Department for Education

Science: post-16 level 2 and 3 subject content

Government consultation

Launch date 11 November 2026

Respond by 23 December 2026

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Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out plans to reform post-16 qualifications at level 3 and level 2, creating a clearer, more coherent system that supports progression into further study, skilled employment and apprenticeships. The government consultation on post-16 pathways took place between October 2025 and January 2026, and the government response was published in March 2026. The government has further published the Post-16 pathways: implementation plan in May 2026. These new pathways include:

- **A third, vocational pathway at level 3:** creating V Level qualifications. V Levels will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels as a vocational offer for students who wish to explore a range of sectors without focusing on a single occupation, with applied learning and practical assessment. They are the same size as an A Level and can be taken alongside other V Levels or A Levels to form a broad study programme.

- **Two new pathways at level 2:** simplifying the current offer and providing a clear line of sight to either further study at level 3 through the Further Study pathway or skilled employment through the Occupational pathway. Two new level 2 qualifications will underpin these pathways:

    - Foundation Certificates will be taken as part of the 1-year Further Study pathway. They are designed for students who want to pursue further study at level 3 including T Levels, V Levels or A Levels. They are aimed at students who do not meet the provider's own entry requirements to progress directly from GCSE to level 3.

    - Occupational Certificates will be taken as part of the 2-year Occupational pathway. They are designed for students who want to prepare for a particular occupation in a school or college-based setting, before progressing directly into skilled employment.

The new qualification pathways will have nationally set content to drive greater consistency, clarity, and quality across qualifications and will ensure all students studying a subject, regardless of what, where or how they study are equipped with comparable knowledge and skills.

The government has already published the subject content for the first set of V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates that will be taught from September 2027. This consultation seeks views on the proposed subject content for qualifications in science that will be taught from September 2028. Further consultations are being held for qualifications in the health and care, enterprise and professional services, engineering and manufacturing, construction, and sport and leisure subject areas, and links to the consultation pages will be shared here Post-16 level 2 and 3 qualifications: proposed subject content - GOV.UK.

The content is the product of detailed engagement with subject experts, sector stakeholders and education experts including providers and higher education institutions. The content has been developed to support a substantial, engaging and worthwhile programme of study that enables progression.

Ofqual is launching separate consultations seeking views on the proposed Subject Level Conditions, requirements and guidance for V Levels that will be taught from September 2028. These consultations will launch throughout November and close in January.

Awarding organisations will develop specifications for the new qualifications based on nationally set subject content and Ofqual's conditions and guidance.

Who this is for

The consultation is for anyone with an interest in post-16 education for 16 to 19-year-olds in England. This includes but is not limited to:

- awarding organisations who intend to offer V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates, and their representative bodies
- strategic authorities
- schools, colleges, students and their representative bodies
- further and higher education institutions, training providers and their representative bodies
- employers and their representative bodies.

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 11 November 2026.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on: post16level2and3.delivery@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk, telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the DfE Contact us page.

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from GOV.UK DfE consultations.

The response

To help manage and analyse responses effectively, we will use AI tools to support tasks such as summarising feedback and identifying recurring themes. These tools will not replace human judgement, and all outputs will be subject to review by officials.

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be published on GOV.UK in February 2027.

About this consultation

The Department is consulting on the proposed subject content requirements that will form the basis of the new V Levels and Foundation Certificate in science:

V Levels

- Science Research and Technology
- Healthcare Science and Technology

Foundation Certificate

- Science

The subject content will set out the national requirements, defining the knowledge, understanding and skills expected for the V Levels and Foundation Certificate in science. The subject content will provide the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications, and these specifications will set out for teachers in more detail what students will study.

This consultation seeks views on whether the proposed subject content:

- is clear and appropriate for the size and purpose of each qualification
- reflects current and emerging sector and occupational needs
- supports progression to further study, skilled employment, or apprenticeships, as appropriate
- is deliverable within the proposed guided learning hours

Respondents are asked to review the subject content documents alongside this document. You will have the opportunity to provide feedback on one or more of the subject content included in this consultation. You do not need to respond to every qualification, and you can focus on those most relevant to your expertise or interests.

