Questions matter

Level 3 and Level 2 Vocational Qualification Reforms

Qualification reforms and defunding guide

August 2026

Contents

3 Overview

2 Qualification overviews

7 Post-16 pathways

8 Qualification defunding

9 Defunding timeline

10 What should Ido next?

13 Pathways

Overview

Announced following the release of the **post-16 education and skills white paper** and the **Curriculum and Assessment Review**, the Department for Education say that the 16 to 19 pathway reforms are based on three key principles:

Ensuring that students progress to positive outcomes

Qualifications are high quality and adapt to future skills needs

Pathways provide clear choices

The aim is to offer a clear choice of high-quality pathways to all students entering post-16 education. This impacts pathways from level 2 to 3, introducing viable vocational routes and defunding existing qualifications when an equivalent V Level is introduced. Centres who want to continue to offer the same subject choices will need to move to new qualifications.

Level 3
V Levels

GLH

360

DURATION

Part of a 2-year mixed study programme

GRADING

A*-E (plus N & U grades)
Overall grade based on compensatory assessment and numerical marking.

CONTENT

DfE-set learning outcomes
Core knowledge and understanding, and work-related purposes
Taken in conjunction with other V or A-Levels

ASSESSMENT WINDOWS

40% timetabled assessment (e.g. exams) to be taken in May/June
60% non-timetabled assessments (e.g. tests, demonstrations or projects), with one submission window a year

2027/28

Digital Systems & Data
Education
Accounting & Finance

2028/29

Applied Research & Technology
Construction Design
Engineering Design
Engineering & Manufacturing
Health
Healthcare & Clinical Technologies
Legal Services
Leisure, Exercise & Sports
Management, Procurement & Supply Chains
Marketing & Retail
Social Care

2029/30

Agriculture & Land Management
Animal Care & Management
Protective Services

2030/31

Art & Performing Arts
Creative Media & Design
Travel & Tourism

Subject to consultation

Level 2
Foundation Certificate

GLH

240-300

DURATION

1-year programme

GRADING

Pass/Merit/Distinction
Overall grade based on compensatory assessment

CONTENT

DfE-set learning outcomes
Part of a 'Further Study' pathway including enrichment, employability and pastoral (EEP) support, English & Maths resists where applicable

ASSESSMENT WINDOWS

40% timetabled assessments with two assessment windows within the year
60% non-timetabled assessments marked by centres with one external moderation window

2027/28

Digital Systems & Data
Education

2028/29

Business, Administration & Law
Construction & the Built Environment
Engineering & Manufacturing
Health & Care Services
Science
Sport, Fitness & Exercise Science

2029/30

Agriculture, Land Management & Animal Care
Hair, Beauty & Aesthetics
Hospitality & Catering
Protective Services

2030/31

Creative Media & Design
Performing Arts
Travel & Tourism

Subject to consultation

Level 2
Occupational Certificate

GLH

540-720

DURATION

Likely 2-year programme

GRADING

Pass/Merit/Distinction
Overall grade based on compensatory assessment

CONTENT

DfE-set learning outcomes
Part of an 'Occupational' pathway including employability skills, resilience, confidence, enrichment and English & Maths resists where applicable

ASSESSMENT WINDOWS

30% timetabled assessments with one or two assessment windows a year
70% non-timetabled assessments spread over two years, marked by centres with one external moderation window per year

2027/28

Catering & Hospitality
Early Years Practitioner

2028/29

Business & Finance Administration
Health & Care Services
Construction (On-site)
Construction (Finishing trades)
Engineering & Manufacturing
Healthcare & Science
Sports & Leisure

