

Post-16 Level 3 qualifications reform – quick reference guide

The new post-16 Level 3 qualification landscape

Following the review of post-16 qualifications and below, the Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed its aim of developing a new streamlined qualifications system for students aged 16 and over.

This quick reference guide is designed to provide you with a summary of what we know so far and what it means for you and your post-16 level 3 vocational curriculum. You can find more detailed information on this on our [website](#). We'll update you as we know more about this and will continue to provide you with everything you might need as a result of these changes.

Summary

As a result of the reform, there could be two routes available for students. They could choose between:

- A Levels or a mixed curriculum of, typically, two A Levels alongside a vocational qualification, known as an alternative academic qualification (AAQ)
- T Levels or they may wish to enrol in an apprenticeship.

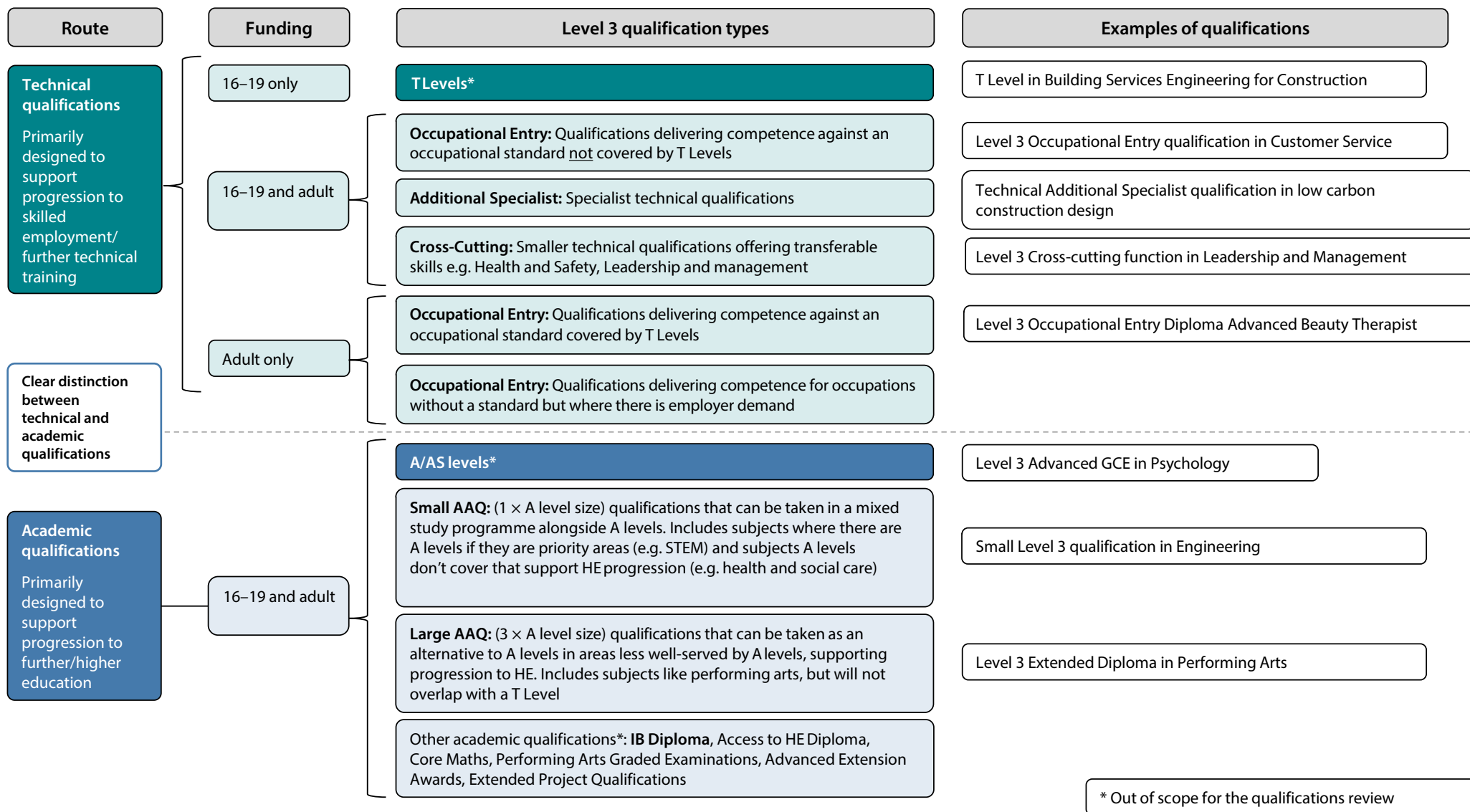
Alternative academic qualifications will be developed in two cycles:

- Cycle 1 will include subjects that align with waves 1 and 2 of T Level roll-out with qualifications being funded from September 2025.
- Cycle 2 will include everything not covered in Cycle 1 and qualifications will be funded from September 2026.

