

England

Full Review

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Aim and purpose

- What is the stated aim and purpose of this stage of education, e.g. linked to entry to higher education, the world of work; a broad aim of personal and societal enrichment etc.?
- What is the context to the development of the aims and purposes for this stage of education and what vision do they present for the future of this stage of education?
- Are these aims and purposes influenced by an overarching national plan for education or do they reflect the influence of international organisations such as the OECD?

The 2016 Government White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (Department for Education, 2016a) sets out its vision for schools across England, underlining that regardless of their background, ability or needs, all children and young people deserve access to an education which 'allows them to reach their full potential and prepares them to succeed in adult life in modern Britain' (page 5). The role of education as a vehicle for social justice and economic growth is highlighted.

With regard to upper secondary education (also known as post-16 education or the sixth form), *Educational Excellence Everywhere* states that all young people should leave education ready for the world of work. More specifically, academic qualifications (AS level and A levels) aim to prepare

students for undergraduate study and the world of work. Vocational qualifications aim to prepare students for the next stage of education, training and employment and to be recognised by both employers and universities.

Academic and vocational qualifications have undergone a period of reform over the past decade, triggered by concerns related to the standard of qualifications on offer to students in upper secondary education. On the one hand, it was felt that too much time was spent in preparation for examinations for academic qualifications, rather than in focusing on developing a deep knowledge of subjects, and that much time was also invested in preparing for and allowing students to retake examinations, risking a form of grade inflation.

On the other hand, too many low-value vocational qualifications were deemed to exist which did not involve employers in their design and did not ensure a clear path to the world of work. There were also too few apprenticeships available to meet the needs of young people and the demands of the economy. The 2011 *Review of Vocational Education: the Wolf Report* (Wolf, 2011) recommended 'study programmes' be introduced for students aged 16 to 19 with a view to offering depth and breadth in upper secondary education, without limiting students' options for future work or study (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes').

In 2015 (under the Education and Skills Act 2008), the participation age for full- or part-time education or training was

raised to 18. In doing so, the Government's aim was to:

- increase the number of young people continuing with their studies and gaining the skills and qualifications needed for sustainable jobs
- decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- increase the opportunities for young people, helping them to achieve their potential and preparing them for higher education and work.

Academic qualifications in upper secondary education have also recently been made more rigorous, with the intention of ensuring that students have the right skills and knowledge to progress to university study. Vocational qualifications and the options available to all students in upper secondary education – under the study programmes – are still undergoing a series of reforms, in line with the *Post-16 Skills Plan* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016). This seeks to establish an upper secondary framework which '[supports] young people and adults to secure a lifetime of sustained skilled employment *and* meet the needs of [the] growing and rapidly changing economy' (page 7).

National debate continues over raising the overall quality of education, and statements made by the Secretary of State for Education and policy documents published by the Department for Education make intermittent reference to results from international surveys of educational attainment, including, for example, the OECD PISA and IEA PIRLS and TIMSS surveys. *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, for example, states that 'international comparisons show that while the proportion of high-performing pupils in this country compared well to others at the end of primary school, we remain a long way behind the Far East; and are outstripped by the end of secondary' (Department for Education, 2016a; page

98), while the *Post-16 Skills Plan* highlights that '[the UK] performs poorly on intermediate professional and technical skills, and is forecast to fall from 22nd to 28th out of 33 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for intermediate skills by 2020' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016; page 10). In this way, international organisations affect the policy direction and the setting of education policy in England.

Structure of the education system

- How is upper secondary provision for students structured, e.g two-year / three-year / varied approach; around subjects or broad areas of learning; broad/comprehensive or specialised / narrow in focus?
- When does compulsory education end?
- What is the age profile of students in this stage of education?
- How well does the structure of the system reflect the stated aim as outlined above

Upper secondary provision in England comprises the final two years of education, as detailed below:

Year	Age range	School Level
Early childhood education and care	0-4/5	Pre-school provision (childcare, playgroups, nursery provision)
Reception class	4-5	Primary school
Year 1	5-6	Primary school
Year 2	6-7	Primary school
Year 3	7-8	Primary school
Year 4	8-9	Primary school
Year 5	9-10	Primary school
Year 6	10-11	Primary school
Year 7	11-12	Secondary school: lower secondary provision
Year 8	12-13	Secondary school: lower secondary provision
Year 9	13-14	Secondary school: lower secondary provision
Year 10	14-15	Secondary school: lower secondary provision
Year 11	15-16	Secondary school: lower secondary provision
Year 12	16-17	Upper secondary provision in school sixth form, sixth-form college or college of further education
Year 13	17-18	Upper secondary provision in school sixth form, sixth-form college or college of further education

Compulsory full-time education runs from Year 1 through to Year 11 (ages 5-16). Participation in full- or part-time education or training is then compulsory until the age of 18 in the upper secondary phase.

Students who receive their upper secondary education in schools usually do so in the sixth form of a comprehensive school. The great majority of publicly funded secondary

schools in England are comprehensive schools; admitting students regardless of ability. There are a limited number of grammar schools in certain areas of the country only – 163 in 2016. These select pupils by academic ability and are attended by around five per cent of all secondary school pupils.

