



Training  
Qualifications UK

## **Alternative Academic Qualification Factsheet**

TQUK Level 3 AAQ Certificate in IT and Computing

TQUK Level 3 AAQ Diploma in IT and Computing

## What are AAQs?

Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) have been approved by the Department for Education (DfE) and, when combined with A Levels as part of a mixed-study programme, provide learners with a high-quality entry route into higher education with the added reassurance of allocated UCAS tariff points. AAQs provide a flexible and inclusive progression opportunity for learners who commence at certificate level and then have the option of working towards the diploma that builds on the knowledge and skills they have already completed.

The purpose of the AAQs in IT and Computing is to provide learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to progress to higher education, and ultimately to work within the computing industry. They provide learners with a strong foundation of knowledge and skills in IT and computing principles that complement theoretical concepts covered in the A Level curriculum.

This integrated approach enables learners to gain a full understanding of academic principles and their practical application. This will showcase their ability to apply concepts and techniques and strengthen their university/college applications giving them a competitive edge.

## What will learners study?

The AAQs seek to equip learners with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the approaches required when designing and creating computer programs. The diploma comprises 5 mandatory themes and includes the 2 themes that are studied at certificate level, as outlined in the following table:

Themes	Certificate	Diploma
1. Fundamentals of computing	✓	✓
2. Programming	✓	✓
3. Cyber security – network threats and vulnerabilities		✓
4. Network security management and data gathering		✓
5. Website technology		✓

## The difference between the certificate and the diploma

Learners who study an AAQ have the choice between a certificate or a diploma. The certificate is equivalent to an AS Level and comprises 2 themes that learners may typically complete in one year, or as part of a 2-year programme of study. Learners may choose to study the certificate to gain core knowledge of the fundamentals of computing and programming and have the option of continuing to diploma level.

The diploma is equivalent to one A Level and comprises 5 themes that learners would typically complete within a 2-year study programme. The diploma builds on the 2 themes completed at certificate level and provides learners with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills in cyber security, network security management, and website technology.

## The target age group



The certificate and diploma have been designed for learners aged 16-19 who wish to develop core knowledge and understanding of IT and computing fundamentals and principles.

## Focus of the diploma

Learners will build on the principles studied at certificate level. They will further develop their knowledge of computing principles and techniques, explore cyber security technologies and firewall configurations, and the importance of managing risks and system vulnerabilities.

Network security management is a key aspect of the diploma, where learners will gain an understanding of legislation, explore the principles of network maintenance, and investigate data gathering to include sequence calculation and probability. The final theme provides learners with opportunities to investigate website technologies and standards and use and select scripting and programming languages.

## Focus of the certificate

Learners will study the fundamentals and core principles that underpin IT and computing. They will explore the features of computers, operating systems, and types, and the functions of hardware and software. They will gain an in-depth understanding of computing languages, testing and debugging techniques, and will explore designing and creating computer programs.

Learners will develop skills throughout the qualification to understand appropriate approaches for specific IT projects.

## Total Qualification Time (TQT)

An estimate of the overall time a learner will typically take to achieve and demonstrate the required level of attainment:

Qualification	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Direct Study	Total qualification time (TQT)
TQUK Level 3 AAQ Certificate in IT and Computing	180	20	200
TQUK Level 3 AAQ Diploma in IT and Computing	360	40	400

## Assessment

The qualifications are assessed holistically and comprise an examined assessment (EA) and a non-exam assessment (NEA). The NEA will be released each year in September. The assessment weightings are:

Qualification	Examined assessment (EA)	Non-exam assessment (NEA)
TQUK Level 3 AAQ Certificate in IT and Computing	40%	60%
TQUK Level 3 AAQ Diploma in IT and Computing	40%	60%

## HE progression

The Level 3 AAQ Certificate and Diploma in IT and Computing can support progression to higher and further education qualifications in subjects to include:

- Computer Science
- Computing (Networks, Cyber Security and Forensics)
- Computer Networking and Cloud Security
- Cyber Security
- Computer Engineering
- Software Engineering
- Data Science / Data Analytic
- Information Systems
- Artificial Intelligence.