The content has been developed collaboratively with employers, providers, awarding organisations, higher education institutions, Ofqual and Skills England. Through this collaborative approach, we aim to ensure that the content is manageable to teach, supports high-quality assessment, and enables learners to achieve the intended progression outcomes associated with each qualification, whether that is entry into skilled employment, apprenticeships, further technical study, or higher education.

Whilst the responsibility for specifying the subject content of the V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates lies with the Department, Ofqual is responsible for setting the regulatory requirements, including those relating to assessment, which awarding organisations must meet. Ofqual is therefore consulting in

parallel on the regulatory framework that will underpin the delivery of these qualifications. In order to understand how students will be expected to engage with the qualification, it is important to consider both the content and the regulatory framework.

This consultation is not seeking views on the introduction of new post-16 pathways. The consultation on post-16 level 3 and below pathways has already taken place, and you can read the published government response to the post-16 level 3 and below pathways consultation. The subject content for V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates for first teach in 2027 was published in July 2026.

Qualification Pathways

As you review the content of the individual qualifications, you should do so considering the intended purpose and overall structure of the qualifications:

V Levels At level 3, V Levels will be broad applied and vocational qualifications. They will be 2-year qualifications with a size of 360 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and be based on DfE-set subject content linked to occupational standards. They will be taken alongside other V Levels or A Levels to form broad study programmes. They are aimed primarily at students who want to progress to higher level study, higher technical training (defined at level 4 or above) or an apprenticeship, and are designed to complement rather than overlap with A Levels and T Levels.

Foundation Certificates At level 2, there will be a 'further study' pathway with students taking a one-year Foundation Certificate between 240 and 300 GLH in size, set through the content design process. The Foundation Certificates will be based on the national DfE set content, designed to provide a broad introduction to the subject to prepare and support students' progress to further study at level 3.

Across both qualification types, content is designed to be deliverable with standard resources and expertise within the guided learning hours allocated, ensuring it can be successfully taught to large and diverse cohorts of students.

The new qualifications will be introduced in annual tranches. The first qualifications are intended to be first taught from September 2027. Qualifications in scope for this consultation are intended to be first taught from September 2028, with further qualifications to be introduced in 2029 and 2030.

Engagement

The subject content being consulted on for the V Levels and Foundation Certificate in science has been developed by DfE with input from representatives from the following organisations:

Colleges and College Groups:

Birmingham Metropolitan College; Luminate Education Group; Midkent College; Milton Keynes College; New City College; Oldham Sixth Form College; The Sixth Form Bolton; Wyke Sixth Form College.

Universities:

Coventry University; Manchester Metropolitan University; University College London; University of Greenwich; University of Nottingham.

Awarding Bodies, Professional Associations, and Other Organisations:

Cambridge OCR; CSR Scientific Training Ltd; Open Awards; Pearson; SIAS; The Institute of Cancer Research; The Strategic Board for Skills Advancement.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit DfE consultations on GOV.UK to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request an alternative format of the form.

By email

post16level2and3.delivery@education.gov.uk

By post

Technical Vocational Qualification Directorate

Department for Education

Great Smith Street

SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 23 December 2026.

Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment will be published alongside the final content.

Privacy Notice

The Department for Education (DfE) will process your personal data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). Your name, contact details and response will be used for the purposes of analysing and responding to this consultation.

For more information about how DfE uses personal data, your rights, and how long data is retained, please see the DfE privacy notice for members of the public and stakeholders: DfE Personal Information Charter – How we use your information

Annex A: Consultation questions for online survey portal

Section A: About You

1. **Name**

Free Text

2. **Email Address**

Free Text

3. **Are you responding as an individual or part of an organisation?**

- Individual
- Organisation

4. **If you are responding as an individual, how would you describe yourself?**

- Student
- Teacher
- Parent
- Academic

Other – If other, please specify here

5. **If you are responding for an organisation, what type of organisation is this?**

- School
- FE College
- Sixth Form College
- University
- Awarding Organisation
- Sector Body
- Employer
- Strategic Authority

Other - If other, please specify here

6. **If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, what is the name of your organisation?**

Free Text

7. **If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, what is your role within the organisation?**

Free Text

Section B: Which qualification(s) are you responding about?