2029/30

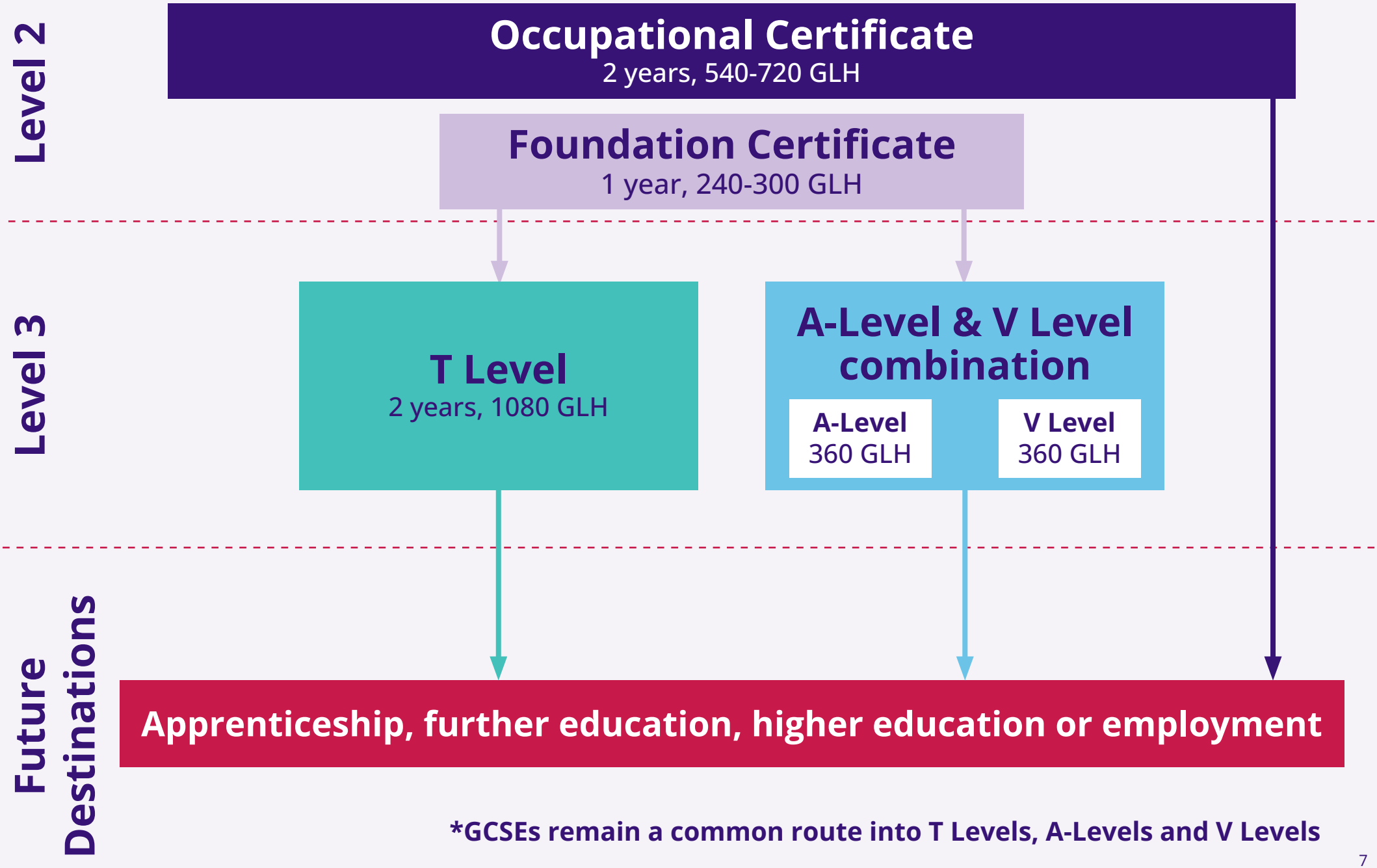
Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care
Hair & Beauty
Horticulture & Floristry

2030/31

Creative & Design

Subject to consultation

Post-16 pathways



*GCSEs remain a common route into T Levels, A-Levels and V Levels

Qualification defunding

Funding for all level 2 and 3 qualifications will continue for 2026/2027. Removal of qualifications approved for public funding, or defunding, will start in 2027/2028 and complete by 2030/2031.

How defunding works

There are two types of defunding:

1

Funding for large Level 3 qualifications with 1,080 Guided Learning Hours which overlap with T levels will be removed from 2027/28, except Health and Social Care which will be removed from 2028/2029.

