups 2 and 3)
- Specialist qualifications that develop additional skills and knowledge beyond the requirements of the level 2 standard (group 4)
- Qualifications developing cross-sectoral skills (group 5)

- Qualifications enabling entry into occupations without employer-led occupational standards (group 6)

IfATE will take advice from Ofqual during this process, as at level 3.

DfE will continue to have overall responsibility for funding decisions. These decisions will take account of feedback from IfATE in respect of those groups for which it leads the approval process, and from Ofqual in respect of all other qualifications groups which are subject to review as part of funding approval decisions.

General, equalities and impact assessments

Question 36:

Do you have any concerns regarding the potential impact that the principles and proposals outlined in this consultation may have on students with SEND or those with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010?

- 254 respondents (65%) answered this question.
- Concerns raised in response to this question were that students who have SEND and/or were an ethnic minority, were more likely to be disadvantaged by the reforms. That is because students belonging to those groups are more heavily represented at level 2 and below and so removal of qualifications at these levels could remove potential entry points to education.
- A further concern was that courses could be discontinued based upon enrolment numbers when some provision for students with SEND is designed for smaller numbers.
- There were concerns that non-regulated provision may be reduced as part of the reforms. This would be problematic as some high value provision for students with SEND is delivered in this way.

Question 37:

Are there any additional impacts that you think should be included in the general impact assessment which will accompany our response to this consultation?

- 179 respondents (46%) answered this question.
- Further to concerns that reducing qualification numbers would affect the access of people with SEND, there are broader concerns that this could impact access to education for others including those who are NEET or adults who are far from the labour market.

- There are concerns that this reform will create a burden on the education system that there is not capacity for. This is due to the ongoing recovery from the pandemic and the implementation of other changes to the system. It is thought this could impact upon providers, awarding organisations and educators. Beyond this, there are concerns that the pace of change could undermine the recognition of new qualifications with employers in the short term.

Government response to questions 36 and 37

There are concerns that the reforms could lead to the exclusion of groups that are over-represented at level 2 and below, including learners with SEND. However, as the aim of this reform is to improve qualification provision at level 2 and below, we expect students over-represented at this level to be the biggest recipients of the benefits of these changes. As well as improving quality, the reforms will streamline the system and make it easier for students to navigate and choose appropriate qualifications. Even though these students are disproportionately affected in the short term, we expect the long-term impact to be generally positive as those students will see the biggest improvement in quality of qualifications that they will study at entry level, level 1 and level 2, and better outcomes thereafter. We are committed to working with the sector to explore how best to support students to progress.

We are committed to ensuring we have flexibilities in place to ensure students with SEND can access our proposed qualification groups, and to regularly reviewing the mix and balance of qualifications approved through the approvals process to ensure we are meeting the needs of all learners

Although we expect overall benefits to be positive, we have listened to concerns raised in particular about learners with SEND and have made several changes and clarifications in response:

- Included more flexibility by allowing the group 2 qualifications to be taken in under two years if that better meets the needs of learners. This will be at the discretion of providers, and we expect their decisions to be dependent on the size of the reformed qualification and other elements of the study programme.
- Confirmed we will continue with 'option B' which allows more choice of qualification options within the study programme for 16–19-year-olds aiming for employment.
- Confirmed we will fund 'vocational taster' qualifications at entry levels 1 and 2, giving an additional option for those studying at the lowest levels.
- Made clear that our guideline size criteria are guidelines only, not hard rules, and said that we will consider further the feedback on the importance of smaller, bite sized qualifications for learners studying at these levels.

With regards to concerns about non-regulated provision being affected by the reforms, we recognise this as valuable and appropriate for some students. However, it falls outside the scope of these reforms which focused on qualifications. The consultation on funding and accountability in Further Education set out in more detail proposed future funding arrangements for non-regulated provision for adults.

Consultation respondents raised concerns that the education system will not have the capacity to successfully implement these reforms in the timescale proposed. We have listened to these concerns and have confirmed that the first reformed qualifications will be available for teaching in 2025, rather than 2024.

Annex A: Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Adult Education Budget (AEB)	<p>The AEB aims to engage adults and provide the skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship or other learning.</p> <p>The national AEB supports three statutory entitlements to full funding for eligible adults (aged 19 and above). These are set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills and Children’s Learning Act 2009, and enable eligible adults to be fully funded for the following qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English and mathematics, up to and including level 2, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have not previously attained a GCSE grade A* to C or grade 9 to 4, and/or • first full qualification at level 2 for individuals aged 19 to 23, and/or • first full qualification at level 3 for individuals aged 19 to 23 <p>Further information on AEB funding and performance can be found on GOV.UK.</p> <p>From August 2019, AEB is devolved. Further information can be found on GOV.UK.</p>
Advanced Learner Loan	<p>An Advanced Learner Loan helps eligible adults (aged 19 and above) with the costs of a course at a college or training provider in England. Further information can be found on GOV.UK.</p> <p>Qualifications for which an individual can take a loan out are known as qualifications that are designated for loans. These can be found in the Advanced Learner Loans qualifications catalogue.</p>
Applied General qualifications (AGQs)	<p>Applied General qualifications are level 3 qualifications for post-16 students. They allow entry to a range of higher education courses, either by meeting the entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside other level 3 qualifications such as A Levels. Applied General qualifications are included in DfE’s 16 to 18 school and college performance tables.</p>
Apprenticeship	<p>An apprenticeship is a job that combines practical training with study.</p> <p>See “A guide to apprenticeships” for further information.</p>
Apprenticeship standards	<p>Contains a list of the skills, knowledge and behaviours an apprentice will need to have learned by the end of their apprenticeship. Apprenticeship standards are based on</p>

