



Department
for Education

Post-16 pathways and qualifications update

Department for Education


Boni Odoemene, Michaela Needham and Riti Dasgupta

December 2025

Contents

- Background to Qualifications Reform
- New, reformed Level 3 qualifications
- T levels Update
- Future Post-16 pathways
- Useful resources

Background to qualifications reform



Over the past ten years, a series of independent reviews expressed concerns about whether post-16 education supports people to enter good jobs and provides effective support for skills. The reviews found that many qualifications were not valued by employers, offered little value to students and had few routes to further education or meaningful employment.

The aim of qualifications reform was to simplify the qualifications landscape and improve both quality and progression outcomes

In 2024, funding was removed from qualifications that had less than 100 or no publicly funded enrolments for three consecutive years.

Last year, after the General Election, the Secretary of State for Education announced a short review of the reforms and a pause in defunding of qualifications due to be defunded in 2024.

The Review of Qualifications Reform affirmed a clear commitment to T Levels as a high-quality post-16 option, retained 157 qualifications previously identified to lose public funding, decided not to proceed with the proposed rules of combination and established a pragmatic approach to future reform, giving certainty until 2027.

Curriculum and Assessment Review final report

- Recognised A levels and T Levels as strong academic technical routes, and **recommended the introduction of a revised third pathway at level 3 called V Levels**
- Emphasised the importance of reforming provision for those studying at level 2, who are likely to face additional barriers, and **recommended the introduction of two separate pathways** – an occupational pathway and a pathway to level 3
- On English and Maths, it reaffirmed, in line with current practice, that all learners who do not reach level 2 by the end of Key Stage 4 should continue to build the core knowledge, skills and confidence in English and maths.



Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy

- Published on **Monday 20 October**
- Critical to supporting the development of a **skilled workforce**, delivering on our **Plan for Change**.

The strategy sets out proposals designed to:

- Introduce new 'V Levels' – a new vocational level 3 option.
- Continue growing T Level provision.
- Strengthen post-16 level 2 options by creating two new dedicated pathways.
- Boost progress in maths & English.
- Make changes to the current accountability framework.