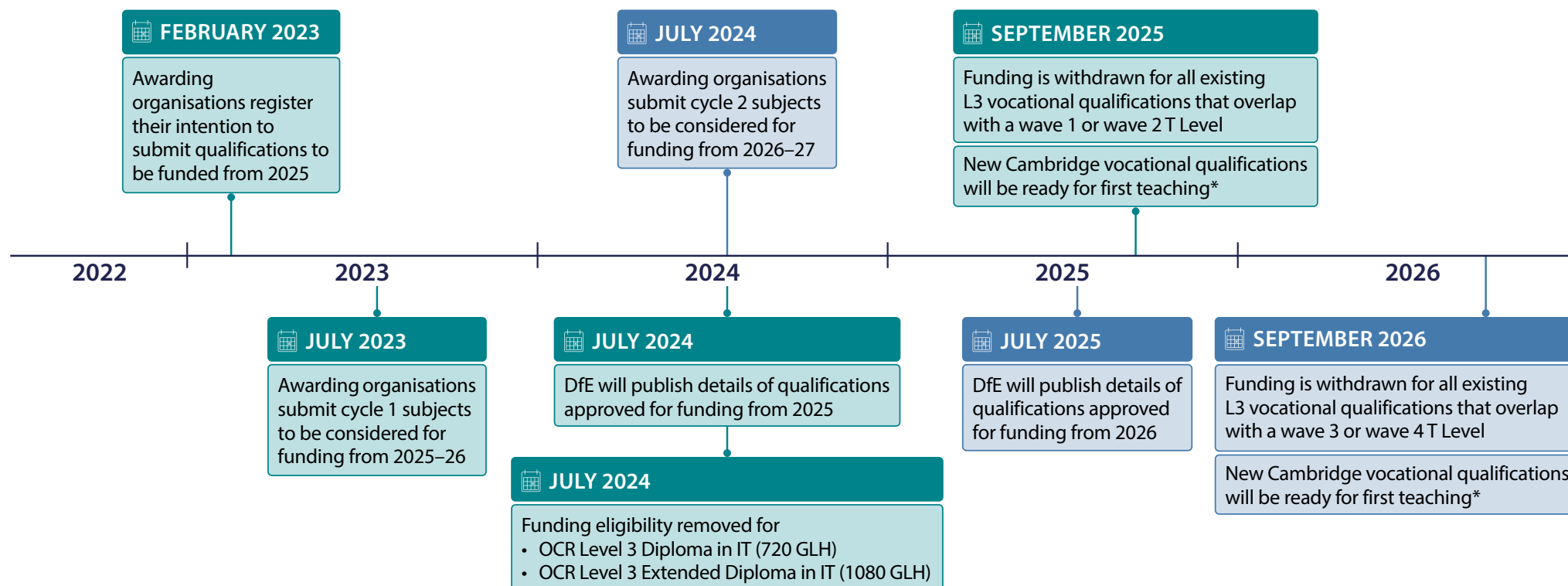
You can continue teaching our current [Cambridge Technicals Level 3 qualifications](#) until 2025.



The new Level 3 qualification landscape



Key activity timeline



*Subject to DfE approval

Where are we now?

The Post-16 reform of qualifications at Level 3 will have an impact on the qualifications you teach from September 2025.

The new Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) will become the only qualifications that exist alongside A levels and T Levels. The name has been decided by the DfE and the title 'Alternative Academic Qualifications' must be used, although further, exam board-specific titles can be used in addition, alongside the official name. They will replace Cambridge Technicals.

The new qualifications will not have the range of subjects or sizes that the Cambridge Technicals had. This has been decided by the DfE.

