

Qualification reform hub

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Ofqual is working with government and the education sector to deliver significant changes to qualifications in England. You can find the latest updates here.

Vocational qualifications: what's changing?

What is changing in the qualifications landscape?

Young people in England deserve qualifications that open doors to education and employment. They must be clearly understood by employers, universities and colleges, and signal real achievement.

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced once-in-a-generation reforms to post-16 education. These reforms will make sure that whatever a student's interests or strengths, whether academic, technical, or vocational, there's a clear, high-quality path for them.

There will be significant changes to vocational and technical qualifications, while general qualifications, such as GCSEs and A Levels, will be reviewed to make sure they remain relevant, consistent and trusted.

We will ensure these qualifications are introduced at a high standard and that students, teachers and employers can have confidence in them from the start.

By giving post-16 students a clear, credible and flexible route into higher education and employment, these reforms can improve their future prospects and their economic and cultural contribution to the country.

What are V Levels?

V Levels will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels to form a family of well-recognised and valued qualifications – all underpinned by nationally-set content and common grading scales and sizes.

V Levels are a completely new qualification. They will be introduced in phases and different subject areas. V Levels offer a broad vocational qualification for students who want to explore a sector before deciding where to specialise.

Key features of V Levels:

- Same size as an A Level and can be combined with A Levels where this creates a coherent study programme
- Built on nationally set content with a common approach to grading and standard setting
- Designed to support progression to higher education and employment

What are Foundation Certificates and Occupational

Certificates?

Foundation Certificates typically last one year, with a vocational focus and nationally set subjects linked to occupational standards. They will cover broad sectors to support progression on to relevant T Levels and V Levels or, where applicable, A Levels.

Occupational Certificates typically last 2 years and will be a technical qualification based on occupational standards, enabling learners to work towards occupational competence.

These qualifications offer students 2 distinct but complementary pathways at level 2: an occupational pathway for those looking towards employment and study programmes tailored to support success in the workplace, and a further study pathway for students with the ambition and capability to progress on to level 3 but who would benefit from programmes designed to support successful progression.

What is changing for GCSEs?

A review of GCSE content and assessment will ensure these bedrock qualifications remain relevant and continue to command high levels of trust and recognition.

Reforms will reduce overall examination time by around 2-and-a-half to 3 hours for an average student taking 8 or 9 GCSEs.

We will ensure this reduction in assessment time is done without compromising the validity or rigour of GCSEs.

Broadly the government's approach to GCSEs is one of 'evolution not revolution'.

Where GCSE content is changed, we will work with exam boards to recognise their new qualifications.

New post-16 level 1 qualifications for English and maths

Achieving a Grade 4 in English and maths GCSE opens up employment and study routes that are otherwise closed.

However, there is no value in students repeatedly resitting GCSEs to try to achieve this grade without identifying and closing their knowledge gaps and rebuilding confidence to enable them to succeed.

These new level 1 qualifications will provide a structured way to do this before students resit their GCSE to achieve a grade 4.

For more detailed information on all of these qualifications see [New V levels and post-16 qualifications explained](#) – The Education Hub

What action is Ofqual taking?

Ofqual is working with government and the education sector to deliver the most significant changes to qualifications in a generation. We are ensuring that new and reformed qualifications are high

quality, well-understood and fair, so every student gains qualifications that open doors to their future.

While the Department for Education sets the content for these qualifications, Ofqual will set out the conditions awarding organisations must meet to offer them, and the rules governing their design. Ofqual regulates awarding organisations to ensure that regulated qualifications in England are trusted, reliable and fair.

We uphold standards in assessment and awarding so that regulated qualifications consistently reflect what students know, understand and can do.

Ofqual's involvement is distinct from, but complementary to, that of the Department for Education.

- The Department for Education sets education policy and designs curriculum content. DfE decides what students should learn.
- Ofqual regulates to ensure assessments evaluate how well that learning has been achieved. We protect the value and integrity of qualifications so they remain trusted by students, teachers, universities and employers.

How Ofqual will ensure standards are maintained throughout the changes

1. Ensure subject content supports good assessment

We are involved from the start and work with the government from the point that they design curriculum content to demonstrate the impact that this will have on methods of assessments and awarding qualifications.

2. Set high level design requirements

We consult on and publish the regulatory requirements that qualifications must meet to ensure that qualifications are trusted, reliable and fair.

3. Set market entry requirements

We set a high bar for awarding organisations because students deserve qualifications they can trust. Only organisations with proven capability, capacity and governance will be able to offer these national qualifications.

4. Accredite new qualifications

Ofqual will accredit this suite of new vocational qualifications and reformed GCSEs and A levels to ensure that they are high quality, trusted, reliable and fair.

5. Oversee safe introduction of qualifications

We will not experiment with the future of young people. We will carefully monitor the introduction of new and reformed qualifications and their assessments in line with our rules.

6. Secure standards in qualifications

We will secure long term standards during grading and awarding for qualifications we can all trust.

What has happened so far?

Open consultations

In March 2026 we opened a consultation on new Criteria for Recognition. Ofqual is consulting on the introduction of new Criteria for Recognition to secure the safe and timely delivery of 3 new types of qualification for post-16 students - V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates. The proposed criteria allow Ofqual to ensure any awarding organisation that currently has the capabilities required to successfully deliver the first of these new qualifications, in September 2027, has the opportunity to do so.

This consultation is open until 23 April and is open to anyone who may wish to make representation but may be of most interest to:

- awarding organisations intending in future to offer V Levels, Foundation Certificates and/or Occupational Certificates, and their representative bodies
- schools, colleges, students, and their representative bodies
- employers and their representative bodies

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-reform-hub>