2

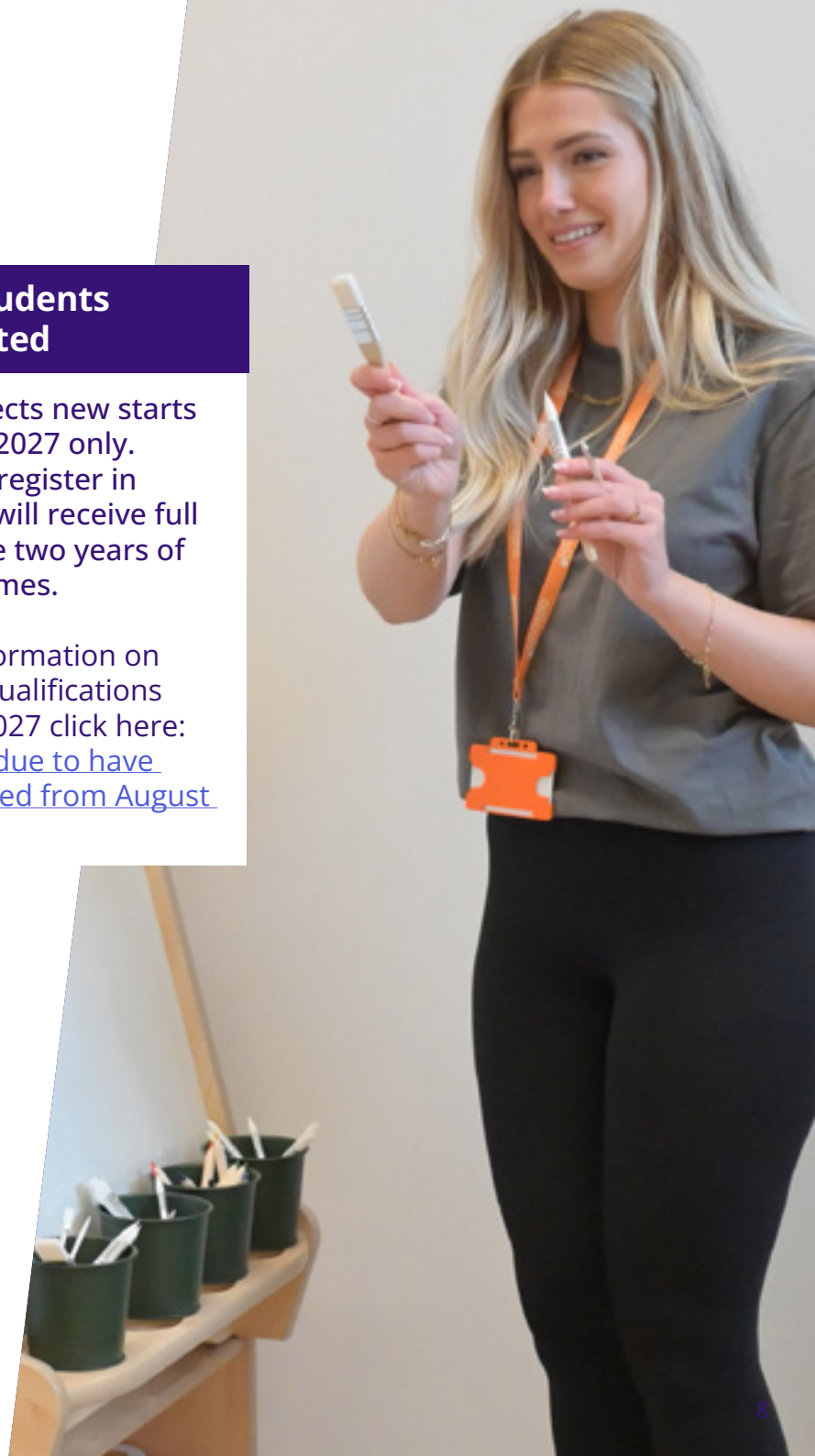
Funding for smaller Level 2 and Level 3 vocational qualifications (under 1,080 GLH) in subject areas that duplicate new V Levels, Foundational Certificates or Occupational Certificates will be removed as the new qualifications are introduced. Students will not be able to choose to start legacy qualifications once a new qualification is available in that subject. One exception is Catering and Hospitality which will not have funding removed before 2029/2030, even though Occupational Certificates will be introduced in 2027/28. A-Levels with a subject in the same area will not have funding removed when the V Level is introduced.

There is further information available on the DfE's implementation plan available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-pathways-implementation-plan/post-16-pathways-implementation-plan#removal-of-qualifications-approved-for-public-funding

Existing students are protected

Defunding affects new starts from Autumn 2027 only. Students who register in Autumn 2026 will receive full funding for the two years of their programmes.

For further information on defunding of qualifications from August 2027 click here: Qualifications due to have funding removed from August 2027 - GOV.UK



Defunding timeline

Aug 2027

The first wave of qualifications are impacted.

All large qualifications which duplicate T Levels, **except Health and Social Care**.

Small L3 qualifications in Digital, and Accounting and Finance subject areas.

Small L2 and L3 qualifications in Child Development and Wellbeing, Teaching and Lecturing, and Direct Learning Support subject areas.

Aug 2028

The second wave of qualifications are impacted.

Large Health and Social Care qualifications.

Small L2 and L3 qualifications in Applied Research & Tech, Business & Administration, Care Services, Construction & the Built Environment, Engineering & Manufacturing, Health & Science, Legal Services, Sports & Leisure, Management & Procurement, Marketing & Retail.

Aug 2029

The third wave of qualifications are impacted.