All full-time students in upper secondary education are expected to follow an individual '16-19 study programme', which includes one or more substantial qualifications - which can be academic or vocational or a combination of the two. Programmes are designed to cater for students of all abilities and are intended to stretch students and link clearly to training, employment or higher education. The policy

on study programmes was introduced in September 2013, following the recommendations of the *Review of Vocational Education: the Wolf Report* (Wolf, 2011). The *Post-16 Skills Plan* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016) outlines changes due to come into effect beginning in 2019, including the introduction of a new streamlined post-16 vocational system through a common framework of 15 new, post-16 technical routes. It states that 'flexible learning will be important to learners of all ages, given the changing labour market [...] there should be appropriate bridging courses to make movement between [academic and vocational] options easily accessible' (page 20).

When the first post-16 technical routes become available from 2019, all will include English, mathematics and digital skills, according to employers' needs. Young people who are judged not ready to start an academic or technical option at the age of 16 will be able to opt for a tailored 'transition year' to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to move forward in their education. See the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes'.

Note: Although most post-16 study programmes are intended to last for up to two years, the funding framework applies to 16- to 19-year-olds.

Available pathways / programmes

- What pathways / programmes are available to students - academic / vocational / professional / flexible?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?
- At what stage are decisions about the student choice of pathway finalised and who has an input into these decisions?
- Where do these pathways lead - entry to higher education; accreditation for professional life; further training?
- What percentage of the overall cohort of students progress through each pathway?
- How many students progress to higher education / further education / workforce / apprenticeships?

Depending on student preference and the qualifications on offer at a particular educational institution, students may participate in upper secondary education in a school sixth form, sixth-form college, further education (FE) college, or other training provider. Generally, sixth-form colleges, FE colleges and training providers offer a wider variety of vocational qualifications than do sixth forms in schools. Students in upper secondary education (aged 16-18) may study full-time; undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship; or study part-time whilst also working or volunteering.

Full-time study programmes in upper secondary education include one or more substantial qualifications, which may be academic or vocational:

- Academic qualifications are AS and A level qualifications taken at the end of one and two years of study respectively. AS and A levels are Level 3 qualifications on the national qualifications framework – the Regulated Qualifications Framework, or RQF, and offer the most common route for young people intending to pursue higher education.
- Vocational (applied) or technical qualifications include:
 - Technical Certificates (Level 2 qualifications on the RQF), achieved after one year of study, and leading either to further study (usually the Technical Level, see below), to an apprenticeship, or into employment.
 - Technical Level qualifications (Level 3 qualifications on the RQF), achieved after two years of study, leading either to an apprenticeship, employment, or to a related course of higher education.
 - Applied General Qualifications (Level 3 qualifications on the RQF), achieved after two years of study, allowing entry to a range of higher education courses, either by qualifying students to meet the entry requirements in their own right or alongside other Level 3 qualifications.

A study programme can be solely academic or vocational. It may also include the study of general academic and vocational qualifications in combination. Some students follow Tech Bacc courses, which aim to offer a high quality technical alternative to A levels and include the study of a Technical Level Qualification alongside a Level 3 qualification in mathematics (usually an AS or A level in mathematics), and an extended project.

Upper secondary students may choose to take an Apprenticeship or Traineeship rather than a full-time study programme as outlined above. 16- to 18/19-year-olds will usually follow an Intermediate Apprenticeship (a Level 2 qualification) or an Advanced Apprenticeship (at Level 3).

Traineeships are intended for students (aged 16-24) who need extra help to access an apprenticeship or employment and are qualified below Level 3. They include the study of approved qualifications in English and mathematics for those students who

need it (see below), and last a maximum of six months.

Since September 2014, any upper secondary student who has not achieved a good pass* in his or her General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications in English and / or mathematics in lower secondary education (at age 16, Level 2 on the RQF) must continue to work towards completing these in the upper secondary phase. If the GCSE qualification is not immediately achievable, the student must complete an approved interim qualification (for example, a Functional Skills qualification which is a Level 1 qualification on the RQF).

Upper secondary students wishing to study part-time towards a qualification (including A levels and / or vocational qualifications) must combine this with a minimum of 20 hours per week of work or volunteering.

Students who, at age 16, are not ready to take Level 2 qualifications, such as GCSEs, are provided with

opportunities to focus on work preparation, or are offered an extended work placement and other non-qualification activities in order to be better placed to enter employment when they leave education. Young people aged 16+ with special educational needs may also participate in a supported internship (see the subheading 'Inclusion' for more information).

Note: a minority of upper secondary providers in England offer other general qualifications for post-16 students which can be used for entry to higher education. These include:

- the post-16 International Baccalaureate qualification which leads to the IB Diploma
- the CIE Cambridge Pre-U, a post-16 qualification which prepares students for university study
- the AQA Baccalaureate, a post-16 qualification which includes three A levels, an extended project and enrichment activities.

A good GCSE pass in English and mathematics was a pass achieved at one of grades A, A, B or C until the 2016/17 academic year. Following changes to GCSE qualifications, it is now a pass achieved at one of Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9.

The academic pathway

Students choosing to follow a solely academic upper secondary study programme usually take a number of AS and A level subject courses, generally three or four, leading to the completion of AS levels at the end of Year 12 (age 17) and A levels at the end of Year 13 (age 18). Beyond meeting the entry requirements for Year 12 and 13, which are set by each individual school, sixth-form college or further education college (which are likely to include good passes at GCSE in the subjects to be studied at AS / A level), students are free to take any combination of subjects on offer by that school or college, ranging from modern foreign languages through to

design and technology and chemistry. On successful completion of their A levels, students generally progress to employment or higher education.

