Awarding Body Technical Guide

A technical guide for awarding bodies on IfATE's public consultation on the approval of level 3 technical qualifications

Institute for apprenticeships and technical education (IfATE)

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1. Introduction to the awarding body technical guide

The awarding body technical guide provides additional detail for awarding bodies seeking to interact with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) technical consultation. This is to ensure awarding bodies feel fully informed of the technical detail relating to the proposals set out in IfATE's public consultation on the approval of level 3 technical qualifications. The guide covers the following sections:

Level 3 technical qualification core aims and purposes
This section presents tables containing the intended core aims and purpose statements for each of the categories IfATE will specify at level 3.

Criteria in context of tests
This section presents the high-level criteria contained within the main technical consultation in the context of the individual tests that IfATE applies. This section should be read in line with Section 8 of the consultation in order to provide audiences more information as to the application of our tests.

The approval process for level 3 qualifications
This section provides an overview of the different steps in the proposed approval process for technical qualifications. This process will ensure that all qualifications offered at level 3 allow students to undertake and complete high-quality qualifications that are fit for purpose and demonstrate clear routes into employment.

2. Level 3 technical qualification core aims and purposes

Qualification categories are presented in the following order:

- Level 3 – Occupational entry – 16-19 and adults
- Level 3 – Occupational entry – adult only
- Level 3 – Additional specialist
- Level 3 – Cross-cutting functional competence
- Level 3 – Occupational progression
- Level 3 – Employer-proposed

Purpose statements in this section will fall into one of the following four purpose categories:

I. **Technical expertise:** The expertise a student will develop through achievement of the qualification

II. **Qualification information:** What the achievement of the qualification will signal, primarily relating to signals of competence to employers

III. **Student engagement:** What role the qualifications will play in engaging students as part of their course of study

IV. **Qualification Size:** The expected size of the qualification, as it relates to an overall course of study

Level 3 – Occupational entry – 16-19 and adults	
Core aim: aligns to an existing occupational standard(s) and enables entry to the aligned occupation (not covered by a T level), although further learning/training in work may be required to reach 'full' occupational competence **Cannot** align to a standard which is covered by T levels	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills, and behaviours relevant to developing competence in an occupation
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment against occupational standard KSBs which form the minimum requirements for entry into occupation.
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide appropriate differentiation above the pass grade to facilitate student progression to further study
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning and act as motivation for Students to enter into and progress within, the occupational area
Qualification size	The qualification **typically** forms the core element of a student's course of study, and may be the sole qualification taken

Level 3 – Occupational entry – adult only	
Core aim: aligns to an existing occupational standard(s) and enables entry to the aligned occupation although further learning/training in work may be required to reach 'full' occupational competence **Can** align to a standard which is covered by T levels	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills, and behaviours relevant to developing competence in an occupation
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment against occupational standard KSBs which form the minimum requirements for entry into occupation.
Qualification information	The qualification **may**, where identified as appropriate, provide evidence of differentiated student achievement which supports employer selection decisions
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning for, and reflect the flexible learning requirements of, adult students
Qualification size	The qualification **typically** forms the core element of a student's course of study, and may be the sole qualification taken

Level 3 – Additional specialist	
Core aim: Builds on the outcomes within an occupational standard and enables an individual to specialise within an occupation having achieved the specialist qualification in addition to their prior achievement of competence in the core occupational outcomes.	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to developing additional specialised competence within an occupation
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment against occupational outcomes which form the minimum requirements for practice in a specialised role within the occupational area
Qualification information	The qualification **may**, where identified as appropriate, provide evidence of differentiated student achievement which supports employer selection decisions
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning and act as motivation for students to specialise within the occupational area
Student engagement	**Where an awarding body wishes to offer the qualification for a predominantly adult market:** The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning for, and reflect the flexible learning requirements of, adult students
Qualification size	The qualification **is** a substantial part of a student's course of study, with the option to be delivered alongside other qualifications

Level 3 – Cross-cutting functional competence	
Core aim: Selectively covers outcomes from a variety of occupational standards and enables an individual to demonstrate competencies which offer progression opportunities, and/or enhances employability, within a variety of occupational areas.	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to developing competencies to deliver a specific duty or function across a variety of occupational areas
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment of outcomes which form the minimum expectations required to discharge a specific function
Qualification information	The qualification **may**, where identified as appropriate, provide evidence of differentiated student achievement which supports employer selection decisions
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning within the context of the student's occupational area
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning for, and reflect the flexible learning requirements of, adult students
Qualification size	The qualification is **typically** taken either in isolation or alongside other qualifications to build on or enhance skills

Level 3 – Occupational progression	
Core aim: Selectively covers outcomes within an occupational standard and enables an individual to demonstrate achievement of outcomes which employers identify as supporting progression into or within the occupation	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills and behaviours identified as supporting progression into and within an occupational area
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment in relation to the competence required to support progression into and within an occupation
Qualification information	The qualification **may**, where identified as appropriate, provide evidence of differentiated student achievement which supports employer selection decisions
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning and act as motivation for students to enter into and progress within the occupational area
Qualification size	The qualification is **typically** taken either in isolation or alongside other qualifications to build on or enhance knowledge and skills

