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# Introducing Cambridge Advanced Nationals (AAQS)

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# Post-16 curriculum landscape and outcomes of rapid review

# Background

Following a review of Level 3 post-16 vocational qualifications in 2022, the Department for Education (DfE):

- Proposed the defunding of 16–19 qualifications which overlapped with T Levels, qualifications more suited to a technical qualification, or qualifications in subjects that had an A Level (apart from STEM subjects).
- Introduced Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) – to replace the defunded qualifications
- Created two routes for students from 2025:
    - Academic: A Levels or a mixture of A Levels and AAQs
    - Technical: T Levels and approved technical qualifications

Post election, the Labour led DfE conducted a rapid review of these changes and published the outcomes in December 2024.

This rapid review was set up to determine which qualifications will be funded in England from 2025.

# Outcomes of the rapid review

- All Level 3 qualifications 360 GLH and below in subjects that overlap with T Levels, and have a replacement AAQ already approved, would be defunded along with any other qualifications with fewer than 100 enrolments in the last 3 years

- Large Level 3 qualifications would remain funded (720 and 1080 GLH) but will be reviewed in the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR)

- Cycle 1 AAQs including Cambridge Advanced Nationals are funded for first teaching September 2025

- Centres are no longer required to include A Levels in an AAQ study programme. The review concluded that the government would not proceed with proposed rules of combination for post-16 mixed study programmes.

Link to qualifications reform FAQs: https://support.tlevels.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/17845204641426-FAQs

# What does this mean for Cambridge Technicals

AAQs will replace existing Cambridge Technicals in 2025 for the following qualification sizes:

- Certificates will no longer be funded where there is a 180GLH AAQ
- Extended Certificates will no longer be funded where there is a 360GLH AAQ
- Diplomas and Extended Diplomas* continue to retain funding in September 2025

This only applies to the qualifications that already have approved AAQs.

*Not available for Applied Science

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# Introducing Cambridge Advanced Nationals (AAQs)

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# What are Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)?

Designed for students aged 16 to 19 years, AAQs are Level 3 qualifications that can be combined with A Levels, or with themselves, as part of a post-16 study programme.

**Cambridge Advanced Nationals**, our AAQs, encourage students to:

- develop subject specific key knowledge, understanding, and skills
- think creatively, innovatively, analytically, logically, and critically
- develop valuable communication skills that are important in all aspects of further study and life
- develop transferable skills, such as evaluation, planning, presentation, and research skills
- develop independence and confidence in applying their knowledge and skills

# Where do they fit in a post-16 study programme?

Students who don't want to study only A Levels (or a T Level), can choose a mixed study programme. With the rules of combination being relaxed, students can combine a variety of qualifications with no minimum number of A Levels

Cambridge Advanced Nationals are designed to complement other existing qualifications, including A Levels, and provide flexibility for students, allowing them to choose subjects that best align with their abilities and goals

Cambridge Advanced Nationals are currently available as a Certificate or Extended Certificate

The Certificate is equivalent to an AS Level and the Extended Certificate is equivalent to an A Level.

# Examples of qualification combinations

These can be taken alongside complementary qualifications to create a study programme. Here are some examples of possible combinations:

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# Our range of subjects

## Subjects for first teach September 2025:

| Subject | Size | |
|---|---|---|
| Applied Science | Certificate | 180 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |
| Human Biology | Certificate | 180 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |
| Computing: Application Development | Certificate | 150 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |
| IT: Data Analytics | Certificate | 150 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |
| Engineering | Certificate | 180 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |
| Health and Social Care | Certificate | 180 GLH |
| | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH |

## Cycle 2 subjects – first teach: TBC

We've developed Cambridge Advanced Nationals in the following subjects. These subjects could change, depending on DfE guidance.

- Creative Media Production
- Cyber Security and Digital Networking
- Enterprise and Innovation
- Marketing
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Policing and Criminal Justice
- Sport and Physical Activity

The DfE haven't announced a submission date for Cycle 2 AAQs yet.