Prior to September 2015, an AS level amounted to 50 per cent of a full A level. However, when revised A level courses began to be introduced in 2015, AS and A levels were 'decoupled', meaning that AS results no longer count towards a full A level; they are now standalone qualifications. Other changes introduced with the 2015 reforms included the removal of modular and coursework assessment, so that all assessment is now taken at the end of the AS or A level course and

is mainly conducted by examination. Other forms of assessment, such as practical assessments are now only used in circumstances where they are necessary to test essential skills. Reformed AS and A level courses are being phased in by subject between September 2015 and September 2017. Depending on their AS / A level subject choices, students taking these qualifications in the interim period may therefore experience assessment arrangements which differ between one subject and another.

The vocational / applied / technical pathway

Schools and colleges can offer students any qualifications which are approved for teaching by the Department for Education and included in the database of approved qualifications (Department for Education, 2017a). However, only three types of vocational qualification are recognised in school and college performance tables, published annually as part of the accountability system. These qualifications are:

- Technical Certificates, which relate to a specific industry or occupation and usually take one year to complete
- Technical Level qualifications ('Tech Levels'), which are available in specific recognised occupations (e.g. hospitality or engineering) and usually take two years to complete

- Applied General Qualifications, which are offered in broad vocational areas such as sport or business and usually take two years to complete.

These qualifications prepare students for further study, skilled employment or courses of higher education.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are work-based training programmes which last one year at minimum and are open to all individuals over the age of 16 who are not in full-time education. They are available at four levels:

- Intermediate (Level 2 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework, RQF)
- Advanced (Level 3)
- Higher (Level 4 or 5)
- Degree (Level 6 or 7).

Students in upper secondary education usually take Intermediate or Advanced Apprenticeships.

Like A levels and applied / technical qualifications, Apprenticeships have been the subject of review following *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) and the subsequent publication of *English Apprenticeships: our 2020 Vision* (HM Government,

2015). As a result, Apprenticeship frameworks are now being based on employer-designed apprenticeship standards, with a view to ensuring that they deliver high quality, recognised qualifications which are relevant to the skill or occupation of the learner and employer, and offer learners appropriate training to achieve a good standard or numeracy and literacy (and ICT where relevant).

As outlined in the *Post-16 Skills Plan* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016), the available post-16 vocational pathways will change beginning in 2019, when 15 new technical routes (T-Levels) will be introduced. These routes will be:

- agriculture, environmental and animal care
- business and administrative
- catering and hospitality

- childcare and education
- construction
- creative and design
- digital
- engineering and manufacturing
- hair and beauty
- health and science
- legal, finance and accounting
- protective services
- sales, marketing and procurement
- social care
- transport and logistics.

Each route will take place either through a college (and will include a work placement), or through an Apprenticeship. All routes will include digital skills, English and mathematics, according to employers' needs, and will be overseen by the newly operational

Institute of Apprenticeships. Employers are currently being involved in setting the standards students will be required to meet for achieving qualifications within each route.

Pupils generally choose their study programme for upper secondary education in Year 11 (aged 15-16) based on where they plan to progress after the end of Year 13 (age 18). Schools are expected to provide students with independent (careers) guidance, which includes information on

the full range of available education and training options, to help them in this decision making. They are also expected to work with local employers and colleges, universities and Apprenticeship providers in providing guidance to pupils, so that they can benefit from direct experience of the world of work to inform their decisions about their study programme for upper secondary education.

When selecting the subjects / courses for

their upper secondary study, students wishing to study at university after completing upper secondary education are advised to take into account the entry requirements for the university courses they are interested in. For example, the Russell Group universities (the group of 24 leading universities across the UK) have outlined so-called '[facilitating subjects](#)' which are those A levels most commonly required for entry to leading universities.

Statistics

Provisional statistics from the Department for Education show the following participation rates for 16- and 17-year-olds at the start of the 2015/16 academic year:

	Percentage of 16-year-olds	Percentage of 17-year-olds	Percentage of 18-year-olds
Full-time education	87.4	77.1	49.7
Part-time education	3.1	3.8	5.3
Work-based learning	3.9	7.3	9.3
Education and work-based learning	94.1	87.8	63.8
Education and training	96.3	91.7	72.4
NEET (not in education, employment or training)	3.1	4.8	11.4

Source: Table A, Department for Education, 2016d.

The number of students aged 16-18 studying different types of Level 3 post-16 qualification in 2016 were:

Total number of Level 3 students	440,455
Students studying A level courses	323,273
Students studying Applied General Qualifications	125,325
Students studying Technical Level qualifications	69,318

Source: adapted from Figure 1, Department for Education, 2017d.

Note: study programmes can contain a mixture of general and vocational qualifications. In 2015/16, there were 509,000 Apprenticeship starts in England.

The following table outlines the percentage of students enrolled in Apprenticeships by level:

Apprenticeship level	Proportion of students enrolled in apprenticeship
Intermediate (Level 2)	58%
Advanced (Level 3)	38%
Higher (Levels 4-7)	5%

Source: House of Commons Library, 2016.

Note: Apprenticeships are aimed at individuals over the age of 16. Although the most relevant Apprenticeship levels for students aged 16-18 are Intermediate and Advanced, the percentages above include not only students coming straight from lower secondary education, but also those who may have completed another upper secondary qualification first, or come from employment or elsewhere.

