

News story: Plans launched to boost quality of post -16 qualifications

Plans to stop funding qualifications that do not provide the same high-quality education as new T Levels and world-class A Levels have been published today (19 March) by Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

The move is the latest step in the Government's drive to boost the quality of education and training available to young people post-16, which includes the introduction of new T Levels from 2020 – the technical equivalent to A Levels – and more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.

A Levels, T Levels and apprenticeships will be the gold standard option for young people after they take their GCSEs, but if a student chooses another qualification the Government wants to make sure they are as high-quality and will set them on a clear path to a job, further education or training.

If a 16-year-old wants to study history, they know they can take an History A Level which is understood and trusted by parents, universities and employers. But if a student wants to study an engineering qualification after GCSEs there are over 200 different options to choose from – leaving them at a loss as to which ones will give them the best chance of getting the skills they need and leaving employers with no clue as to which qualifications they should be looking for.

To help streamline and boost the quality of education on offer, Mr Hinds has launched a consultation reviewing qualifications at level 3 and below – excluding A Levels and GCSEs – such as Applied General Qualifications, Tech Levels and Technical Certificates.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

We have made huge progress to boost the quality of education and training on offer for young people. From 2020 we will start to roll out new T Levels which will offer young people high-quality technical courses alongside our world class A Levels. These will be the gold standard choice for young people after they take their GCSEs.

But we also want to make sure that all options available to students are high-quality and give them the skills they need to get a great job, go on to further education or training, and employers can be confident they can access the workforce they need for the future.

We can't legislate for parity of esteem between academic and technical routes post 16. But we can improve the quality of the options out there and by raising quality, more students and parents will trust these routes.

In the first part of a [two-stage consultation](#), the government is consulting on:

- only providing public funding for qualifications that meet key criteria on quality, purpose, necessity and progression
- not providing public funding for qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds that overlap with T Levels or A Levels

[Analysis](#) published by the Department for Education today has highlighted a confusing landscape of over 12,000 courses on offer to young people at level 3 and below, with multiple qualifications in the same subject areas available – many of which are poor quality and offering little value to students or employers.

Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director, said:

Young people need clear, high-quality and easy to understand options at 16 – whether that's A-levels, new T-levels, or doing an apprenticeship. Each route is valued by employers, but it can sometimes be difficult to understand the difference between the thousands of qualifications and different grading systems out there.

The Government is absolutely right to address this by giving employers a part in shaping the reforms, ensuring qualifications relate to the modern world and give young people the skills they need to succeed.

In 2011, the Government asked [Professor Alison Wolf to carry out a review of vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds](#) in this country to support more young people into jobs or into higher level education and training. Following this, in 2015 the Government also commissioned [Lord Sainsbury to carry out an independent review] and make recommendations on how to improve the quality of technical education. Both reviews led to improvements in the system, including the development of new, tougher criteria for qualifications included in performance tables and the introduction of new gold standard T Levels from 2020.

The Government announced that it would carry out a review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in May 2017 as part of its [response](#) to the T Level consultation.

The review launched today will build on the progress made so far to deliver the vision set out by Professor Wolf and Lord Sainsbury.

Lord Sainsbury said:

I am very pleased that this review will shine a spotlight on any current qualifications that exist that do not best serve our young people or their future employers.

The key priority for the Independent Panel on Technical Education, which I chaired, was to raise the quality of technical education to that of academic education in this country, and we strongly recommended that public subsidy should be withdrawn from college-based technical education that didn't set young people on the best possible path to employment or further learning.

If we are going to ask our young people to work hard to get qualifications, we must make sure that those qualifications deliver real benefits to them.

The Government reformed GCSEs and A Levels to make them more rigorous and put them on a par with high performing countries, so they better prepare pupils for further study and employment.

The response to the first consultation will be published alongside the launch the second consultation later in the year. It will set out more detailed proposals for change, including the criteria that will be used to determine whether a qualification will be approved for public funding.