

Next stage of post-16 qualifications overhaul gets under way

The next step in the government's drive to boost the quality of post-16 qualifications has been [announced today](#) (23 October) by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson.

Last year [the government announced plans](#) to remove funding from qualifications that overlap with T Levels and A levels, and only fund qualifications at level 3 and below that are high quality and lead to good outcomes for students.

Today the Education Secretary has [confirmed](#) that he is pressing ahead with these vital reforms, [setting out detailed measures](#) that will make sure all students no matter where they live and whatever course they choose can be confident it will set them on the path to success. The new measures, which are subject to a 12 week consultation process, include:

- Putting employers at the heart of designing and developing all level 3 technical qualifications – this is already happening with apprenticeships, T Levels and [new higher technical qualifications](#), but the government is going further so students and employers can be sure they are gaining the skills they need to thrive
- Removing funding for qualifications that overlap with A levels and T Levels – simplifying choices for young people – while offering funding for high quality alternatives to A levels, that support students to progress onto specialist Higher Education courses, such as performing arts and sports
- Ensuring only qualifications that meet a high quality bar and help students progress into work or further study are approved for funding
- Making more qualifications available to adults including new T Levels so more people can upskill or retrain

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Now more than ever we must redouble our efforts to support as many people as possible to access high quality education and training, so they can get ahead and so employers can tap into the talented workforce they need as we build back better from coronavirus.

The measures we have announced today will ensure that whether a student opts to study A levels, a T Level or any other qualification, they can be confident that it will be high quality and will set them on a clear path to a job, further education or training.

[Analysis published by the Department for Education](#) 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 offer little value to students or employers.

A spokesperson for the Gatsby Foundation said:

We are pleased to see the government moving forward with this reform. The current system is complex and confusing, with thousands of overlapping, poorly-understood and often low-value qualifications.

We need a radical streamlining of the landscape. Only qualifications that are high-quality and, in the case of technical qualifications, meet employer-led standards, should continue to receive public funding.

As part of the work to boost access to high quality level 3 qualifications, [in July 2019 the government took immediate steps to:](#)

- remove funding for more than 160 duplicate qualifications from August 2020, ensuring that students take the newer, more rigorous versions
- 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 over 12,000 qualifications already available at these levels

This action builds on the work already underway to transform technical and vocational education, including the roll out of new T Levels, working with employers to create more high quality apprenticeship opportunities, establishing a system of higher technical education and a network of Institutes of Technology, backed by up to £290 million.

This autumn the Education Secretary will publish a White Paper setting out plans to build a world-class further education system – one that unlocks potential, levels up skills and boosts opportunities for people across the country.

John Williams, executive chef at the Ritz London, and vice chair of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, said:

The sheer number of qualifications out there at level 3 and below for catering can be overwhelming. It's hard for many employers, who obviously want to focus on the job at hand, to be confident about which ones are up to the high standards we all expect. And of course, it's really hard for learners to choose which qualification is likely to be right for them. Government moves to rationalise that and raise quality will be a huge help.

Dr Graham Honeyman, Head of International Business Development and former

Chief Executive at Sheffield Forgemasters, said:

There needs to be a substantial reduction in the number of options available for students to take up further education at level 3 and below. Not only is the situation confusing for students but also for employers and training providers. The government is entirely right to consider rationalisation of a number of courses and retain those of the highest quality. Progression from one qualification to another with a clear pathway from entry levels to higher levels would be desirable.

Paul Edmonds, international and BAFTA hair stylist, said:

The review of level 3 and below qualifications is, I believe, a real positive for both learners and employers. In the hair and beauty industry for example, though there aren't that many recognised qualifications within hairdressing, there are many in beauty.

This really makes it hard as an employer to know what quality and standard the qualifications are. Elevating and standardising them will make it so much easier for me as an employer to recognise fewer qualifications and give us a clearer and more focused framework to work from. Learners also will have a clear direction of what route they can take to get into their chosen career, with greater transparency towards the detail of the qualification.

We should be putting the needs of both learners and businesses at the forefront of these qualifications, giving a firm foundation to make all our industries dynamic into an ever changing future.