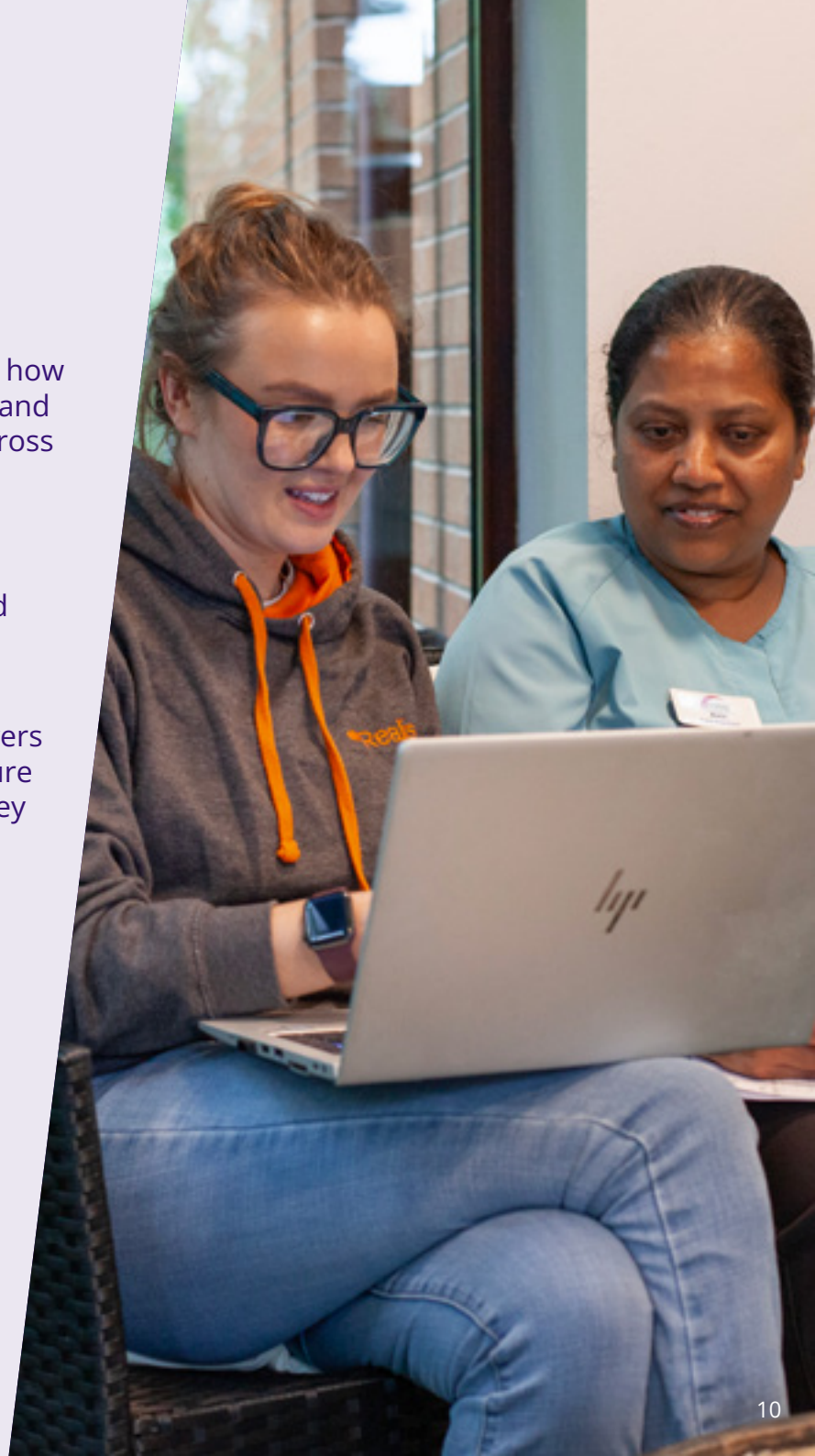
Small L2 and L3 qualifications in Agriculture & Land Management, Animal Care & Management, Protective Services.

Small L2 qualifications in Hair & Beauty, Horticulture & Floristry.

Aug 2030

Final defunding completes for legacy L2 and L3 qualifications. Some small, specialist qualifications may continue.

What should I do next?

If your setting currently delivers, or is considering delivering vocational qualifications, here are some prompts for you to reflect on to prepare for upcoming changes.

- Given the subjects that we offer, when do we need to move to the new qualification for each subject, 2027, 2028, or later?
- For each affected qualification, when is the last point we can enrol a new cohort with full funding through to completion?
- For settings currently offering catering and hospitality qualifications: given existing qualifications will not be immediately defunded, when will we choose to offer the new qualification?
- Which Awarding Organisation will we choose to work with for new qualifications and what is important to us when making this decision?
- What programme design will need to take place and how can we build these to work most effectively alongside other programmes?
  - For V Levels, which other V Levels or A-Levels could this be taken alongside?
  - For Level 2 Certificates, which enrichment, employability and pastoral (EEP). support might be appropriate as part of the wider pathway, and how will assessment structures, resits and progression points be planned across the course?
- Which staff teach the affected qualifications, and what retraining or curriculum redesign will they need before first teach of the new route?
- How will we explain the changes to current students, applicants, employers and parents? And how will we reassure students already on a course that they will keep their funding through to completion?
- How will we support students to choose the new qualifications that are most suitable for them?
- How will we need to update career guidance to ensure students are receiving up to date information about the pathways available to them?