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# Certificates and Extended Certificates

- Our qualifications have Certificates embedded within them – if a student starts a course late or needs to leave early – they won't leave empty handed
- By completing the relevant units first, you can make sure all students achieve at least an AS Level-sized qualification

# New Level 3 enrichment qualification

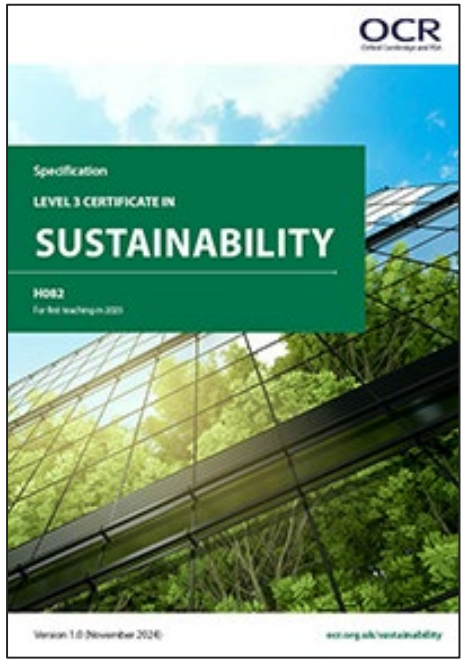
We've just launched a **new** 150GLH Level 3 qualification in Sustainability for **first teach in September 2025**. It is a **regulated** non-performance table qualification for students aged 16 or above with **UCAS tariff points**.

The qualification is made up of two mandatory 75GLH units:

- F227: Fundamentals of sustainability (EA)
- F228: Sustainability in practice (NEA)

The qualification provides students with knowledge and understanding of:

- Climate education
- Sustainable practices
- Linear vs circular economies
- Greenwashing




teach.ocr.org.uk/level-3-certificate-in-sustainability

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# How are Cambridge Advanced Nationals assessed?

Cambridge Advanced Nationals are assessed holistically and have a simple and intuitive assessment model, comprising:

- externally assessed units, which focus on subject knowledge and understanding
- applied or practical non-exam assessment units (NEA)
- optional NEA units to provide flexibility

| Subject | Qualification | Size | External assessment | NEA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Computing: Application Development<br>IT: Data Analytics | Certificate | 150 GLH | 50% | 50% |
| Applied Science<br>Engineering | Certificate | 180 GLH | 50% | 50% |
| Human Biology<br>Health & Social Care | Certificate | 180 GLH | 40% | 60% |
| Computing: Application Development<br>IT: Data Analytics<br>Applied Science<br>Human Biology<br>Health & Social Care<br>Engineering | Extended Certificate | 360 GLH | 40% | 60% |

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# Why choose Cambridge Advanced Nationals (AAQs)?

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# Why choose Cambridge Advanced Nationals (AAQs)?

**Every mark matters**: We've removed hurdles because we want students to achieve their full potential. Our marking criteria are all worth one point each, and those points are all included in calculating the overall qualification grade. **No marks go to waste**

**Features teachers love and more:** we've kept **visiting moderation**, a blend of exam and coursework units, a Certificate drop-down, and we're keeping the well-recognised Pass, Merit, Distinction, Distinction* grade scale

**Pathways to university:** Designed in **collaboration with teachers and universities**, Cambridge Advanced Nationals equip students with UCAS points and a well-rounded skill set for today's undergraduate studies as part of a Level 3 programme of study

**Complementary practical application:** Designed to be taken alongside A Levels, Cambridge Advanced Nationals seamlessly complement a mixed study programme while maintaining a strong focus on the practical application of skills and knowledge – a valuable supplement to A Levels, **preparing students for university or employment**.

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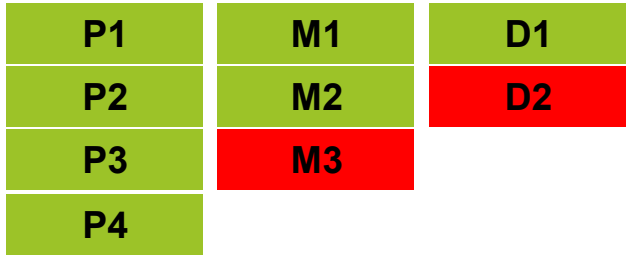
# Our marking approach – every mark matters

## How it works at qualification level

Each mark that a student achieves counts towards their final qualification outcome.

**Old hurdles model**




The red criteria haven't been achieved. In the model above, M1, M2 and D1 wouldn't count towards the final qualification grade, because the student would be capped at a Pass.

**Our new model**

Using our new approach, M1, M2 and D1 all count towards the final qualification grade, as every mark counts.

