



The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills

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Helen Hayes MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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Tuesday 10th March 2026

Dear Helen,

Following my letter to the Committee on 20th October 2025, I am writing to update you on the Government's reforms to technical and vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds in England, as the government publishes its response to the post-16 level 3 and below pathways consultation.

This package represents once-in-a-generation reforms to vocational education, transforming the vocational landscape for millions of 16-19 year olds and supporting the Prime Minister's ambition for two-thirds of young people to study higher level learning – whether academic, vocational, or technical, by age 25.

Driving economic growth is the Government's top priority. The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper set out our reforms to the skills system in England which will develop the skilled workforce our economy needs. The challenge is huge – 900,000 more skilled workers needed in our priority sectors to 2030, nearly 1 million young people not in education, employment or training, and the everchanging impact of technology and Artificial Intelligence.

The government's response, building on the recommendations made in the Curriculum and Assessment Review, sets out our vision for a reformed 16-19 qualifications system that ensures every young person has a clear choice of education pathways that support them to succeed in work and in life. It is built around three key principles:

- **Strong progression outcomes for students:** Every qualification must lead to strong, positive outcomes – and eventually into skilled work – linked where appropriate to the areas that they studied.
- **Future-proofing the qualifications system:** Our qualifications must keep pace with changing skills needs, and each route will be equally prestigious, valued and respected.
- **Clarity of choice for students and parents:** In the new system, students and their parents will be able to better understand their options and what they can lead to – whether academic, vocational or technical.

We will end the assumption that the only way to get on is academic progression and acknowledge the value and prestige that a strong vocational pathway can have.

That is why we are announcing three key changes to our 16-19 qualification system.

1. We are introducing the **V Level** – the new flagship vocational qualification to sit alongside A Levels (academic) and T Levels (technical). V Levels will be the same size as an A Level and can be taken alongside them to create a broad study programme for a young person to progress to higher level study without specialising in one area. V Levels will feature engaging applied teaching, learning and assessment designed to develop real world skills. V Levels will be linked to occupational standards, strengthening employer links and meeting the country's long-term skills needs. In specific and limited cases, we will allow a partnered set of V Levels, in a similar way to the model of Maths/ Further Maths A Level, which will enable overall depth of study in a linked area with the ability to study another subject. We will not allow V Levels to be combined in ways that recreate a large technical study programme within a single route where a T Level exists, to avoid overlap.
2. We have confirmed that **T Levels** will be the only large level 3 qualification for 16–19 year olds who know what broad career area they want to pursue. T Levels have already shown excellent progression outcomes, and their link to occupational standards means they provide the skills employers need. We recognise that sourcing industry placements and delivering assessments are key barriers to providers expanding delivery. We will make changes to placements and assessment to support the accessibility and scalability of T Levels whilst maintaining quality. Placements will still require external employer oversight and will continue to be a minimum of 315 hours, but providers will have more scope for designing the placement within that framework – including through remote working, additional employer involvement and group projects where appropriate. These changes, coupled with the largest expansion in subjects since T Levels were introduced in 2020, will enable significant growth in the number of students progressing with a T Level.
3. We are introducing two new pathways for young people who need to continue learning at a level equivalent to GCSE (**level 2**) at age 16. They will have a choice of two pathways: Further Study, which will help them to progress into a study programme of A Levels and/ or V Levels, or a T Level; or Occupational, which is a two-year programme that supports progression to a good skilled job.

To maintain stability during this transition, and to give providers more time and scope to engage with the reforms, we will not remove funding approval from qualifications in AY2026/27, as set out previously.

Further detail on the timeline for changes to funding approval for qualifications, and the provisional timeline for introduction of new qualifications in routes from AY2027/28, is set out in our Transition Plan published on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

The Government has also today launched a consultation on new 16-19 level 1 English and Maths qualifications for students with prior GCSE attainment of a grade 2 or below. We know that good English and maths skills are hugely important for further study, work and life. The new qualifications will enable these students to secure the key knowledge and skills needed to achieve a grade 4/C or higher at GCSE to help ensure that students only re-take exams when they are ready to make progress.

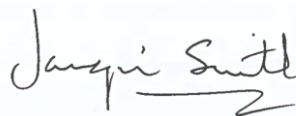
Next Steps

We will roll out the reformed qualifications on a route-by-route basis, with the first new qualifications in Digital, Finance and Accounting, Early Years Education, and Catering and Hospitality starting from 2027. The government will publish an Implementation Plan by June 2026, which will set out further detail on the delivery of our reforms.

The Government is also today publishing a transition document for providers to support them with the transition arrangements to the new qualifications system.

I would be pleased to offer the Committee a detailed briefing following this publication, and I would greatly value your Members' reflections as we work towards implementation. Ensuring that the Committee can shape, test and scrutinise the reforms will be essential as we work to strengthen the post-16 qualifications system for young people in England.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jacqui Smith' with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith

Minister for Skills