Level 3 – Employer-proposed	
Core aim: Enables entry to the aligned occupation for which no standard currently exists (including entry level competence with the requirement for further learning/training in work to reach full occupational competence).	
Purpose category	**Purpose statement**
Technical expertise	The qualification **will** provide students with knowledge, skills, and behaviours relevant to developing competence in an occupation
Qualification information	The qualification **will** provide employers with reliable evidence of a student's attainment against occupational outcomes which form the minimum requirements for entry into occupation.
Qualification information	The qualification **may**, where identified as appropriate, provide evidence of differentiated student achievement which supports employer selection decisions
Student engagement	The qualification **will** form part of an engaging course of learning for, and reflect the flexible learning requirements of, adult students
Qualification size	The qualification **typically** forms the core element of a student's course of study, and may be the sole qualification taken

3. Criteria in context of tests

3.1 PROPOSED APPROACH TO APPLYING THE OCCUPATIONAL OUTCOMES TEST

The following applies to Categories:

- Occupational entry

To establish if the occupational outcomes test has been met, IfATE will test the documents submitted to establish whether the awarding body has demonstrated suitable coverage of the KSBs indicated as included within their qualification materials.

As part of the review of occupational entry qualifications, IfATE intends to conduct a 'coherence check' to assess the quality of KSB coverage achieved by the awarding body. A targeted, staged approach will be taken, focusing on a specific subset of the KSBs which IfATE identify as fundamental to competent performance in the occupational area. Findings from this initial analysis will be used to establish the extent to which further checks are required across the remaining qualification content.

The following principles will be applied when assessing coverage:

- **knowledge statements:** knowledge statements to be fully covered in the content of the qualification

- **skill statements:** skill statements to be fully covered in the content of the qualification. However, partial coverage will also be considered where access to technology and/or relevant settings is a factor

- **behaviour statements:** a minimum of partial coverage for behaviour statements to be achieved, for example, learning about the expectations of a behaviour. Where it is possible to fully cover a behaviour in a qualification, the awarding body should seek to do so

Some current qualifications include multiple optional units, modules or pathways. Any unit or pathway combination should cover as many of the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the relevant occupational standard as it may be reasonable to attain by undertaking a course of education or training.

3.2 PROPOSED APPROACH TO APPLYING THE SPECIALIST COMPETENCE TEST

The following applies to Category:

- additional specialist

In satisfying the Specialist competence test we will expect the substantive element of an awarding bodies submitted content to consist of:

- **content mapped to pre-existing vital KSBs:** content covering KSBs taken directly from the occupational standard on which the additional specialist qualification builds

- **specialist content mapped to duties:** content covering the specific duties published by IfATE within our pre-defined list. This specialist content is likely to provide greater depth to existing KSBs from the linked occupational standard

IfATE will test the documents submitted to establish whether the awarding body has demonstrated suitable coverage of content which contributes to the achievement of specialist competence in the occupational area.

IfATE will scrutinise an awarding bodies' rationale for the inclusion of content, as well as the links between content and the specialist duties required for competent performance in the area. Through this process IfATE seeks to assure itself that all content included within the qualification is suitable to enable an individual to competently practice within the specialist area.

We expect the majority (substantive element) of the qualification to comprise of the new specialist content covering the specialist duties.

For example:
- a specialist duty for motor vehicle maintenance may be to 'remove and replace hybrid vehicle components using correct procedures'

For new specialist content mapped to duties which are suggested by IfATE, awarding bodies will not be required to provide justification for the inclusion of this content. Whilst we do not require a rationale for its inclusion, awarding bodies will still be required to demonstrate coherent links between their content and the agreed duties.

3.3 PROPOSED APPROACH TO APPLYING THE SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES APPROVAL TEST

The following applies to Categories:

- Cross cutting functional competence
- Occupational progression
- Employer proposed

IfATE will test the documents submitted to establish whether the awarding body has demonstrated suitable coverage of content to allow an individual to achieve the

competency required by the category into which the qualification is submitted (for example, competency to fulfil a cross-cutting function).

Where an occupational standard exists, we will expect to observe that the majority (substantive element) of the qualification is made up of content based on KSBs drawn from the occupational standard(s). KSBs selected for inclusion must be covered in full. Where content is not based on an occupational standard, IfATE will expect the majority of content to map to pre-defined duties specified by IfATE for the qualification area.

For example:
- A cross-cutting duty for management may be to 'effectively manage personal and professional development'

For content mapped to duties which are suggested by IfATE, awarding bodies will not be required to provide justification for the inclusion of this content. Whilst we do not require a rationale for its inclusion, awarding bodies will still be required to demonstrate coherent links between their content and the agreed duties.

4. The approval process for level 3 qualifications

The proposed approval process for technical qualifications aims to ensure that all qualifications offered at level 3 allow students to undertake and complete high-quality qualifications that are fit for purpose and demonstrate clear routes into employment.

4.1 STEPS IN THE PROCESS

The following steps relate to the process for cycle 1 of IfATE's level 3 approvals.

