

Technical Education Programme

‘Update on Qualifications Reform’ webinar (30/04/25) – Q&A

Many thanks to colleagues from the DfE, NCFE and the Gatsby Foundation for their input to the answers below.

Disclaimer: Please note that the information in this document reflects the policy situation at the time of the webinar recorded in April 2025 and is subject to change over time.

Q: What are ‘Additional Specialist Qualifications’ and when can they be taken?

A: Additional Specialist Qualifications are specialist-level post-16 qualifications that build upon existing occupational standards. They are designed to enable learners to go beyond the core requirements of an occupational standard and specialise in a particular area within that occupation. Students can study Additional Specialist Qualifications alongside their main qualification or afterwards as a ‘top up’ qualification.

Q: Are Level 2 and Level 3 NCFE qualifications for adults recognised by industry?

A: NCFE works with sector bodies, Sector Skills Councils and industry leads in all relevant sector areas to ensure they meet the needs of the sector (employers and learners). An example of this includes qualifications that are approved that meet the Early Years Educator or Early Years Practitioner standards at Level 2 and Level 3 that are on the Department for Education’s [Early Years Qualifications List](#).

Q: Does NCFE work with Higher Education Institutions to advocate on behalf of T Level students?

A: Yes, NCFE and other major stakeholders are part of a DfE Higher Education Working Group that looks at engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This forum has been in existence since 2021 and advocates that HEIs should consider T Levels.

The DfE has published a [list](#) of HEIs that have confirmed that they accept T Levels for at least one course and engagement is ongoing to ensure that HEIs are aware of T Levels and to encourage them to include technical qualifications in their entry criteria.

Q: Are large AAQs replacing BTECs? If so, what is the difference, other than the name?

A: Applied General Qualifications, (including BTECS), are being reformed into Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) and Reformed Technical Qualifications. The current landscape of vocational and technical qualifications is mixed, with some qualifications providing a very

broad range of content within a field or subject area. The varying levels of minimum mandatory content and external assessment also lead to variable quality and a confusing picture for both learners and others when trying to understand the knowledge a learner has gained by studying a particular qualification.

AAQs are high-quality qualifications and are designed to offer learners a clear route to higher education. Small AAQs (150-450 GLH) will be available from 1 August 2025 and are designed to be taken primarily alongside A levels in mixed study programmes. Mostly academic with elements of applied learning, AAQs are available in subjects that are strategically important and/or less served by A Levels. To be approved for public funding, AAQs must demonstrate that they support progression to related higher education courses, including through at least six letters of support for the qualification from Office for Students-approved higher education institutions. AAQs also attract UCAS tariff points. Before AAQs are approved for public funding, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) reviews qualifications to provide feedback to inform funding decisions taken by the Department for Education. This is a key aspect of ensuring that the quality of qualifications improves.

Ministers are clear that students deserve high-quality qualifications that meet their needs, and that the DfE must continue to develop and improve qualifications, so that they provide for the needs of students and employers. They are also clear that T Levels are excellent qualifications, based on employer-led occupational standards and include high-quality industry placements. Where learners wish to study a large qualification in a T Level route, the T Level should be the main option for them.

The ongoing [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#) has made clear that it wants to build on the work the DfE has already done to simplify and improve the quality of the qualifications landscape, and it is important to give the review the space and time to make their recommendations. Further details will be announced on the department's position about the level 3 landscape, including large AAQs, in due course.

Q: Will qualifications be titled as AAQs, TOQs, etc. or are these broader terms? Will students be familiar with these titles?

A: Yes, the qualifications will have these titles. The DfE is raising awareness of the terms amongst providers and other stakeholders (including career development professionals) to ensure that they are familiar with the new titles and have the relevant information to share with students. A Provider Toolkit is currently being developed, which will provide guidance and resources to assist in raising awareness.

Awarding Organisations also work to raise awareness of these new qualifications. The aim is to ensure that the course titles are clear e.g. NCFE CACHE Level 3 Technical Occupational Entry for the Early Years Workforce (Early Years Educator) Diploma, which is available from September 2025, makes it explicit in the title that it is a Technical Occupational Entry qualification.

Q: How will UCAS tariff points be calculated for the new Level 3 qualifications?

A: All new approved Level 3 qualifications attract UCAS points. Students can work out the tariff points for their Level 3 qualification on the [UCAS Tariff Calculator](#)

Q: Why has the T Level Healthcare Science been dropped?

A: T Levels in Health and Science continue to grow and new delivery contracts have been awarded for September 2026 onwards, securing their delivery up to 2024. The DfE decided to cease enrolments on to the T Level in Healthcare Science after the September 2025 cohort, following an evaluation of whether a separate T Level in this area is required in the long-term to meet the needs to employers and students. From September 2025 onwards, students who wish to pursue assisting healthcare occupations will be able to do so via the Health or Science T Levels. For learners wanting to pursue an optical services specialism, a new Level 3 apprenticeship for optical services is available.

There will continue to be a T Level Foundation Year for the Health and Science route to prepare students for progression onto T Levels in Health and in Science. Students should complete their programme to progress onto one of these T Levels, or other available pathways within the Health and Science route, including apprenticeships.

Q: Is the T Level Foundation course still available?

A: Yes, the [T Level Foundation Year](#) course will continue for students who may require additional support to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in a T Level. This one year course includes English, Maths, practical and technical skills and work-related experience.

Just over 1/3 of T Level providers offer the Foundation Year course and many also offer other level 2 programmes. It is best to contact T Level providers directly to discuss their offer.

Q: What happens if a student doesn't meet the entry requirements for one of the new Level 3 qualifications, a T Level or A Levels?

A: The T Level Foundation Year course may be suitable for some students, who wish to progress on to a full T Level qualification. Providers have flexibility to shape their foundation year offer for their learners, which can include GCSE resits.

Some learners may choose to take a Level 2 qualification first before progressing on to a Level 3. There is still flexibility for the learner to choose the right pathway for them.

Q: Is it difficult for T Level students to find an industry placement?

A: Providers are responsible for sourcing the industry placement and must make sure that it is the right match for both students and employers. The placement must be linked to the content of the T Level to provide students with the opportunity to develop and apply the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours at Level 3, in the workplace. The DfE provides a [connect with employers interested in T Levels](#) service to support providers to connect and build relationships with employers.

Providers may also encourage students to find their own placement. In this scenario, it is important that providers help students to identify suitable employers that are relevant to their chosen T Level. Providers and students may also wish to refer to the [self-sourcing guidance](#)

[New flexibilities](#) on the delivery approaches to T Levels placements were introduced in January 2025 to reflect current working practices and to ensure that T Levels are accessible to a broad range of students.

Of those completing a T Level in summer 2024, 98% had undertaken an industry placement.

Q: How do I keep up to date with the ongoing reforms?

A: To keep up to date with reforms, please sign up to [Post-16 Qualification Reforms - Updates](#) Specific questions for the DfE can be emailed to qualifications.reform@education.gov.uk

Click on the links to see the lists of newly reformed [level 2](#) and [level 3](#) qualifications.

[NCFE](#) also provide regular updates. Useful pages include <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/post-16-reform/> and www.ncfe.org.uk/qualifications/faqs/ Specific queries can be addressed to customersupport@ncfe.org.uk or you can request a consultation [here](#)

As part of the CDI's Technical Education Programme, we seek to provide updates where relevant on our [Technical Education Resource Hub](#) Kim Newman also provides regular updates on LinkedIn (to connect, click [here](#) and on Facebook (CDI Professional Community of Practice and Career Leaders UK groups).