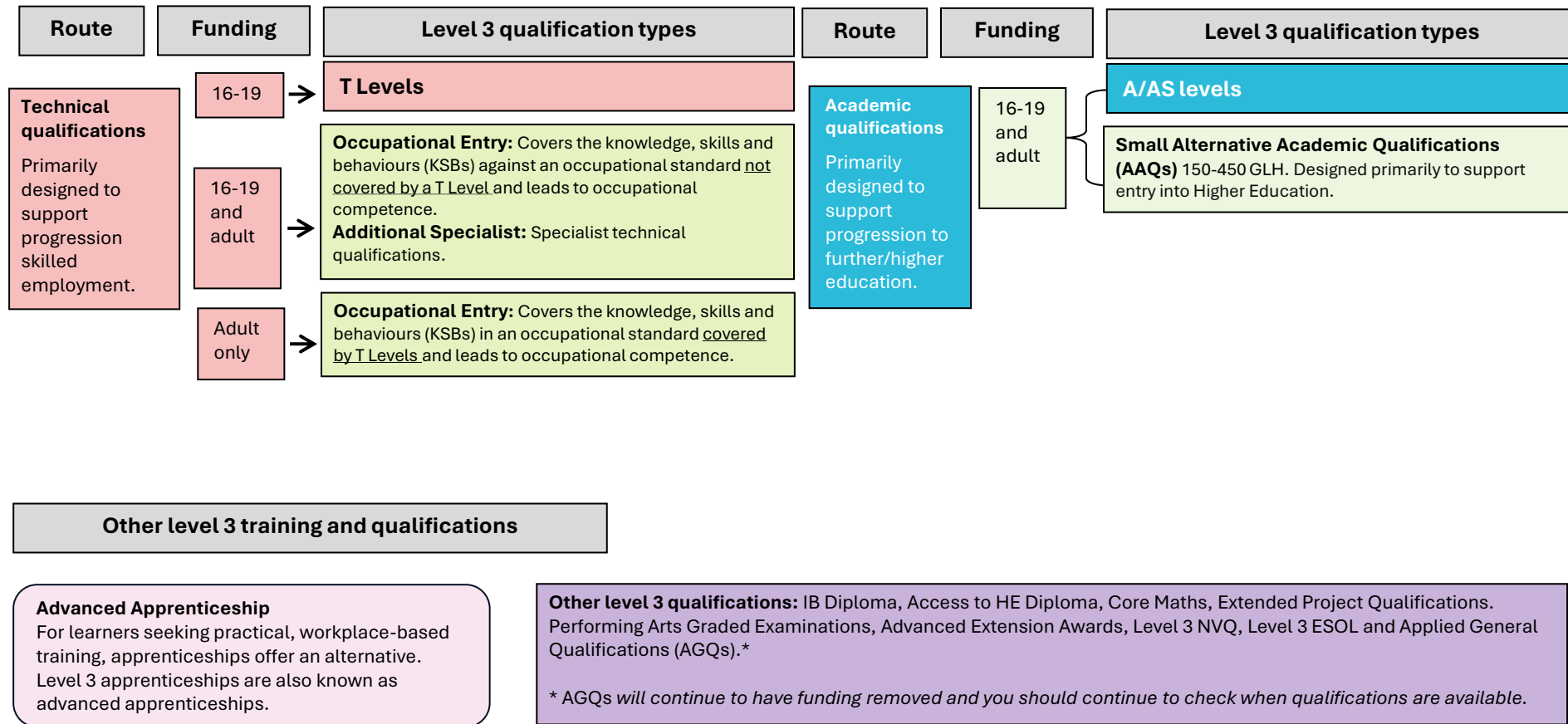


New, reformed Level 3 qualifications

What are the new, reformed qualifications currently available?

- **Level 3**
- **Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs).**
- Reformed Technical Qualifications - **Technical Occupational Entry Qualifications** and **Additional Specialist Qualifications.**
- 74 level 3 qualifications approved and published in **May 2024** for first teach **1 August 2025 and 66** for level 2.
- Available in subjects and routes aligned to Construction and the Built environment, Digital, Education and early years, Engineering and manufacturing and Health and Science.

LEVEL 3 POST-16 QUALIFICATION LANDSCAPE 2025



This diagram represents the **landscape for the academic year 2025**.

Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)

What are they?

Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)

- Level 3 qualifications
- Designed to support entry to higher education
- Minimum 60% mandatory core content, 40% external assessment
- Include elements of applied learning
- Small AAQs can be between 150 and 420 guided learning hours.

Reformed Technical Qualifications (1)

What are they?

Technical Occupational Qualifications

- Available at level 2 and 3
- Deliver competence against an occupational standard not covered by T Levels at level 3 for 16-19-year-olds and all occupational standards for adults.
- Aim to support a learner to enter, or to progress within, a role.
- At level 3, these can be any size