8. **Which qualification(s) are you responding about?** [Select one]

- V Level: Science Research and Technology
- V Level: Healthcare Science and Technology
- Foundation Certificate: Science

You can only select one qualification at a time. You will be redirected to this question if you wish to respond for more than one qualification.

Section C (if applicable): V Level Questions:

9. **How well does the draft content support progression to higher-level study (defined as level 4+), or an apprenticeship?**

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Not very well
- Not well at all
- Unsure
- Not applicable to my organisation

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, should be made to the content to strengthen progression?

10. **Does the content provide the appropriate level of breadth and depth?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Follow-on question to all answers: If ‘No’ or ‘Don’t know’, please explain your answer.

11. **To what extent is the proposed content appropriately applied and vocational?**

- Fully

- Mostly
- Partly
- Not at all
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it is appropriately applied and vocational?

12. **Is the content set at an appropriate level of demand for a level 3 qualification?**

- Too demanding
- Appropriate
- Not demanding enough
- Unsure

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it meets the expected level of demand for a level 3 qualification?

13. **Are there any issues that should be considered to ensure that the content is manageable for providers to deliver?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: Please explain your answer.

14. **Is the content deliverable within the proposed size for the qualification?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘No’ or ‘Don’t know’: Please explain your answer.

15. **Is any of the content unclear or ambiguous?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: What is unclear and how might it be re-worded?

16. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on students with SEND?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer.

17. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, for improving student engagement and supporting retention?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer. Please be as specific as possible.

18. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on other groups of students (this could include those sharing another protected characteristic such as sex and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity), or others such as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, carers, or people in care?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer. Please be as specific as possible.

19. **Is the title of the qualification meaningful, and an accurate reflection of the content and progression routes?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'No' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer.

20. **Does the content reflect the latest practice in the sector, including emerging innovation and technology, and is it future proof?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if 'No' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer and what technologies should be added.

21. **Is there anything else about the content that you would like to provide feedback on?**

Free Text

Section D (if applicable): Foundation Certificates:

22. **How well does the draft content support progression to level 3 study (to A level, T Levels or V Levels)?**

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Not very well
- Not well at all
- Unsure
- Not applicable to my organisation

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, should be made to the content to strengthen progression to A Levels, T Levels or V Levels?

23. **Does the content provide the appropriate level of breadth and depth?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question to all answers: If 'No' or 'Don't know', please explain your answer.

24. **To what extent is the proposed content appropriately applied and vocational?**

- Fully
- Mostly

- Partly
- Not at all
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it is appropriately applied and vocational?

25. **Is the content set at an appropriate level of demand for a level 2 qualification?**

    - Too demanding
    - Appropriate
    - Not demanding enough
    - Unsure

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it meets the expected level of demand for a level 2 qualification?

26. **Are there any issues that should be considered to ensure that the content is manageable for providers to deliver?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: Please explain your answer.

27. **Is the content deliverable within the proposed size for the qualification?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘No’ or ‘Don’t know’: Please explain your answer.

28. **Is any of the content unclear or ambiguous?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘Yes’ or ‘Don’t know’: What is unclear and how might it be re-worded?

29. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on students with SEND?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer.

30. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, for improving student engagement and supporting retention?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer. Please be as specific as possible.

31. **Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on other groups of students (this could include those sharing another protected characteristic such as sex and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity), or others such as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, carers, or people in care?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'Yes' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer. Please be as specific as possible.

32. **Is the title of the qualification meaningful, and an accurate reflection of the content and progression routes?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

Follow-on question if 'No' or 'Don't know': Please explain your answer.

33. **Does the content reflect the latest practice in the sector, including emerging innovation and technology, and is it future proof?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - Don’t know

Follow-on question if ‘No’ or ‘Don’t know’: Please explain your answer and what technologies should be added.

34. **Is there anything else about the content that you would like to provide feedback on?**

    Free Text

Department for Education

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