- There will be small, 1 A level sized qualifications allowed.
- They are deemed small as they will range from 150–420 Guided Learning Hours (GLH). An A level is 360 GLH.
- The first cycle (Cycle 1) of subjects will be submitted to the DfE in 2023, approved in 2024 introduced for first teach in September 2025.
- The second cycle (Cycle 2) of subjects will be submitted to the DfE in 2024, approved in 2025 introduced for first teach in September 2026.
- At the same time as above, funding for current Cambridge Technicals (both 2012 and 2016) will respectively cease, depending on whether the subject is in Cycle 1 or Cycle 2.
- There will be no large sizes of AAQs (720 GLH or 1080 GLH) apart from subjects where there are no T Levels (e.g. Sport and Performing Arts).
- The subjects where there will be AAQs has been determined by the DfE and is detailed in the guidance. If we propose any new subjects not currently offered as Cambridge Technicals, we will have to notify the DfE in February 2024.
- There will be no "Business" AAQ. DfE Ministers have deemed that this subject is already well served by both an A level and a T Level and that offer will suffice.
- The DfE have indicated that only 1 AAQ (typically alongside 2 A Levels) will be permitted, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- No learner will be able to study 3 AAQs as their study programme.



What does this mean for Cambridge Technicals?

We are redeveloping our current Cambridge Technicals (2016 suite) to meet the criteria for Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs).

Our new qualifications will complement existing A Level study programmes by providing students with the practical and essential skills and knowledge they need to better prepare themselves for entry into higher education and university.

We are redeveloping qualifications in the following subjects in the first cycle:

- Engineering
- Health and Social Care
- IT
- Science

If approved, these will be available for first teach in September 2025.

We will be redeveloping further qualifications for the second cycle for first teach in 2026. These include (subject to DfE approval):

- Creative Media Production
- Sport
- Enterprise and Innovation
- Policing and Criminal Justice*
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Sustainability
- Cyber Security and Digital Networking

*The DfE have announced in an updated ['Guide to Post-16 qualifications'](#) that it would NOT consider funding a small AAQ as a Criminology subject. We are reviewing options for submitting such a qualification in subject categories where funding will be considered and will communicate our decision soon.



Subject and sector reform – by academic year

Academic year	New qualifications	Funding eligibility removed	Academic year	New qualifications	Funding eligibility removed
2024/25	N/A	July 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCR Level 3 Diploma in IT (720 GLH) OCR Level 3 Extended Diploma in IT (1080 GLH) 	2026/27	Cycle 2 <p>AOs inform DfE of intention to submit February 2024. Final list to be published July 2025.</p> <p>Academic</p> <p>Small Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in the following subjects only (subject to DfE approval):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Media Production Sport Enterprise and Innovation Policing and Criminal Justice* Mental Health and Wellbeing Sustainability Cyber Security and Digital Networking <p>Large Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in the following subjects only (subject to DfE approval):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport and Physical Activity <p>Technical</p> <p>N/A</p>	July 2026 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCR Level 3 Business (all sizes) OCR Level 3 Certificate in Digital Media (180 GLH) OCR Level 3 Extended Certificate in Digital Media (360 GLH) OCR Level 3 Performing Arts (all sizes) OCR Level 3 Sport and Physical Activity (all sizes)
2025/26	Cycle 1 <p>AOs inform DfE of intention to submit February 2023. Final list to be published July 2024.</p> <p>Academic</p> <p>Small Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in the following subjects only (subject to DfE approval):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering Health and Social Care IT Science <p>Technical</p> <p>N/A</p>	July 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCR Level 3 Applied Science (all sizes) OCR Level 3 Foundation Diploma in Digital Media (540 GLH) OCR Level 3 Diploma in Digital Media (720 GLH) OCR Level 3 Extended Diploma in Digital Media (1080 GLH) OCR Level 3 Engineering (all sizes) OCR Level 3 Health and Social Care (all sizes) OCR Level 3 Certificate in IT (180 GLH) OCR Level 3 Extended Certificate in IT (360 GLH) OCR Level 3 Introductory Diploma in IT (360 GLH) OCR Level 3 Foundation Diploma in IT (540 GLH) 			

*The DfE have announced in an updated '[Guide to Post-16 qualifications](#)' that it would NOT consider funding a small AAQ as a Criminology subject. We are reviewing options for submitting such a qualification in subject categories where funding will be considered and will communicate our decision soon.