The table below shows the percentage of students in sustained education or employment destinations in 2014/15 after completing secondary education in school or college:

	Schools	Colleges
All sustained destinations	90%	86%
Sustained education destination	72%	60%
Sustained employment destination	19%	26%
Non-sustained destinations	7%	10%
Activity not captured	3%	4%

Source: Figure 25, Department for Education, 2017c.

Note: sustained destinations include school sixth forms, further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, universities, employment, and Apprenticeships.

Of those students who were in sustained education in 2014/15, on completing upper secondary education, 59 per cent of students from schools and 38 per cent of students from further education colleges progressed to higher education (Figure 26, Department for Education, 2017c).

Specified curriculum within pathways

- How is the curriculum within these pathways organised? Is it broad / comprehensive / specialised / narrow?
- Are there core subjects that are central to the curriculum?
- What degree of choice is afforded to students within each pathway?
- Is the curriculum presented in subject specifications / syllabi / learning outcomes?
- Is there differentiation of learning outcomes in terms of stage and / or ability?
- What degree of autonomy do teachers / schools have in shaping and implementing the curriculum?
- What is the place of wellbeing / social, personal and health education (SPHE) / citizenship education within the curriculum?
- What competences / key skills are promoted in the curriculum?
- To what extent are skills and competences central to the curriculum structure? How do they feature i.e. are they embedded in learning outcomes?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

The curriculum in upper secondary education is determined by a student's chosen study programme. There are no core subjects as such.

As outlined in 16 to 19 Study Programmes (Department for Education, 2016b), all study programmes must:

- include one or more academic, applied or vocational qualifications which stretch the student and are clearly linked to training, employment or higher education, or include work preparation and an extended work placement for those students who are not ready for study at Level 2 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), or who are on a Traineeship
- require students who do not have a good pass in GCSE mathematics and English to work towards the achievement of these qualifications (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes')
- allow for meaningful work experience related to the vocational area and / or other non-qualification activity which develops students' personal skills and / or prepares them for employment, training or further and higher education.

The importance of sound literacy and numeracy skills is underlined in upper secondary education, as exemplified by the requirement for all students to continue to work towards achieving a good pass in GCSE mathematics and English, should this not have been achieved in lower secondary education. In addition, the *Post-16 Skills Plan* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016) mentions the Government's intention to explore the possibility of more or all students

continuing to study mathematics until the age of 18 in the long term. Although personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is not a statutory subject at any stage of the education system in England, the Government regards it as a necessary part of all pupils' education and recommends that schools should make provision for PSHE by drawing on good practice. In 2015, following the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, a legal duty was placed on

schools to 'promote British values and challenge extremist ideology'. In addition, staff, leaders and governors in further education institutions are also required to promote British values in their management, teaching and behaviour and to challenge extremist ideas which arise. Beginning in 2017, all secondary schools are also being offered mental health training as the Government seeks to improve awareness of mental health problems in schools and the support available to pupils.

Academic qualifications

Students following a purely academic upper secondary study programme usually choose a number of A level subjects (generally three or four) which they study to complete the AS level qualification at the end of Year 12 and for A levels at the end of Year 13. AS and A level qualifications are Level 3 qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The guided learning hours (GLH) (i.e. the time when staff are present, including classes / lectures, tutorials and supervised study) for a full A level is 360 hours.

Four awarding organisations are recognised to offer newly reformed AS and A level qualifications in England: AQA, Pearson, OCR, and Eduqas. They design their AS and A level qualifications in line with:

- regulatory requirements set by Ofqual (2016b), the independent regulator of qualifications and examinations in England
- AS and A level subject-specific assessment objectives, subject-specific conditions and subject-level guidance, which are also set by Ofqual (2017b and 2016c). Assessment objectives outline the broad skills and knowledge which students should be able to demonstrate on completing the qualification (and the weighting to be given to specific skills / knowledge), while subject-specific conditions outline the subject content, including the aims and objectives of the subject and required prior knowledge.

AS and A level regulatory requirements, subject-specific conditions and assessment objectives for each subject on offer at AS and A level are available from Ofqual (Ofqual, 2017a).

The assessment objectives for Ancient Languages are provided as an example below:

Objective	Requirements	Weighting given to objective in AS level	Weighting given to objective in A level
A01	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the language	50%	50%
A02	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the literature	25 to 30%	20 to 25%
A03	Critically analyse, evaluate and respond to literature	20 to 25%	25 to 30%

Each individual awarding organisation publishes its own specifications for the subjects in which it has designed AS and A level qualifications in line with Ofqual's requirements. AS and A levels in any given subject may therefore have different subject specifications, depending on the awarding organisation. Individual schools and colleges decide on the qualification subjects and subject specifications they will offer to their pupils.

Although subject specifications from individual awarding organisations may vary slightly, all will include:

- the objectives of the qualification

- information on any other qualification(s) a student must have completed before taking the qualification
- any other prior knowledge or skills required
- any other requirements a student must have satisfied before assessment
- the knowledge and understanding that will be assessed
- the method of assessment
- the criteria against which a student's level of attainment will be measured, including assessment criteria. The number of marks awarded for a student's performance in relation

to the assessment criteria is also made clear.

