



Baroness Barran

Minister for the School System and Student Finance
Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Lord Willetts
House of Lords,
Houses of Parliament,
Parliament Square,
London,
SW1A 0PW

24 May 2024

Dear David,

Thank you for raising questions about the Government's post-16 qualification reforms at the debate about skills and their importance for the UK economy and quality of life held on Thursday 9 May 2024.

I mentioned during the debate that the Government's qualifications reforms are ongoing and are being undertaken through a phased approach.

Through phase 1, the Government removed public funding from around 5,500 qualifications with sustained low or no publicly funded enrolments in England. This was a once and done exercise that took place in 2021 and 2022.

Through phase 2, the Government will remove 16-19 public funding from technical qualifications which overlap with T Levels. This is being done in a staggered way in line with T Level roll-out, giving a minimum of a year's dual running of T Levels and existing technical qualifications. The 16-19 public funding will be removed from 134 qualifications in Health and Science, Construction and the Built Environment, Digital and Education and Early Years on 1 August 2024. Of these qualifications 100 out of 134 qualifications had low (fewer than 100) or no 16-19 study programme enrolments in 2020/21, and there were just under 40,000 16-19 enrolments on these qualifications in total.

We will then remove 16-19 public funding from 85 technical qualifications that overlap with T Levels in Business and Administration, Engineering and Manufacturing, and Finance and Accounting on 1 August 2025. Of these, 59 had low (fewer than 100) or no 16-19 study programme enrolments in 2020/21, and there were circa 17,600 enrolments in total on these qualifications.

For T levels in Legal Services, Craft and Design, Animal Care and Management, Media Broadcast and Production, Agriculture, Land Management and Production, we have not yet published the final list of overlapping qualifications that will have 16-19 public funding removed on 1 August 2025. We have published a provisional list of 71 qualifications. Of these, 34 had low (fewer than 100) or no 16-19 study programme enrolments in 2020/21, and there were around 32,000 publicly funded 16-19 study programme enrolments in 2021/22. My department is currently considering appeals from Awarding Organisations on the wave 4 provisional overlap list.

Phase 3 is the Government's new funding approval process through which awarding organisations submit all new alternative academic, technical, and non-technical qualifications for public-funding approval at level 3 and below from September 2025. New qualifications will be assessed in cycles, and we have recently published the outcomes from cycle 1 at level 3 on gov.uk. Through cycle 1 at level 3, we have approved 74 new alternative academic and technical qualifications. These were submitted by 16 Awarding Organisations and span a range of subjects within scope of the occupational routes where there are T Levels. This list includes 12 BTECs. [A link to the list of newly approved qualifications is here](#). We will remove public funding from 318 unreformed qualifications at level 3 through cycle 1 on 1 August 2025. This list includes 65 BTECs. Where an awarding organisation has flagged a qualification is being directly replaced it will have funding removed in line with our normal processes and is not featured on this list. [A link to the list of these qualifications is here](#). The related [Written Ministerial Statement is here](#). The list of 318 qualifications that will have funding removed through cycle 1 may be updated in July following the opportunity for awarding organisations to request a procedural review if they disagree with how we have implemented the process.

Through this process, students will continue to have a range of options available to them at level 3, in addition to A Levels and T Levels. Alternative academic qualifications must demonstrate a clear and direct link to related higher education and can be taken as part of mixed study programmes alongside A Levels, or in some cases as standalone qualifications where they lead to more specialist Higher Education, such as in Sport or Performing Arts. The new technical qualifications are based on occupational standards that have been co-designed with employers and which are approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE). They will provide students with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that employers need from their future workforce and will enable students to move directly into skilled employment or access higher levels of technical study.

You asked whether the estimate I provided in my letter of March 8th related to the proportion of qualifications affected by the reforms was still applicable. The department's estimate remains that around 50% of qualifications may not fit into the future landscape. This will differ from subject to subject, and sometimes we replace a set of qualifications with newer, better quality, versions that be smaller in number.