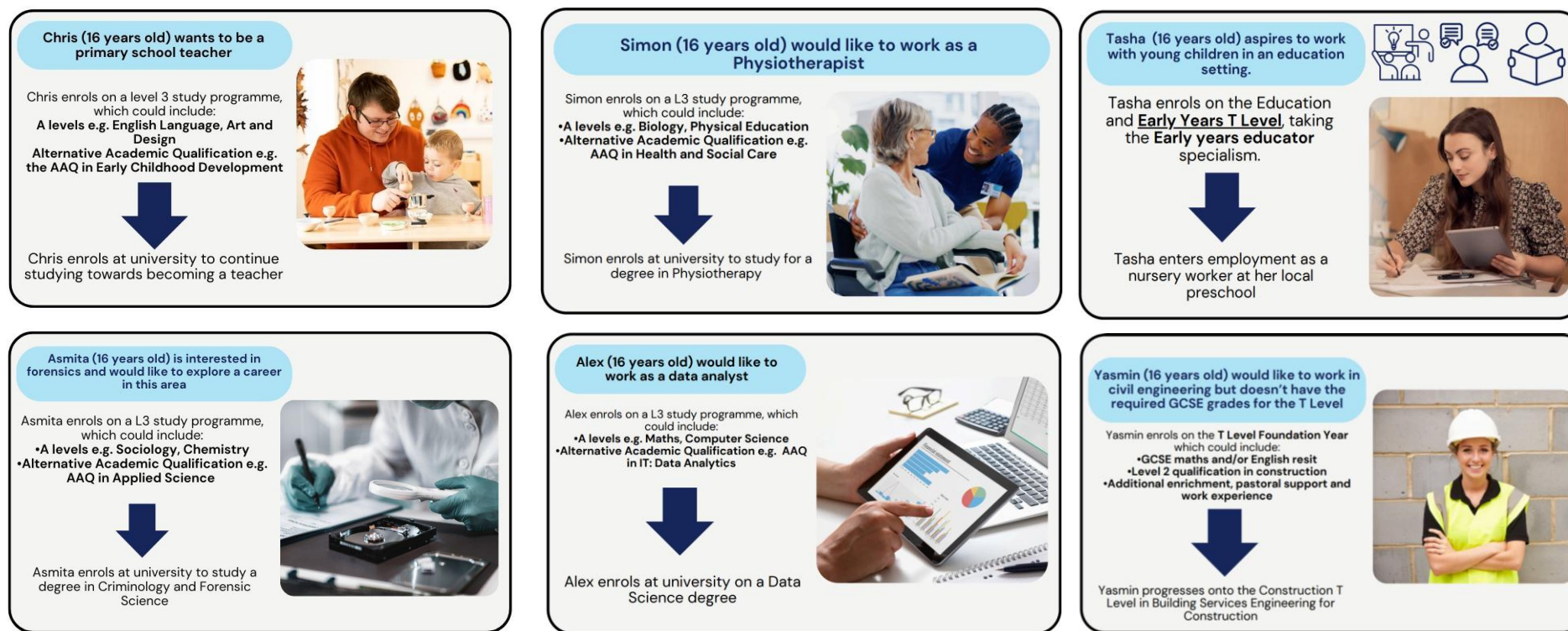
Reformed Technical Qualifications (2)

What are they?

Technical Occupational Additional Specialist Qualifications

- Available at level 2 and 3
- Specialist technical qualifications for post 16 learners and adults
- Go beyond the contents of an occupational standard
- Build on knowledge covered by a T Level or other occupational entry qualification at level 3.

WHAT COULD A LEARNER PATHWAY LOOK LIKE?



Download these pathway examples here: [Support materials for providers and career development professionals, including curriculum planning – T Levels support for schools and colleges](#)

Next steps with HE

- Newly reformed AAQs and TOQs are high quality qualifications that sit alongside A levels and T Levels in the post-16 level 3 offer.
- We want them to be recognised as equals by HE institutions.
- Likely to see students presenting with these for entry into HE courses starting in 2027.
- What do you need from us?

T Levels Update

T Levels are a high-quality route to skilled employment and Higher Education

- T Levels are **high quality Level 3 qualifications designed to prepare students for skilled employment, higher apprenticeships, or further study.**
- T Levels are built on **occupational standards and include industry placements**, giving students an early introduction to their future professions
- Through the outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform (12 December 2024) and the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy (20 October 2025) **the government has asserted its commitment to T Levels** and ensuring more students have the opportunity to benefit from them.
- As T Levels mature, **we are continuing to refine them to enhance deliverability** whilst maintaining rigour and quality
- Offered by over 300 colleges and schools across the country, T Levels are now available in a wide range of subjects, including **a new T Level in Marketing**, taught for the first time from this September.
- If you have engaged with the consultation, you will have seen the proposal for new T Levels. If you have any questions relating to this, please do contact us after the session.