Each subject and subject specification contains a number of units. There may be some degree of overlap between the unit specifications for subjects offered by different awarding organisations. For example, one unit included in AS/A level history offered by AQA entitled 'Spain and the Age of Discovery, 1469 to 1598' contains similar content to the unit offered by Edexcel entitled 'The Golden Age of Spain, 1474 to 1598'. However, the AQA unit entitled 'The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643 to 1715' does not contain similar content to any Edexcel unit options for history AS/A level.

The newly designed AS and A level qualifications have been introduced in stages.

The final 'batch' of reformed subjects will be introduced for teaching in September 2017 (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes').

Vocational qualifications

A range of awarding organisations are recognised to award Technical Certificates, Technical Level qualifications and Applied General Qualifications. The specifications for these qualifications must include:

- a declared purpose, including what the qualification covers and what further study and / or employment the qualification is designed to lead to
- a size in guided learning hours (GLH)
- details of course / qualification content
- appropriate assessment
- a 'distinction, merit, pass or fail' grading structure (or a more detailed grading scale), including details on the differences between each grade.

Technical Certificates (which are Level 2 qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework, RQF) enable students to develop

knowledge and skills relating to a specific industry or occupation. They are designed to be taken after one year of post-16 study and must include at least 150 guided learning hours (GLH). Students usually progress to an Apprenticeship, employment or a Technical Level qualification on successful completion of a Technical Certificate. Some Technical Certificates provide students with a 'licence to practice'.

Technical Level qualifications ('Tech Levels') (which are Level 3 qualifications on the RQF) are aimed at students wishing to study a specific recognised occupation, such as engineering, hospitality or computing. They are designed to be taken after two years of post-16 study and must comprise at least 300 guided learning hours (GLH). Students learn specialist knowledge and skills to enable

them to progress to an Apprenticeship, to skilled employment, or to take a technical degree. Some Technical Level qualifications provide learners with a 'licence to practice'. To be recognised in the school and college performance tables (the accountability system for schools and colleges), Technical Level qualifications must have support from professional bodies or from five employers registered with Companies House.

Applied General Qualifications (Level 3 qualifications) are intended for upper secondary students wishing to learn about a broad vocational area, such as business, science or sport. They are designed to be taken after two years of post-16 study and must include at least 150 guided learning hours (GLH), enabling them to be studied alongside another post-16 qualification, such as AS and A levels.

Successful completion of Applied General Qualifications, either in their own right or in combination with other Level 3 qualifications, allows entry to a range of higher education courses / institutions. To be recognised in school or college performance tables, Applied General Qualifications must have the support of three universities.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are work-based training programmes designed by employers, awarding organisations and training providers. They are available in a range of occupations, from golf green keeping through to carpentry and broadcasting assistance. They are open to all individuals over the age of 16 who are not in full-time education and last for a year at minimum. All Apprenticeships also offer learners appropriate

training to achieve a good standard of numeracy and literacy.

Intermediate and Advanced level Apprenticeships (Levels 2 and 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework, RQF, respectively), which are the Apprenticeships taken by learners aged 16-18 (although they are also available to learners above this age), must include at least 280 guided learning

hours (GLH) each year.

The vocational qualifications currently available to upper secondary learners will be reviewed in light of the 15 new technical routes to be introduced from 2019 onwards (see the subheadings 'Structure of the education system' and 'Available pathways / programmes' for more information).

Inclusion

- How is inclusion addressed?
- How are the learning needs of all students catered for, including students who have completed a reduced curriculum at lower secondary school, students with challenging behaviour patterns who find it difficult to function in larger classes, international learners for whom the language of instruction is not their first language, students with special educational needs?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

Schools and colleges providing upper secondary education are expected to respond to the individual needs of all learners and to set high expectations for all students to enable them to achieve their potential.

Schools and colleges are also expected to pay particular attention to outcomes for specific groups, including disabled learners and learners with special educational needs (SEN); the highest and lowest attaining learners; learners for whom English is an additional language (EAL); learners from minority ethnic groups; learners attending alternative provision (see below); disadvantaged learners; and looked after children (children in the care of the local authority).

Local authorities also have a number of duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education and training. This includes:

- securing sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are between the ages of 16 and 19 (or between the ages of 16 and 25 if they have an Education and Health Care (EHC) plan (see below))
- providing support to encourage, enable or assist young people aged 13-19 (and those between 20 and 25 with special educational needs, SEN) to participate in education or training. This can include ensuring alternative forms of provision for learners who, for example, have been excluded from school or college or are ill for prolonged periods of time. Students who are excluded from school, sick, or unable to attend a mainstream school for any other reason (including teenage mothers) attend pupil referral units (PRUs).

In upper secondary education, students who are not ready for qualifications at Level 2 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), such as GCSE qualifications usually taken at around age 16, or Technical Certificates, may be provided with opportunities to focus on work preparation, undertake an extended work placement, or undertake other non-qualification activities so that they are better placed to enter employment when they leave education. Under the *Post-16 Skills Plan* (Department for Business, Innovation

and Skills and Department for Education, 2016), plans are in place to introduce a tailored 'transition year' for young people aged 16 who are not ready for academic or vocational study in upper secondary education. The intention is to allow such students to use this year to develop the knowledge and skills needed to continue with their education and training. (See the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' for more information.)