Prior to submission window opening

- In Autumn 2022, IfATE will publish its criteria and guidance for the first cycle of our level 3 and below approval process (including, pre-defined list and standards in scope)
- DfE will publish their funding approval guidance
- Ofqual will publish their requirements and regulations
- Awarding bodies to complete an online registration form detailing the qualification(s) that they intend to submit to the current approval cycle. This form is highly valuable to allow IfATE and Ofqual to plan its activities, not least allowing us to tailor our awarding body support sessions

Submission window open

- Our submission window will open in Summer 2023
- Awarding bodies will submit qualification materials and evidence for approval using a single access point
- Materials are accessed by relevant organisations to enable them to assess relevant information and carry out their respective functions. This will avoid awarding bodies from having to duplicate submissions to multiple organisations

Sift

- IfATE will conduct an initial review of submitted materials to ensure that they reflect the requirements laid out in the criteria
- For qualifications mapped to KSBs in occupational standards, IfATE intend to use a natural language processing tool (NLP) to provide an indicative report of the KSB coverage of the submission
- IfATE conducts detailed coherence checks on the submitted materials, with the findings of these checks informing the approach taken to the review stage
- Feedback is provided to awarding bodies relating to their submission's performance in one or more of these sift activities. This may include requirements for awarding bodies to submit further materials or undertake additional work for the submission to be reviewed in full

Review

- Between Summer 2023 and Spring 2024, IfATE will evaluate submissions to establish their adherence to our criteria
- IfATE will engage employer contacts to validate the accuracy and currency of submitted materials
- Ofqual provide feedback to IfATE based on their own review of the submission
- Route panels will provide strategic employer oversight, reviewing materials and providing recommendations
- Based on officials' reviews and route panel advice, IfATE compliance board makes final approval decision (prior to being communicated to awarding bodies and DfE)

Feedback

- IfATE will provide a report to awarding bodies, with feedback consolidated from IfATE delivery and assessment teams
- IfATE will offer 1-2-1 support and information sessions to help awarding bodies address specific comments, as required
- Where required, awarding bodies will submit additional evidence or resubmit materials with the required changes completed and clearly flagged to IfATE
- In cases where an awarding body has not met IfATE's criteria and is unlikely to fulfil the expectations in alignment with any agreed timelines, IfATE may decide that an application should not continue to be considered for approval in the cycle.

Final outcomes and approval decisions

- Ofqual will inform IfATE on the status of any ongoing regulatory action. This must be concluded before a qualification can be approved
- By Spring/Summer 2024 IfATE will communicate final outcomes to awarding bodies, and to DfE so that it can take decisions relating to funding approval
- DfE will confirm and publish all qualification funding approval decisions by Summer 2024
- Failure to achieve approval within one submissions cycle will not preclude an awarding body from seeking approval for the qualification in subsequent cycles.

Procedural Review

- In rare cases, where awarding bodies disagree with how IfATE reached a final decision, they may be able to challenge the decision by way of Procedural Review. Procedural Review can only be requested in respect of final IfATE decisions and must not be made simply because awarding bodies disagree with a decision or have found new evidence to support their submission. Instead, a request should be based on one or more of the following reasons:

  - we failed to follow our published processes
  - we overlooked or misunderstood relevant information
  - we considered irrelevant information
  - or we made a decision when we did not have the power to do so

For more detail on the process, timeframes and possible outcomes, please visit the [section of our website about procedural review.](#)

4.2 SINGLE SUBMISSION

Awarding bodies seeking approval for a qualification will make a single submission. Submission will start at a single access point. This submission will include all the information and evidence needed for review, including anything required by Ofqual's regulations. materials submitted will be shared with other parties involved in reviewing the submission (for example, Ofqual, employer reviewers). DfE will also access materials for its separate review and approval of the qualification for funding. IfATE will not charge fees for submissions or approval in submission cycles set out below.

4.3 SUBMISSION CYCLES

Our approvals process will be split into cycles that align to DfE post-16 reform timelines. The cycles cover multiple routes, as presented in [our occupational maps](#). Cycle 1 **will launch in Autumn 2022 and cover the following occupational routes:**

1. Construction and the built environment
2. Digital
3. Education and childcare
4. Engineering and manufacturing
5. Health and science

Awarding bodies will be able to submit level 3 technical qualifications that fall under the above occupational routes and are the following types:
- Occupational entry
- Additional specialist
- Occupational progression
- Employer-proposed

Cycle 2 will launch in Summer/Autumn 2023 and will cover the following routes:
1. Agriculture, environmental and animal care
2. Business and administration
3. Catering and hospitality
4. Care services
5. Creative and design
6. Hair and beauty
7. Legal, finance and accounting
8. Protective services
9. Sales, marketing and procurement
10. Transport and logistics

Awarding bodies will be able to submit level 3 technical qualifications that fall under the above occupational routes and are the following types:

- Occupational entry
- Additional specialist
- Occupational progression
- Employer-proposed
- Cross-cutting functional competence – including qualifications that align to standards in the occupational routes listed in cycle 1.