For example, in health and science, the T Level is one large qualification containing multiple occupational routes, and it is awarded by only one organisation in line with our policy on T Levels. There are, however, four small alternative academic qualifications (AAQs) on our list of newly approved qualifications in health and social care related subjects and fifteen small AAQs in science. There are also three new technical occupational entry qualifications at level 3 on our list of newly approved qualifications - one each in medicine and dentistry, health and social care, and nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine. This is a much smaller number than the amount we are defunding, but this reflects the fact that we have the T Level in this area, and that large numbers of qualifications we are defunding had low and no enrolments – 100 out of 134 in wave 1 and 2 related subjects as I mention above. This contrasts with what we will see in an area like performing arts, where there is no T Level and we will see both small and large alternative academic qualifications delivered by multiple awarding organisations.

The new landscape will look different from the current one. It makes choices simpler for students. T Levels are large qualifications offered by a single awarding organisation. This contrasts with the large range of “pick and choose” vocational qualifications that can often be delivered in similar areas by multiple awarding organisations. Furthermore, and unlike many current qualifications, all our new technical qualifications are based on IFATE’s occupational standards, meaning that young people can be confident that they are gaining the skills that employers need.

As new qualifications are approved and existing qualifications have public funding removed, the Department will regularly monitor the availability of qualifications to ensure students have a range of options available to them. The Department is also working with providers to support the implementation of the Government’s qualifications reforms – this includes regular action-oriented communications (webinars, newsletters, and dedicated GOV.UK content) and provision of curriculum planning resources, tools, and examples of effective practice that have been developed by sector practitioners.

The Government wants to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from reformed qualifications which are higher quality and, where applicable, link to IFATE’s occupational standards that have been developed by employers. This also supports the transition to the Advanced British Standard which will deliver a simpler and equal choice between technical and academic subjects. The Government’s timeline for qualifications reform is outlined in our [‘Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond’](#) and [‘Qualification reform over the next few years – a timeline’](#) which are published on GOV.UK.

Over 30,000 students have started a T Level since 2020, including over 16,000 students who started a T Level course in September 2023 – almost as many students as in the first three cohorts combined and an increase of almost 60% from September 2022. We are pleased to see this growth and remain confident that numbers will continue to grow as more providers deliver T Levels.

The recently published T Level Action Plan sets out the steps that the Department is taking to continue to increase uptake over the coming years¹. These steps include the continuation of awareness raising activity, and work to support providers in delivering a high-quality offer as we continue to grow the programme. This support includes a continuation of the 10% uplift to T Level funding rates, worth up to an additional £42m to the sector, for a further academic year (AY) in 2024/25, and provider peer mentoring to encourage collaboration and sharing of good practice. We are also overseeing a review of all T Levels over the next 12 months to ensure content and assessment is proportionate, whilst remaining rigorous and supporting high-quality progression.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify something that I said during the debate. I said, “... we have not yet finished all our decision-making on the funding of qualifications, but we have published the number of courses and enrolments, rather than students, where either funding is being removed or we are considering it, and I will put the links to that information in my letter.” To clarify my remarks, we have published information specifically about qualifications that will have public funding removed because they have been assessed to overlap with wave 1, 2, 3 and 4 T Levels. This is the data outlined earlier in the letter and the links to that information are here:

[Qualifications that overlap with T Levels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Wave 3 T Levels: overlapping qualifications - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Wave 4 T Levels: overlapping qualifications - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

As I know you are aware, the Government is also reforming qualifications at level 2 to ensure that they are high quality and support progression into level 2 occupations and to level 3 study. These will include qualifications specifically designed to help people progress to T Levels through the T Level Foundation Year, qualifications designed to support progression to non-T Level, level 3 courses such as new AAQs, and occupational level 2 qualifications directly linked to IFATE’s occupational standards at level 2. This will help ensure a strong level 2 pathway which supports people to progress to level 3 study.

Thank you again for raising this matter with me. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,



BARONESS BARRAN

MINISTER FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND STUDENT FINANCE

¹ [T Level action plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)