Boundaries* for each unit can be found in the specification. The example above is simplified for illustration.

# Every mark matters – at unit level

Green criteria have been achieved, red have not been achieved.

**Old hurdles model**

In the model above, the student would fail the unit, as they haven't achieved all the Pass criteria.

**Our new model**

Using our new approach, the same student would now pass the unit – as they've achieved enough criteria and points to meet the pass boundary.

Boundaries* for each unit can be found in the specification. The example above is simplified for illustration.

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# Every mark matters – the detail

**An example of a 50GLH unit in our new Cambridge Advanced Nationals**

Total number of criteria: **24** (12 Pass, 7 Merit, 5 Distinction)

Total required for a **Pass: 10**
Total required for a **Merit: 15**
Total required for a **Distinction: 20**

**If a student achieves a pass with 13 marks, they carry 13 marks forward.**

**We won't cap them at 10 marks.**

The total required for a Pass, Merit or Distinction can come from any unit criteria (e.g., 8 pass, 2 merit and 2 distinction would result in an overall unit Pass)

*Boundaries will be reviewed over time

# Moderation with OCR

- No Lead Internal Verifier needed and no need to submit plans
- Plans for two windows of submission per academic year that match the academic timetable (more details on this to follow)
- In-person or virtual meetings to discuss internal moderation and review a sample of candidates for each unit
- Constructive feedback from moderators about areas for improvement

## Interested in joining our Moderation team?

We have vacancies for Cambridge Advanced Nationals

Find out more and apply

# UCAS tariff points and Higher Education support

- Cambridge Advanced Nationals are worth UCAS Tariff points and our qualifications are on the UCAS Tariff points calculator.

| Certificate | | Extended Certificate | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Distinction* | 28 points | Distinction* | 56 points |
| Distinction | 24 points | Distinction | 48 points |
| Merit | 16 points | Merit | 32 points |
| Pass | 8 points | Pass | 16 points |

- We have letters of support from a wide range of universities, including Russell Group universities.

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# Support package

# What does our support package look like?

| Teaching & Learning | Assessment | Training |
|---|---|---|
| • Textbook and third-party support<br>• Switching Guide<br>• Mapping Guide<br>• Getting Started Guide<br>• Curriculum Planner<br>• Scheme of Work<br>• E-Learning course | • Annotated Sample Assessment Materials<br>• Assessment Story<br>• Practice Papers<br>• Candidate Style Answers (EA)<br>• Candidate Style Work (NEA)<br>• NEA Guide<br>• Student Guide | • Choosing AAQs and understanding the compensation model<br>• Starting to Teach<br>• Ask the SA<br>• Ask the Moderator<br>• Preparing for the Exam<br>• Preparing for the NEA<br>• Exploring the exam (after live examination series)<br>• Exploring the NEA (after live examination series)<br>• Enhance your teaching |

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# Resources delivery schedule

| Resource | Available from |
|---|---|
| Schemes of work for each unit | *Starting from 28 April 2025* |
| Candidate style work for each NEA unit | *Starting from 28 April 2025* |
| Curriculum planner for each subject | *Starting from June 2025* |
| Candidate style answers for each examined unit | *Starting from September 2025* |

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# Schemes of work

Our new **large and comprehensive schemes of work** cover all aspects of the specification providing everything you need to deliver the qualification:

- **Lesson by lesson** – the whole specification is broken down into single 1 GLH lessons
- **Editable**
- **Key words** are highlighted
- **Learning outcomes** – what the students should know by the end of the lesson
- **Teaching ideas** for lesson starter and main activities and student independent learning are included
- **Links** to useful resources to support lessons
- **Subject Knowledge support**

Watch our Schemes of Work video

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# Scheme of Work - a lesson example

| Lesson number | Specification coverage | GLH | Lesson aims and outcomes | Lesson ideas, key words and activities | Useful resources | Student independent learning – ideas and useful resources |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1.1 Programs | 1 | By the end of the lesson students should:<br>• know what a 'program' is<br>• know the characteristics of a program<br>• understand the purpose of a program. | **Starter**<br>Think pair share: ask students to think about different types of software they use daily (e.g., games, word processors, web browsers) and write them on the board.<br>**Main task**<br>Teach students what a **program** is, the characteristics and the purposes of certain programs. Explain to students that a program does not necessarily have an end user or a purpose commercially, but maybe a script or file a programmer may construct.<br>Give students a range of different scenarios, get them to categorise if they are a **program** or not.<br>Group Work: divide students into small groups and assign each group a type of program (e.g., utility, game, educational software).<br>Each group should identify the characteristics and purpose of their | Application vs. Program (What's the Difference?) - Rapid Blog<br>Is There any Difference between a "Program" and an "Application"?<br>How to Create and Run a Batch File in Windows 10 and 11 | Students should use Cornell note taking to create structured notes to reflect on the lesson.<br>Create a glossary of definitions to add to, using flash cards or paper. |