For students with identified special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, there is a general presumption of inclusion in mainstream education, and access arrangements allow such students, along with students with temporary injuries, to participate in the external qualifications available in upper secondary education. These arrangements allow students to demonstrate their abilities without changing the demands of the assessment, and may include giving students supervised rest breaks; extra time when taking an examination; a scribe or word processor; braille transcripts of examination papers; sign language interpreters; practical assistants; or bilingual translation dictionaries

for students whose first language is not English.

Students are defined as having SEN or disabilities if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Students with complex needs have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, which details the special educational, health and social care provision that will be made to support the young person. EHC plans are being introduced to replace 'statements of special educational needs (SEN)' for children from 0 to 16 and Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs) for 16- to 25-year-olds.

Schools and colleges must designate a named person / member of staff – usually known as a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in schools - to oversee SEN provision at strategic and operational levels. Students with identified SEN and / or disabilities can be provided with a range of support, including:

- a special learning programme
- personal care (or access to it)

- assistive technology
- specialist tuition
- note takers
- interpreters
- one-to-one and small group learning support
- independent living training
- accessible information such as symbol-based materials
- access to therapies such as speech and language therapy.

As outlined in *16 to 19 Study Programmes* (Department for Education, 2016b), the study programme principles apply to SEN students. This includes the principle that students should follow a programme which stretches them, supports them to progress into employment or further study, and prepares them for adulthood. Study programmes for SEN students may focus on achieving qualifications or on participating in high quality work experience and other non-qualification activities. They must always include English and mathematics at an appropriate level.

Since 2013, young people aged between 16-24 with an EHC plan have also been able to participate in Traineeships (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' above) or in a supported internship. Internships aim to help students to move into paid employment. They are structured study programmes which are based primarily with an employer. They generally last for a year and include two unpaid work placements which last six months each, alongside study towards qualifications (if suitable) and English

and mathematics to an appropriate level. Students with special educational needs preparing to move to upper secondary education are supported through a number of school-based interventions, which are generally undertaken from Year 9 of lower secondary education (aged 13) onwards. Such interventions may include preparation for adulthood in planned meetings with pupils and parents; ensuring that careers guidance and information provides a wide range of options for the pupil in question;

and helping pupils and parents to understand how the support they receive might change as the pupil progresses to a different setting, and the kinds of support they may require to achieve their future ambitions.

No specific support measures are in place for EAL students in upper secondary education. However, in practice, these students are generally integrated into mainstream education with additional language support if needed.

Assessment and reporting

- How is the curriculum assessed?
- What variety of assessment modes and methods are in evidence? For example, external assessment / internal assessment / online assessment / portfolios / formative / summative / synoptic etc.?
- How does the system recognise varied learning / skills / competences?
- How does assessment link to certification / qualifications / a qualifications framework / selection for further and higher education?
- How is vocational / technical education assessed and accredited?
- How is achievement reported? What is reported?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

Assessment in upper secondary education is linked to achievement in the academic or vocational qualifications undertaken by a student in their chosen study programme. In addition, any student in upper secondary education who has not achieved a good GCSE pass in English and / or mathematics in lower secondary education must continue to work towards completing these, or complete an approved interim qualification if the GCSE qualification is not immediately achievable (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' for more information).

Academic qualifications

Students in upper secondary education work towards a number of AS and A level qualifications, which are available in a wide range of subjects. If they are studying solely academic qualifications as part of their study programme, they will usually take four AS levels, completed in one year in Year 12 (aged 17), and three

A levels (completed at the end of Year 13, age 18).

For 'unreformed' AS and A level subjects, which will have been phased out of the system by 2018/2019, assessment can be through a combination of coursework, examinations and practical work / examinations where applicable. Assessment

can also occur throughout the course (modular assessment) rather than purely at the end of the course (linear assessment). In addition, AS level results contribute to the result achieved for the corresponding full A level.

For reformed AS and A levels, which have been introduced in phases by

subject since September 2015 (the final reformed AS and A level specifications will be introduced for formal teaching in September 2017), assessment is mainly in the form of written examinations taken at the end of the course (Year 12 for AS levels and Year 13 for A levels). Other types of assessment are used only where they are needed to test specific skills; for example, in science, students are assessed through practical work as well as written examinations.

As reformed AS and A levels are being phased in, depending on their individual AS / A level subject choices, students taking their examinations during the implementation period may experience assessment arrangements which differ between one subject / qualification and another.

All AS and A level subject qualifications are made up of a number of units, each of which is assessed through an examination or practical activities (where necessary). Each unit may carry a different weight when final, overall subject marks are calculated. Written examinations are set and marked externally – by awarding organisations.

For unreformed AS and A level subjects, a student's teacher marks his / her coursework. For both unreformed and reformed AS and A levels, a student's teacher marks his / her practical assessments; samples of marked practical assessments are submitted to the awarding organisation to ensure that the marking is accurate and consistent.

Once students have taken their exams (usually in May / June of the academic year), these are marked by the team of trained examiners employed by each external awarding organisation, in line with the assessment criteria outlined in each subject specification. To ensure that examiners' marking meets the required standard, samples of examinations they have marked are reviewed by colleagues. Students are assigned 'raw marks' for each unit in which they are assessed. The number of raw marks needed to achieve a certain AS / A level grade may change from year to year, depending on the difficulty of the examination questions for that particular year. Raw marks are converted to grades and, depending on their performance, students achieve grades between A* and E (where

A* is the highest grade) for each subject. The grade U represents 'unclassified' (failed).

