

Clearer choice of high-quality post-16 qualifications

Young people and adults will have clearer qualification and training routes, as part of a shake up of the post-16 system to remove low-quality qualifications that lack job prospects.

The new system will create two clearly defined paths for people who have completed GCSEs or similar courses: academic, meaning qualifications that primarily lead to further study, and technical, those qualifications that primarily lead to skilled employment. This will mean everyone can see more easily how their studies support their future training or job aspirations.

Apprenticeships, A levels and new T Levels will become the main progression options after GCSEs.

There will continue to be other qualifications on offer, for example in creative and performing arts, but the changes will reduce the number of poor-quality courses or duplication across the system. Qualifications will need to prove they give employers the skills they need or lead to good Higher Education courses, and demonstrate why there is a real need for them to be funded. The reforms come after [consultation](#) with the education sector, students and parents and will be phased in from 2023.

Under the new system, employers will also play a key role in helping to design more technical qualifications, so they deliver the skilled workforce businesses and the economy need to build back better from the pandemic.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

As we recover from the pandemic, there can be no room in our education system for second rate qualifications.

Great qualifications are essential to helping everyone – no matter their age or background – to get good jobs and realise their ambitions.

These reforms will simplify and streamline the current system, ensuring that whatever qualification a young person or an adult chooses they can be confident that it will be high-quality and will lead to good outcomes.

Level 3 qualifications include A levels, T Levels and other options such as BTECs and Cambridge Technicals. They are traditionally taken by young people after GCSEs, but also by many adults who wish to upskill or retrain.

There are currently [over 4,000 qualifications at level 3 approved for government funding](#), with multiple qualifications in the same subject areas

available – many of which are poor quality and offer little value to students or employers.

This includes over 200 engineering qualifications, over 200 qualifications in building and construction, and 15 plumbing qualifications, ranging from courses that are 170 learning hours to more than 1,800. In comparison, countries with high-performing technical education systems such as Germany and Switzerland offer fewer than 500 technical qualifications in total.

A recent [survey](#) also highlighted that employers were unable to fill a quarter of all vacant positions because they could not find people with the right skills. It also showed that over a quarter of young people were leaving further education poorly prepared for the workplace, further underlining the need for qualifications to be high-quality and provide the skills that employers say they need.

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive at the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education said:

Qualifications at level 3 play an important role for people at the start of their careers and also those looking to build new skills.

The impacts of the pandemic made it more important than ever that we offer high-quality training to address skills gaps.

This review will help us to do even more to help people gain the knowledge and skills they need for prosperous and successful careers in their chosen industry.

Ruth Ginever, chief of industrialisation, Rolls-Royce Civil Aerospace Division, said:

I take the proposed review of level 3 qualifications as a positive step. The current proliferation of different qualifications and lack of standardised content is confusing to both employers, seeking to recruit and to young people, and their parents, looking to make decisions on qualifications to study.

The lack of clear routes through the different qualification levels and how they link to career paths is not supporting developing a diverse, future ready, technically skilled workforce. Particularly for employers, the lack of standardisation is disruptive and leads to extra costs being incurred in bringing an apprentice into a business, as often funding for extra academic support for learners has to be found to cover gaps emanating from non-standard level 3 qualifications.

Mark McClennon, global chief information officer (CIO), Burberry, said:

Level 3 qualifications are an important gateway for people from all backgrounds. I welcome this review and the plans now being shared through this consultation response to move to a more streamlined system that ensures high-quality training and reflects employers' skills needs.

Lucy Wiltshire, sector lead commercial, Willmott Dixon Interiors, said:

Level 3 qualifications are extremely important to help ensure everyone has clearly defined and high-quality training and career choices after their GCSEs. Willmott Dixon has been keen to play a lead role in supporting and shaping these for the construction sector through employer engagement. We support government plans to improve how the wider system works and help students and employers make the right choices.

As part of the work to boost access to high-quality level 3 qualifications, the government has already taken action to:

- remove funding for more than 160 duplicate qualifications from August 2020, ensuring that students take the newer, more rigorous versions
- remove funding from August 2021 for more than 2,200 qualifications which are not being taken by anyone each year.
- stop any new qualification at level 3 and below from getting approval for funding from 2020, to avoid adding to the already confusing and complicated system of qualifications already available at these levels.

Since April, adults without a full qualification at Level 3 have also been able to access [almost 400 free courses](#), ranging from engineering to healthcare to conservation, to help them gain in-demand skills and open up job opportunities.

The new streamlined system announced today forms part of the government's reforms to post-16 education and training as set out in the [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#), which will ensure everyone no matter where they live can gain the skills they need to progress and secure a great career.