# Textbooks and other resources

OCR qualifications can be supported by endorsed and non-endorsed resources.

**Endorsed Resources**

- Endorsement by OCR is a mark of quality that indicates that a resource will be a valuable source of support for you and your students.

**Non-endorsed resources**

- Third-party resources that have not been subject to review and so we cannot offer recommendations or guarantee the quality. Please preview before use.
- As these resources have not been through an OCR review process, all content and reference to the exams is the work of the publisher and you will need to use your professional judgement in assessing the validity. Please always refer to the specification if in doubt.

# Textbooks and external resources publication dates

| Publisher | Qualification | Type | Publication dates |
|---|---|---|---|
| CAMBRIDGE<br>Cambridge | Computing: Application Development | Textbook | • Print: available **Summer 2025**<br>• Digital: available from **April 2025**<br>• Optional units available in digital format only: from **April 2025**<br>• Samples available to **download now** |
| | IT: Data Analytics | Textbook | |
| | Health & Social Care | Textbook | |
| | Engineering | Textbook | |
| Zig Zag Education<br>Zig Zag Education | Applied Science | Textbook | • Applied Science: available **June 2025**<br>• Samples available to **download shortly**<br>• Health & Social Care, Computing: Application Development and IT: Data Analytics coming soon |
| | Health & Social Care | Textbook | |
| | Computing: Application Development | Teaching resources | |
| | IT: Data Analytics | Teaching resources | |
| eboru<br>eboru | Health & Social Care | Textbook | Print: available **30 May 2025** |
| Primrose Kitten<br>Primrose Kitten | Human Biology | Teaching resources | • Fundamentals of Human Biology F170 – **Sept 2025**<br>• Genetics F172 - **Sept-Dec 2025**<br>• Biomedical Techniques F173 - **Dec 2025**<br>• Health and Disease F171 – **2026** |

# Cambridge resources

- Student textbooks for the following qualifications:
  - ✓ **Computing: Application Development**
  - ✓ **Engineering**
  - ✓ **Health & Social Care**
  - ✓ **IT: Data Analytics**
- Books covering all mandatory units available in print and digital formats
- Digital student books covering each, individual optional unit
- Publishing from **summer term 2025 – samples available now**
- All books available directly from Cambridge. Print books will also be available through third parties
- More information on Cambridge's website

**WORKING TOWARDS ENDORSEMENT**

# Zig Zag Education resources

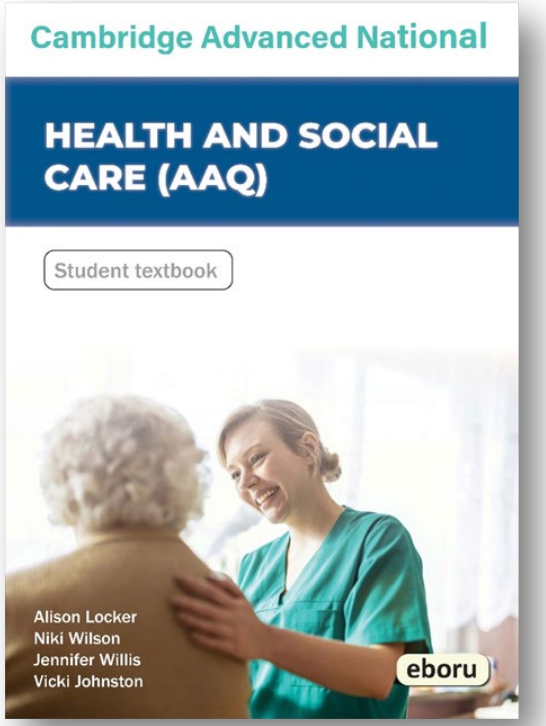
**WORKING TOWARDS ENDORSEMENT**

- Course Companion student textbooks for the following qualifications:
  - ✓ **Applied Science** – publishing from June 2025
  - ✓ **Health & Social Care** – coming soon
- Books covers <u>all</u> mandatory units available in print format.
- Textbooks for Optional units will be available to purchase individually
- Textbooks available as traditional print textbook or School Site Licence which includes unlimited photocopying
- All books available directly from Zig Zag Education - Samples available to download shortly
- Teaching resources for the following qualifications:
  - ✓ **Computing: Application Development** – coming soon
  - ✓ **IT: Data Analytics** – coming soon