Awarding organisations use grade boundaries to convert raw scores / marks to AS and A level grades. These grade boundaries are set once all an awarding organisation's examinations in a particular subject unit have been marked, and they outline how many marks are needed to achieve a particular grade. Grade boundaries are set taking into consideration students' work; reports from senior examination officials on how the unit examinations worked in practice; examples of typical performance expected at certain grades; statistics predicting how well students are expected to do; and previous examination papers and their grade boundaries. Grade boundaries for each unit are combined to issue an overall subject grade.

Student results are sent to students and schools and colleges in August. Certificates are sent to schools about eight weeks after this, to allow for any queries about grades to be resolved. Certificates include the following information:

- the date of the examination series
- the awarding organisation
- the school or college where the examination was taken
- student details
- the qualification name and number
- the grade awarded.

For students holding provisional offers of places from universities, their results are sent directly to the universities in question by the awarding organisation in August.

Higher education institutions set their own entrance requirements

for each course they offer, but for undergraduate courses the minimum entry requirement is generally two or three A level passes – usually at a required grade - in addition to a certain number of passes at GCSE (the examinations usually taken at the end of Year 11, age 16). Students generally begin submitting applications to university in the winter term of their final year in upper secondary education (Year 13, age 17-18). They do so via UCAS, the University and College Admissions Service, submitting information for a maximum of five higher education courses / universities they are interested in being considered for; their GCSE results; any AS results they may have; a personal statement; school

references; and predicted A level grades from their teachers. For particularly competitive courses, students may be required to take additional entrance tests or be invited to an interview.

Although A levels remain the most common method of entry qualification for higher education, other qualifications are also acceptable for entry to university, such as Technical Level qualifications.

As well as being used for admission to higher education, AS and A level qualifications also provide a basis for school and college accountability and a benchmark of academic ability for employers.

Vocational qualifications

Assessment schemes for the vocational qualifications on offer in upper secondary education vary, depending on the awarding organisation, although they must comply with Ofqual's *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2016b), and all awarding organisations must produce a written document which sets out clear and unambiguous

criteria against which a learner's attainment will be evaluated.

For the vocational (technical) qualifications which are available to students in upper secondary education, and which are included in the school and college performance (accountability) tables, the Department for

Education (2016f) outlines the necessary assessment requirements. These include that:

a certain proportion of the qualification must be externally assessed – that is, for a certain proportion of the qualification, the awarding organisation must set question papers and assignments, and students must take these assessments under

specified conditions, following which the assessments are marked by the awarding organisation. For the Technical Certificate, this applies to 25 per cent of the marks for the course; for the Technical Level qualification, it is 30 per cent; and for the Applied General Qualification it is 40 per cent. (Note: the internal assessment component is planned and overseen by the school, college or employer, although awarding organisations may suggest appropriate methods for assessment.

In addition, all decisions relating to internal assessment made by a school, college or employer are quality assured by the awarding organisation.) qualifications must include synoptic assessment, which requires students to demonstrate that they can identify and use an appropriate selection of skills, techniques, theories, concepts and knowledge from across the whole vocational area. qualifications must have a 'distinction, merit, pass, fail' grading structure, or a more

detailed grading scale, and the difference between each grade and how a student achieves each grade must be detailed. assessment for Technical Certificates and Technical Level qualifications must include assessment of some meaningful activity for students involving employers, e.g. structured work experience which develops skills and knowledge relevant to the qualification, or units delivered or co-delivered by industry practitioners.

Apprenticeships

The document *Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England* (Department for Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2017) outlines the statutory requirements which all apprenticeships should meet. Training providers and employers are expected to ensure that apprenticeships:

- include a competencies qualification and a technical knowledge qualification (at Level 2 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) for Intermediate Apprenticeships and at Level 3 of the RQF for Advanced Apprenticeships). The competencies qualification demonstrates competence in performing the occupation, skill or trade the student is learning; the technical knowledge qualification demonstrates achievement of the technical skills, and understanding and knowledge of theoretical concepts and of the industry and its market
- include opportunities for apprentices to demonstrate skills in independent enquiry; creative thinking; reflective learning; team working; self-management; and effective participation.

Once vocational qualifications have been completed and marked, certificates are sent to students. They include the date of the assessment; the awarding organisation; student details; the qualification name and number; and the grade awarded (distinction, merit, pass or fail).

There are no formal assessment requirements for Traineeships (unless students are continuing to work towards a qualification in English or mathematics).

Flexibility and transfer options

- What flexibility is inherent in the system for movement between or within pathways?
- What are the student transfer options?
- Can students combine study across schools / institutions?
- Can credits / certification be transferred?

Study programmes in upper secondary education are designed to provide students with an individualised learning programme that supports their development in line with their future career plans. A certain amount of flexibility is inherent in the study programme structure, e.g.:

- students can combine study for a mixture of academic and vocational qualifications within the same programme
- students who are not ready for qualifications at Level 2 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) are provided with opportunities to focus on work preparation, an extended work placement and /or other non-qualification activities so that they are better placed to enter employment when they leave education
- students undertaking an Apprenticeship spend part of their time working for an employer and part of their time completing a qualification which is supervised by a training provider
- students completing Technical Certificate and Technical Level courses participate in school- or college-based study towards a qualification, combined with some meaningful activity involving employers.

