



Department  
for Education

# **Proposed subject content for post-16 L2 and L3 qualifications (for 2027)**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 23rd April 2026**

**Respond by 4th June 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 new post-16 pathways has already taken place, and the [government response has been published](#). 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.
- **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 into employment in a relevant level 2 role.

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.

This consultation seeks views on the proposed subject content for the first set of V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates that will be taught from September 2027. The proposed subject content is the product of detailed engagement with subject experts, as well as with sector stakeholders. The content has been developed to constitute a substantial, engaging, and worthwhile programme of study.

A [separate consultation from Ofqual on regulatory requirements](#) is live and will close on the 2 July 2026. It covers how the qualifications must be designed, assessed, and awarded.

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 16-19-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
- schools, colleges, students, and their representative bodies
- further and higher education institutions and their representative bodies
- employers and their representative bodies.

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 July 2026.

## About this consultation

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

### V Levels:

- Accounting and Finance
- Digital Systems and Data
- Education

### Foundation Certificates:

- Digital Systems and Data
- Education and Early Years<sup>1</sup>

### Occupational Certificates:

- Early Years Practitioners
- Culinary Skills
- Hospitality

The subject content will set out the national requirements, defining the knowledge, understanding and skills expected for the first V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates. 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

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the Foundation Certificate reflects its purpose in preparing students for all level 3 progression options, including T Levels in Education and Early Years and V Levels in Education.

included in this consultation. You do not need to respond to every subject and 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, 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, 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. Ofqual's consultation can be found [here](#).

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.

## 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 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.

**Occupational Certificates:** At level 2 there will also be an 'occupational pathway' with students taking a 2-year Occupational Certificate, designed to help them progress to

skilled employment or an apprenticeship. These will range in size between 540 and 720 GLH, with the size for each qualification being set through the content development process. The qualification will include core content, set by DfE, which provides a sector overview and broad introductory knowledge and skills. The core content will form less than 50% of the qualification. The remainder of the qualification content will be occupation-specific and aligned to relevant occupational standards. DfE will mandate the occupational skills which must be included in the occupation-specific content. Awarding organisations must use the DfE-specified skills statements and the occupational standards to design qualification specifications, ensuring that skills are appropriately underpinned by the required knowledge and behaviours. Awarding organisations will have some flexibility in developing the occupation-specific content to meet local or sectoral interests but must ensure the mandatory skills are covered.

Across all 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, with further qualifications to be introduced in 2028, 2029, and 2030.

## **Engagement**

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

### **Colleges and College Groups:**

Activate Learning - Guildford College; Brighton Metropolitan College; City College Norwich; East Lancashire Learning Group; EKC Group; Exeter College; Gateway Sixth Form College; Halesowen College; New City College; Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group; South Essex College Group; South Hampshire College Group; South Hampshire College Group - Fareham College; The Bedford College Group; The Manchester College; The Sixth Form Bolton; Walsall College; West London College.

### **Universities:**

Birmingham City University; University of Bradford - School of Management; Canterbury Christ Church University; De Montfort University; Kingston University London; Leeds Trinity University - School of Childhood and Education; Liverpool John Moores University; Middlesex University London; Nottingham Trent University; Queen's University Belfast; Ulster University; University of Chichester; University of Essex; University of Roehampton; University of Salford; University of Staffordshire; University of the West of England;

University of Westminster - School of Computer Science & Engineering; York St John University.

## **Awarding Bodies, Professional Associations, and Other Organisations:**

AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians); ABE; Advanced Consultancy in Education Ltd; AQA; Ascentis; Association of Colleges; BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT; British Accounting and Finance Association (BAFA); Cambridge OCR; City & Guilds; Compass Group UK & Ireland; FDQ Ltd; Forge Academy; Highfield Qualifications; Kido Schools; Learning Resource Network; NCFE; NOCN Group; Open Awards; Pearson Education Ltd; Pen Green Research & Training Base; Professional Assessment Ltd; RSL Awards Ltd; Sharon Moore Ltd; SIAS; Sixth Form Colleges Association; Skills and Education Group Awards and BIIAB Qualifications Limited; Sodexo UK and Ireland; Trent Education Centre; TQUK; UKHospitality.

## **Respond online**

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations) 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](mailto:post16level2and3.delivery@education.gov.uk)

### **By post**

Technical Vocational Qualification Directorate

Department for Education

Great Smith Street

SW1P 3BT

## **Deadline**

The consultation closes on 4<sup>th</sup> June 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

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 in Accounting and Finance
- V Level in Digital Systems and Data
- V Level in Education
- Foundation Certificate in Digital Systems and Data
- Foundation Certificate in Education and Early Years
- Occupational Certificate in Early Years Practitioners
- Occupational Certificate in Culinary Skills
- Occupational Certificate in Hospitality

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. To what extent does the proposed content enable students to achieve the aims of the qualification?

- Fully
- Mostly
- Partly
- Not at all
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: Please explain your answer

10. 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

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

11. Is the content set at an appropriate level of demand for level 3 students? What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it meets the expected level of learner demand for a Level 3 qualification?

- Too demanding
- Appropriate
- Not demanding enough
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it meets the expected level of learner demand for a Level 3 qualification?

12. Are there any issues associated with delivering this content that should be considered to ensure that the content is manageable for providers to deliver?

Free Text

13. Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific groups, in particular those who share a 'protected characteristic' (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if Yes/Don't Know: If Yes/Don't know, please explain

14. Is the title of the qualification appropriate?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if No/Don't Know: If No/Don't know, please explain

15. Is any of the content unclear or ambiguous?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if Yes/Don't Know: If Yes/Don't know, what is unclear and how might it be re-worded?

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

Free Text

## **Section D (if applicable): Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates Questions:**

17. To what extent does the proposed content enable students to achieve the aims of the qualification?

- Fully
- Mostly
- Partly
- Not at all
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: Please explain your answer

18. Is the content set at an appropriate level of demand for level 2 students?

- Too demanding
- Appropriate
- Not demanding enough
- Unsure

Follow-on question to all answers: What changes, if any, are needed to the content to ensure it meets the expected level of learner demand for a Level 2 qualification?

19. Are there any issues associated with delivering this content that should be considered to ensure that the content is manageable for providers to deliver?

Free Text

20. Does the content have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific groups, in particular those who share a 'protected characteristic' (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

- Yes

- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if Yes/Don't Know: If Yes/Don't know, please explain

21. Is the title of the qualification appropriate?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if No/Don't Know: If No/Don't know, please explain

22. Is any of the content unclear or ambiguous?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if Yes/Don't Know: If Yes/Don't know, what is unclear and how might it be re-worded?

23. Is the content deliverable within the proposed size for the qualification?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Follow-on question if No/Don't Know: If No/Don't know, please explain

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

Free Text

## **Foundation Certificates Only:**

### **Question:**

25. How well does the draft content support progression to Level 3 study (i.e. A Levels, T Levels and V Levels)? What changes, if any, should be made to the content to strengthen progression?

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Not very well
- Not well at all
- Unsure

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

### **Occupational Certificates Only:**

26. Would there be any benefit in having the option to deliver small specialist qualifications alongside these Occupational Certificates as part of a 16-19 study programme?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If Yes/Don't Know, why and in what specialist areas?

27. Is there anything in the content that would preclude learners who currently study at level 1 from accessing this level 2 qualification instead?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Free Text



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