T Levels cover 10 routes and 22 subjects

T Levels span a wide range of technical routes, each designed to meet industry needs and support progression into skilled employment or higher education. Below is the full picture of T Level subjects under each route.

Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care:

Agriculture, Land Management and Production

Animal Care and Management

Business and Administration:

Management and Administration

Construction

Building Services Engineering for Construction

Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction

Onsite Construction - *new enrolments ceased after September 2024*

Creative and Design:

Craft and Design

Media, Broadcast and Production

Digital:

Digital Data Analytics Digital

Software Development

Digital Support and Security

Education and Early years:

Education and Early Years

Engineering and Manufacturing:

Design and Development for Engineering and Manufacturing

Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control

Maintenance

Installation and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing

Health and Science:

Health

Healthcare Science - *last enrolments September 2025*

Science

Legal, Finance and Accounting:

Accounting

Finance

Legal Services

Sales, Marketing and Procurement:

Marketing

T Levels and UCAS tariff points

- **UCAS has aligned T Level attainment standards with other level 3 qualifications**, including A levels to support progression into Higher Education. UCAS points are awarded for the overall T Level grade, not individual components.
- **T Levels will receive points in line with 3 A levels**, such that the highest overall T Level grade (Distinction*) will be awarded the same number of points as 3 A*s at A level (168 UCAS points). An overall T Level Pass grade will be awarded at least 72 UCAS points, in line with 3 Ds at A level.
- **UCAS will allocate points for partial achievement where a student completes the industry placement and one other component**. This recognises valuable learning even if the full T Level is not achieved
- **To learn more about assessments and grading, see this [link](#)**

UCAS tariff points	T Level overall grade	A level
168	Distinction* (A* on the core and distinction in the occupational specialism)	A* A* A*
144	Distinction	AAA
120	Merit	BBB
96	Pass (C or above on the core)	CCC
72	Pass (D or E on the core)	DDD

Progression to Higher Education

- **The most common destinations of T Level completers is a university degree (44%)*.** In 2023 and 2024, **97% of T Level learners who applied for Higher Education through UCAS received at least one offer.** For both years 83% of those who applied were placed.
- T level students are well prepared for their chosen course of study and they **drop out at significantly lower rates than other learners ****
- **T Level learners are more likely to work or study in the field of their T Level** after completion than learners on comparable L3 qualifications (71% vs 61%)*.
- **More than 160 Higher Education Institutions accept T Levels for at least one course.** DfE continue to work closely with sector bodies such as UCAS and UUK to ensure that T Levels are understood by HE providers as a high-quality offer.

Case study 1: Education and Early Years

Saman Kaur is a recent Education and Early Years T Level student at Sandwell College. Saman has a passion for childcare and has now successfully gone on to study an Early Childhood Studies degree at Staffordshire University upon completion of this qualification. To learn more about Saman's story, read [here](#)

Case study 2: University of Sunderland supports the progression of T Level students into higher education

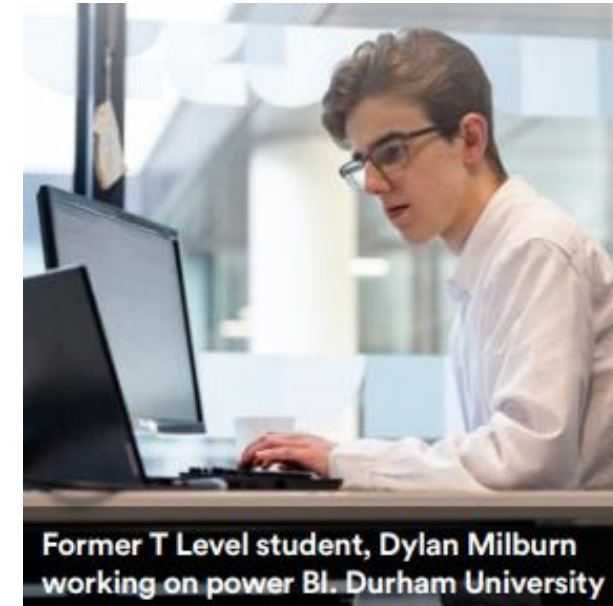
The University of Sunderland treats T Levels as a mainstream route into higher education. In 2023, 22 T Level students joined degree courses in areas like nursing, computing, and primary education, supported by tailored taster days and guidance that make the transition smooth and successful. To learn more about University of Sunderland's journey with T Levels, read [here](#)