In addition, and as outlined in the Post-16 Skills Plan (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2016), when changes to the available technical / vocational routes begin to be introduced from 2019, the Government intends also to:

- introduce 'bridging courses' to allow students to move more easily between academic and technical options
- introduce a 'transition year' to allow 16-year-olds who are not yet ready for academic or vocational study in upper secondary education to develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to continue with their education and training.

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

A level		Academic qualification on offer to students in upper secondary education, normally taken after two years of study, aged 18. Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
Applied General Qualification		Vocational qualification in upper secondary education, normally taken after two years of study (aged 18). Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
Apprenticeship		Work-based training programme which lasts at least one year and is open to all individuals over the age of 16 who are not in full-time education. Four levels exist: Intermediate (Level 2 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework, RQF); Advanced (Level 3 on the RQF); Higher (Level 4 or 5); Degree (Level 6 or 7). Students aged 16+ normally take Intermediate or Advanced Apprenticeships.
AS level		Academic qualification on offer to students in upper secondary education, normally taken after one year of study (aged 17); Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
AQA Baccalaureate		Upper secondary qualification which includes three A levels, an extended project, and enrichment activities.
Awarding organisation		Organisation which is recognised by Ofqual to develop qualifications for learners.
CIE Cambridge Pre-U		Upper secondary qualification.
CIF	Common Inspection Framework	Principles which apply to the inspection of educational institutions carried out by Ofsted.
DfE	Department for Education	Government department which is responsible for children's services and education, including higher and further education policy.
EAL	English as an additional language	Used to describe learners whose mother tongue is not English.
EHC plan	Education Health and Care plan	Plan provided for children and young people under the age of 25 with complex needs. It details the special educational, health and social care provision that will be put in place to support the child or young person. EHC plans are replacing statements of special educational needs (SEN statements) for children aged 0 to 16, and Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs) for 16- to 25-year-olds.
Facilitating subjects		A level subjects most commonly required for entry to leading universities.

Functional skills qualification		Qualifications which give learners practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT). Usually Level 1 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
FE college	Further education college	Educational institution which provides a wide range of learning opportunities for young people and adults. Offers academic and vocational qualifications to students in upper secondary education (aged 16-18).
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education	Academic qualifications taken at the end of Year 11 of lower secondary education (age 16). Successful completion is a stepping stone to post-16 education, training and employment.
GLH	Guided learning hours	The size of a qualification, expressed in the number of hours for which staff are present (including classes, lectures, tutorials and supervised study).
Grade boundary		Minimum marks needed to achieve a certain grade within a unit of assessment.
Grammar school		A secondary school which selects pupils on academic ability.
IB Diploma	International Baccalaureate Diploma	Qualification for post-16 students which can be used for entry to higher education.
ICT	Information and communications technology	
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	
Key skills qualification		Qualifications which give learners practical skills in certain subjects; now largely replaced by functional skills qualifications.
LA	Local authority	Local government body.
NEET		Young person not in education, employment or training.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examination Regulation	
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills	

PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study	Provides internationally comparative data on how well children read by assessing students' reading achievement.
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment	International survey which tests the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students.
Post-16 education		Upper secondary education, ages 16-18, Years 12 and 13.
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit	Alternative form of educational provision for learners who have been excluded from school or college, are ill for prolonged periods of time, or are unable to attend a mainstream school for any other reason.
PSHE	Personal, social, health and economic education	
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework	National qualifications framework describing all regulated qualifications in England. Qualifications are grouped according to their level of difficulty, running from Entry Level to Level 8 (doctorate). High-grade ('good pass') GCSEs (grades A*-C, grades 4/5-9 from 2016/17 onwards) are Level 2 qualifications; upper secondary AS and A levels are Level 3 qualifications on the RQF.
Russell Group		Group of 24 leading universities across the UK.
Secretary of State for Education		Cabinet minister responsible for the work of the Department for Education.
(School) sixth form		Upper secondary provision (Years 12 and 13, ages 16-18) within a school which also caters for students who are in lower secondary education (aged 11-16).
Sixth-form college		Educational institution offering academic and vocational qualifications for students in upper secondary education (aged 16-18).
SEN	Special educational needs	Students are defined as having SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.
SENCO	Special educational needs coordinator	A designated member of staff in a school who oversees special educational needs (SEN) provision at strategic and operational levels.
Study programme		The programme of academic and / or vocational qualifications undertaken by a student in full-time upper secondary education (aged 16-18).

Tech Bacc	Technical baccalaureate	Performance measure offering students in upper secondary education a high quality technical alternative to A levels. A Tech Bacc includes the study of a Technical Level qualification alongside a Level 3 qualification in mathematics (usually an AS or A level in mathematics) and an extended project.
Technical Certificate		Vocational qualification in upper secondary education, normally taken after one year of study; a Level 2 qualification on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
Technical Level qualification	Tech Levels	Vocational qualification in upper secondary education, normally taken after two years of study. A Level 3 qualification on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study	International assessment which monitors trends in mathematics and science achievement every four years, in the fourth and eighth grades.
T-Levels		15 new upper secondary technical routes which will be introduced from 2019.
Traineeship		Course undertaken by young people between the ages of 16 and 24 which prepares them for work or an Apprenticeship. Traineeships may last up to six months.
UCAS	Universities and College Admissions Service	
White Paper		Government paper detailing future policy proposals.