Term	Definition
	occupational standards, with the addition of an End Point Assessment plan detailing the independent assessment that apprentices must take after their training. Apprenticeship standards have replaced apprenticeship frameworks as part of reforms to raise the quality of apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education is responsible for approving apprenticeship standards. (See also occupational standards).
Awarding Organisations (AOs)	Refers to individual organisations that design, develop and assess qualifications but are not themselves education providers.
Classroom-based provision / study	Provision delivered in a school, college or other training provider as part of a study programme or T Level (for students aged 16 to 19) or as a standalone qualification or non-regulated learning (for adults aged 19 and above). Training will be delivered in a classroom-based setting through a mixture of activities, e.g. in the classroom, online, workshops, simulated working environments and if appropriate supervised working environments.
Core component	The part of the qualification which details and assesses underpinning knowledge and general employability skills and behaviours, relevant to the standard to which it relates.
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)	The ESFA is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Education. It is accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. See the ESFA website for more information. In the consultation document, references to the Department for Education should be taken to include the ESFA.
Employer-led standards	See occupational standards.
Entry-level competence	See occupational entry level competence.
ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding 14 to 19	<p>The ESFA list gives information about which qualifications are approved for funding for students. Qualifications are approved in accordance with their suitability for students in the following age categories: pre-16, 16 to 18, and 18+.</p> <p>For some DfE-funded institutions, such as maintained schools and academies, qualifications have to be approved for funding for ages 14 to 19 for them to be delivered to young people. Further information can be found on the ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding webpages.</p>

Term	Definition
Full level 3	A study programme consisting of two A Levels, or other equivalent regulated level 3 qualifications, including Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications. Further information regarding what contributes towards a full level 3 can be found here .
Full level 2	Attainment of a full level 2 equates to achievement of 5 or more GCSEs at grades 4 and above, or a level 2 vocational qualification of equivalent size.
Full occupational competence	The level of competence expected to perform independently to a level needed to successfully undertake a skilled occupation without further training. Apprenticeships and some T Level technical qualifications will lead to this level.
Further Education (FE)	Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree). Courses range from basic English and maths to Higher National Diplomas (HNDs).
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	The activity of a student 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.
Higher Education (HE) provider	An institution or training provider that provides HE courses. Note, some HE providers also deliver apprenticeships.
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	Impartial, practical support provided to students enabling them to make suitable educational and employment decisions.
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE)	A Crown non-departmental public body, established in April 2017 as the Institute for Apprenticeships, responsible for, amongst other things, ensuring the quality of and approving standards and apprenticeships assessment plans, and ensuring that apprenticeships quality assurance for assessments is carried out. On 31 January 2019 it assumed responsibility for delivery of technical education functions in England – at which point it became the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.
Key stage 4	The national curriculum is organised into blocks of years called 'key stages'. At the end of each key stage, a pupil's performance is assessed. Key stage 4 refers to education in years 10 and 11 of schools in England (ages 14 to 16), at the end of which most

Term	Definition
	pupils sit GCSEs or equivalent level 1/2 qualifications. See the guidance on the national curriculum for further information.
Level 2 and below	<p>In the context of the Qualifications Review this phrase refers to post-16 qualifications at level 2, level 1 and entry level (which includes the sub-levels: entry level 1, entry level 2 and entry level 3).</p> <p>Most qualifications have a difficulty level. The higher the level, the more difficult the qualification is. <u>You can find out what qualification levels mean on GOV.UK.</u></p>
Level 3 and below	In the context of the Qualifications Review this phrase refers to post-16 qualifications at levels 3, 2, 1 and entry level (including sub-levels 1, 2 and 3).
National Skills Fund (NSF)	A £2.5 billion fund, part of the Plan for Jobs, which will help adults to train and gain the valuable skills they need to improve their job prospects. NSF covers both the investment in skills bootcamps and the Free courses for Jobs offers.
Non-qualification activity	Activity of value that does not necessarily lead to qualifications but enables students to progress. Examples include tutorials; work to develop study, leadership, team-work or self-management skills; activities such as volunteering or participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.
Non-regulated learning	Learning which is not subject to awarding organisation external accreditation in the form of a regulated qualification.
Occupation	<p>A set of jobs whose main tasks and duties are characterised by a high degree of similarity. It is also an all-encompassing term for individuals' employment and is not restricted to a particular workplace.</p> <p>In the UK, 'job' or 'role' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'occupation'. However, the term 'job' or 'role' is much more limited, implying connection to an employment contract in a workplace.</p> <p>The term 'occupation' (for example in 'occupational standards') is a more general and all-encompassing term for 'employment in which individuals are engaged' and is not restricted to a particular workplace. It also points towards opportunities for progression, both within an occupation but, importantly, also to related occupations with a similar skill requirement.</p>