After completing this qualification, I plan to study Early Childhood Studies at Staffordshire University to further expand my knowledge and understanding. In the future, I aspire to work with UNICEF, helping children worldwide, ensuring they have access to necessities like food, shelter and clothing

T Levels now have an important place in the suite of qualifications that enable students to enter higher education. At the University of Sunderland, we are delighted to promote them as a great qualification to pursue across a wide range of subjects

Next Steps

- **Join our HE working group.** We convene a quarterly HE working group and newsletter and are welcoming new members. Please enquire through [this form](#) if you are interested.
- **See our published resources [here](#)** including [T Level content maps](#) that compare Maths and Science content to A levels and BTECS, as well as guidance to aid HEI's considering T Level students for progression.
- **Mention T Levels in your admissions information.** 63% of T Level students applying for University after completing their study in 2023 reported that information on the university website stated required grades for A Level, or other equivalent qualifications, but not T Levels.
- **Get to know your local T Level School or College** using this [link](#)
- **Consider [providing industry placement opportunities](#)** for students currently studying a T Level.



Future Post-16 pathways

Post-16 Level 3 and below pathways consultation

The consultation seeks feedback on:

- The introduction of **V Levels** at level 3.
- **Growing T Level provision** and exploring T Levels in **new subjects**.
- The creation of two new level 2 pathways: **Further Study Pathway** (Foundation Certificates) and **Occupational Pathway** (Occupational Certificates).

You can answer the consultation here: [Post-16 level 3 and below pathways - GOV.UK](#)



Level 3 Pathways - V Levels



V Levels will:

- Provide a broad vocational pathway at Level 3..
- Be linked to employer-set occupational standards.
- Be the same size as A levels (360 GLH) so that they can be studied alongside A levels or other V Levels
- Have its content set nationally for improved consistency and quality, as it is for A levels and T Levels.
- Be rolled out between 2027 and 2030.

Example learner pathways

Student A

2 V Levels and an A level

This student wants to get into either the creative arts or the media industry. They are interested in music and choose to do a mixed V Level/A level programme. All qualifications are 360 GLH in size.



Student B

3 V Levels

This student is considering working in either the health or fitness industry but also wants to learn more about the digital sector as they know that digital could also support their future career aspirations and future business goals. All qualifications are 360 GLH in size.