# Eboru resources

**WORKING TOWARDS ENDORSEMENT**

- Student textbooks for the following qualifications:
  - ✓ Health & Social Care – publish date 30 May 2025
- Books cover all mandatory and optional units
- Textbooks available as traditional print textbook
- Written by practising teachers who bring real up-to-date classroom experience, each textbook has clear, student-friendly language with unfamiliar words defined on each spread
- All books available directly from Eboru
- Sign up for inspection copies now



# Primrose Kitten resources

**NON-ENDORSED RESOURCES**

- Course Companion student books for the following qualifications:
  - ✓ Human Biology

Primrose Kitten is building a holistic educational experience for students who want to maximise their potential for the examined units.

Their Human Biology Revision Bootcamp features:

- teaching videos which break down complicated concepts into digestible bites
- retrieval questions to ensure long-term knowledge retention
- personalised feedback at the end of each quiz so that students can address their mistakes
- exam skills and specialised sessions that integrate mathematical concepts for biology.

The revision bootcamp provides comprehensive yet concise coverage of all the examined units.

Publish dates

- Fundamentals of Human Biology F170 – **Sept 2025**
- Genetics F172 - **Sept-Dec 2025**
- Biomedical Techniques F173 - **Dec 2025**
- Health and Disease F171 – **2026**

Resources available to buy individually or via a School subscription

# Professional development

You can currently book onto the following courses:

### Understanding the compensation model of assessment

Learn more about the compensation model of assessment used in Cambridge Advanced Nationals and gain a comprehensive understanding of the rationale and benefits of this assessment model for teachers and students and how to apply the model to various assessment scenarios. **Upcoming dates:** 17 June 2025

### Starting to teach

Led by the Principal Moderator/Principal Examiner, our 'Starting to Teach' events for Cambridge Advanced Nationals (AAQs) aim to develop your understanding of the key aspects of the qualification. The sessions cover specification content, structure, question format and assessment requirements, as well as offering practical guidance on getting started in the classroom. **Upcoming dates:** 03 June 2025, 10 June 2025, 12 June 2025

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# Benefits to teachers

- Access to on-demand and live training throughout the year
- Access to teaching materials and assessment support (details coming up)
- All the benefits of our collaborative and constructive moderation processes
- Deliver exciting, relevant and up-to-date content that students will enjoy

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# Benefits to students

- Reliable assessments – papers that are accessible and ramp-up, every question can be attempted
- Minimum time sat in exam halls – maximum of 3 hours across 2 papers
- Chances to resit papers in January and June: 3 attempts in total
- Resubmit coursework in the next appropriate window
- No more hurdles – every single mark counts towards their final grade
- Content is relevant, up to date, and career-orientated

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# Key benefits

- Every mark counts towards the final grade – if you achieve 13 criteria you get 13 marks
- The Certificate drop down to protect students' achievement
- The exam:NEA ratio, favouring practical work over question papers
- New and interesting content, in qualifications that feel familiar
- Optionality, allowing you to tailor your course
- Subject advisors to support you every step of the way

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# Next Steps

- Visit the new Cambridge Advanced Nationals landing page and download our specifications, sample assessment materials, switching guides and more
- Book onto one of our free to attend deep dive subject specific webinars and professional development courses
- Watch our full compensation marking video and download the Cambridge Advanced Nationals summary brochure
- Sign up for email updates (be sure to select “Cambridge Advanced Nationals” and/or your subject areas)
- Join the OCR Facebook group for teacher support
- Let us know you’ll be teaching Cambridge Advanced Nationals here

Please let the Partnerships team know if you’re planning on teaching Cambridge Advanced Nationals or have any questions: partnerships@cambridge.org

Have a subject query? We can also put you in touch with our expert Subject Advisors.

*Scan for landing page*

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