Term	Definition
Occupational entry-level competence	<p>The learner has achieved as many outcomes of an occupational standard as can reasonably be expected through a predominantly classroom-based course and can perform to a level needed to successfully start an entry-level role relevant to the occupation. The learner is well placed to reach full competence after a period of on-the-job experience.</p>
Occupational Maps	<p>Occupational Maps group occupations with related knowledge, skills and behaviours into 15 technical routes, making it easier to see the opportunities for career progression within that particular route. Our technical education reforms would mean that competence in an occupation on the maps could be achieved through an apprenticeship, a T Level, a higher technical qualification or a reformed level 3 qualification. Entry-level competence could be achieved through a reformed level 2 qualification.</p> <p>Most routes have been split into a number of pathways. The maps provide a useful guide to show the technical education options available for employers as well as individuals and training providers.</p>
Occupational standards	<p>The occupational standards (also referred to as employer-led standards) set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required for an occupation. Occupational standards make it possible to assess whether an individual has achieved the KSBs needed to be competent in an occupation. They are developed by groups of employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Occupational standards currently form the basis of T Levels and apprenticeships (see also apprenticeship standards).</p>
Ofqual	<p>The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. <u>It was set up in April 2010 under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 and is also covered by the Education Act 2011.</u></p> <p><u>Ofqual is a non-ministerial government department with jurisdiction in England. See the Ofqual website for further information.</u></p>
Performance Tables	<p>DfE's school and college performance tables are published annually, reporting key stage 2 results for primary schools in December; GCSE and equivalent results for secondary schools</p>

Term	Definition
	(provisional results in October and revised results in late January); and A Levels and other 16 to 18 results for schools and colleges in late January and March. School and college performance tables provide a reliable, accessible source of comparative information on pupil attainment and progress.
Pre-vocational qualifications	Skills-based qualifications at entry level 1 and entry level 2 that allow students to explore a range of industries and occupations, supporting their decision-making and eventual progression to a "pre-technical" qualification at entry level 3.
Provider	An education or training organisation that is approved to deliver education to students.
Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)	The RQF provides a single, simple system for cataloguing all qualifications regulated by Ofqual. Qualifications are indexed by their level and size. Ofqual maintains a register that provides more detail on each qualification. See the Register of Regulated Qualifications for further information.
Sainsbury Review	The Independent Panel on Technical Education, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, reported its findings in April 2016. The recommendations were accepted in the Post-16 Skills Plan and form the basis for technical education reforms. See the Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education for more information.
Study Programme	All students funded through the 16 to 19 funding methodology must be enrolled on a study programme, or T Level programme, which typically combines qualifications and other activities, and is tailored to each student's prior attainment and career goals. All study programmes must have a core aim. This will be tailored to the needs of the individual and typically include a substantial qualification (academic or technical) or preparation for employment. For further information see the study programmes guide for providers .
Supported Internship	A supported internship is a type of study programme specifically aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care (EHC) plan, who want to move into employment and need extra support to do so.
T Level	A T Level is a rigorous, stretching programme of study at level 3 based on recognised, employer-led standards. T Levels offer a

Term	Definition
	high quality, prestigious technical alternative to A levels and are aligned with work-based technical education also delivered at level 3 through apprenticeships. T Levels have been introduced in phases since September 2020.
T Level Transition Programme	The T Level Transition Programme is a specific 16-19 study programme for level 2 students. Its purpose is to help students develop core knowledge, skills and behaviours in five areas which will help them to progress onto, and succeed on, their chosen T Level route. The five areas are: industry-relevant technical knowledge and skills; knowledge and skills for the workplace; skills for successful study; English, maths and digital skills; and positive attitude and behaviours. The core target group are students who have the potential to progress onto a T Level with the extra support and preparation that the programme can provide.
Technical Education	<p>Technical education encompasses any training, such as qualifications and apprenticeships, that focuses on progression into skilled employment and require the acquisition of both a substantial body of technical knowledge and a set of practical skills valued by industry. Technical education covers provision from level 2 (the equivalent of GCSEs at A* to C or 9 to 4) to higher education (level 6) but it differs from A Levels and other academic options in that it draws its purpose from the workplace rather than an academic discipline.</p> <p>References to technical education also include qualifications that many would call “vocational”, especially qualifications at the lower levels of difficulty.</p>
<u>Traineeship</u>	A traineeship is a skills development programme that includes a work placement. Traineeships help 16 to 24 year olds - or 25 year olds with an education, health and care (EHC) plan - get ready for an apprenticeship or job if they don't have the appropriate skills or experience. It can last from 6 weeks up to 1 year.
Wolf Review	<p>The Secretary of State for Education commissioned Professor Alison Wolf of King's College London to carry out an independent review of vocational education. Professor Wolf's Review of Vocational Education (2011) is available on GOV.UK.</p> <p>The government's response to the Wolf Review can be found on GOV.UK.</p>



Department
for Education

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