- Further examples of study programmes can be found in the consultation document

Post-16 Pathways

Apprenticeships	Level 2	Further Study Pathway - Foundation Certificates <ul style="list-style-type: none">For students who want, and are capable of, further study on a level 3 pathway, whether T Levels, V Levels or A levels, after an additional year at level 2.One year duration, 240GLH providing a balance of breadth and depth in a broad vocational areaStrong focus on English and maths, alongside other enrichment activity and exposure to level 3 studyNationally set contentApplication of knowledge and skills to achieve practical outcomes, consistent grading scale	Occupational Pathway - Occupational Certificates <ul style="list-style-type: none">For students who want to enter a particular level 2 occupation and need to develop their technical knowledge and skills in a classroom-based setting, with the aim of progressing into skilled employment in relevant level 2 roles.Two year duration, with broad introductory content based on the occupational standards and set nationally, as well as occupation-specific content.Size driven by the relevant occupational standard – no fixed GLHTailored to support progression to work, including employability and enrichment activity.Strong focus on English and maths, including (where appropriate) the new “preparation for GCSE” qualifications	AS/A levels
	Level 3	V Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide broad, vocational qualifications for students who wish to explore a range of sectors.Comparable in size to an A level, V Levels can be studied alongside other qualifications such as English and maths.Blend applied learning with practical assessment, and their content will be linked to occupational standards set by Skills England.Enable progression to higher education, apprenticeships, or employment.Offer breadth for students who would like to explore sectors without specialising.	T Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none">The main technical route for students who know which broad career area they want to pursueA single, large qualification equivalent to three A levelsAligned to employer-based standardsInclude a 45 day industry placementCombine sector-specific core content with a specialist component that develops competence in an occupationEnable progression to higher education, higher apprenticeships, or skilled employment.	

Level 2 and 3 qualifications that will have funding removed over the next 5 years for 16- to 19-year-olds

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Large L3 720+ GLH	Large existing qualifications in T Level areas in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">DigitalHealth and ScienceSocial CareBuilding and construction	Large existing qualifications in T Level areas in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Animal care & AgricultureCreative & DesignLegal, Finance and AccountingEngineering & ManufacturingBusiness and AdministrationSales & Marketing	Large unreformed qualifications where new large reformed qualifications are introduced	Large unreformed qualifications where new large reformed qualifications are introduced	Large unreformed qualifications where new large reformed qualifications are introduced
Medium/ small L3 719 GLH and below	None	None	Existing Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, F Certs AND OCC Certs have been introduced	Existing Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, new F Certs AND OCC Certs have been introduced	Existing Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, new F Certs AND OCC Certs have been introduced
L2	None	None	Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, new F Certs AND New OCC Certs have been introduced	Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, new F Certs and New Occ Certs have been introduced	Existing Qualifications in routes where new V Levels, new F Certs AND New OCC Certs have been introduced

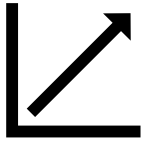
Transition to new landscape

- **Government commitment** to enable more students to benefit from reformed qualifications as soon as possible
- **Phased rollout (2027–2030/31)**
- **Route-by-route approach**
- **Delivery certainty**
- **Transition planning**



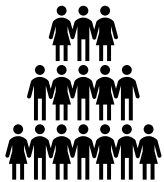
Level 3 Pathways – T Levels and A Levels

T Levels continue to grow and will be the main technical offer for students who have a clear idea of broad career area they want to pursue. T Levels, aligned to employer-based standards and with a 45 day industry placement, are providing positive outcomes with students progressing to further study or employment.



Positive outcomes

- T Level are more likely to agree their course prepared them for the workplace than students on comparable L3 qualifications.
- T Level learners are more likely to work or study in their field than comparable L3 quals (**71% vs 61%**)
- **2/3** of T Level students who do apprenticeships after do higher or degree level apprenticeships – higher than for level 3 learners generally.
- **1/3** of students get a job with their industry placement employer.



Accessible

- Young people with a range of prior attainment are accessing T Levels - the GCSE grade split for students receiving T Level results is very similar to those receiving results for Applied General Qualifications (AGQs).
- Working with T Level providers and AOs to ensure content and assessment is accessible.



A Levels

- A levels continue to be offered for students who want to pursue an academic pathway at university and are not in scope of this consultation.

Useful Resources

Thank you, and here are some useful links:



- [Post-16 level 3 and below pathways consultation](#)
- [Post 16 Skills White Paper](#)
- [Curriculum and Assessment Review report](#)
- [Qualifications Reform toolkit](#)
- [Outcomes of the review](#)
- [Mailing list sign up](#)
- [Qualifications Reform webspace](#)
- [Route by route resources](#)

Email us: **Qualifications.REFORM@EDUCATION.GOV.UK**