## Knowledge and skills and their benefits for future study

Learners will develop specialist skills as they explore computer components, processors, hardware, and software. They will gain skills in the selection and use of the most appropriate technologies and devices for specific tasks and applications. Programming forms a large part of knowledge and skills building in both the certificate and diploma. Learners will gain core knowledge of programming languages, the purpose of code, and its applications for website technologies and business.

Learners will be able to build their knowledge of technical support to include effective network security management, data gathering, and monitoring networks. They will explore the management of cyber-attacks on computer networks and the approaches to risk mitigation.

## A Levels to complement the AAQs

The A Level subject areas that would complement the AAQs include Business, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Media Studies, and Physics. Combining the qualifications with A Levels in Mathematics, or Physics would support learners with the development of analytical skills and a strong foundation in numerical concepts. These skills would be relevant for degrees in computer science, software engineering, cyber security, and engineering.

Combining the AAQ with A levels in Business Studies and Economics would be advantageous for learners interested in business processes and economic principles applying their knowledge of IT within business solutions. This combination would support entry to degrees in business management, economics, finance with technology, and information technology management. Choosing to combine the AAQs with A Levels in Graphic Design or Media Studies would support an exploration of creative design and multimedia production providing an understanding of media trends and communication. This combination would support entry to degrees in graphic design, digital media, game design, and interactive media.

## Mixed Study Programmes

Our AAQs, available in both 180glh and 360glh options, can be pursued sequentially as nested qualifications or independently as standalone qualifications. They are designed to provide flexibility in mixed study programmes, allowing learners to choose the approach that best aligns with their abilities and goals. Learners can choose between full A Level or AS Level study alongside 180glh and 360glh AAQ options, depending on their desired breadth and depth in a subject, and to meet their higher education needs. Tailoring education through a combination of fewer subjects with greater depth or a broader range of subjects allows learners to better support progression to higher education. For more details, please see 'mixed study programme' examples on the next page or refer to the 'course delivery' section in the qualification specification.

### More Information

For further information about the TQUK Level 3 AAQ Certificate and Diploma in IT and Computing, please visit the TQUK [website](#). If you're new to Training Qualifications UK, you can contact us in a variety of ways:

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## Mixed Study Programme Examples

This section of the factsheet is to provide an overview of A-level subjects that may be beneficial when studied alongside our Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) in a mixed study program, to support progression to higher education. The following examples have been designed to illustrate the different options available to learners. These options aim to assist learners in making informed choices of qualifications based on their abilities and goals.

Computer Science - Mixed study programme examples	
To pursue higher education in Computer Science in the UK, it's important to choose A-level and AAQ subjects that will prepare you for this field and provide a strong foundation in relevant areas. Computer Science involves the study of computing systems, programming, algorithms, and software development. Here are some A-level and AAQ subjects that can be beneficial for study in a mixed study programme:	
<b>Option 1</b>	
A Level	Physics
A Level	Mathematics
Small AAQ	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner may study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2, whilst studying the Diploma AAQ over 2 years. The other option is to study all 3 subjects over a 2 year period.	
<b>Option 2</b>	
A Level	Physics
A Level	Mathematics
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period, whilst studying the Certificate AAQ in year 1 and then the Diploma in year 2.	
<b>Option 3</b>	
A Level	Physics
A Level	Mathematics
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	180glh Certificate in Creative Digital Media
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period. Alongside this, the learner has the option to select 2 x 180glh AAQs (equivalent to A/S Levels) whereby they will typically study one in year 1 and the other in year 2.	
<b>Option 4</b>	
A Level	Physics
A Level	Mathematics
A/S Level	Computer Science
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 2.5 A Levels across a typical 2 year study programme alongside 1 x 180glh AAQ equivalent to an AS Level to make up a 2 year study programme equivalent to 3 A Levels in total.	
<b>Note:</b> It's important to research the specific entry requirements for Higher Education programmes at different universities or institutions, as these requirements can vary. Some programmes may have prerequisites or recommended subjects, so it is advised that learners check the admission criteria of the institutions they're interested in. Additionally, learners could also consider seeking guidance from school counselors or career advisors to ensure their A-level and AAQ choices align with their career goals.	

Each mixed study programme option is equivalent to 3 A Levels

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Cyber Security - Mixed study programme examples	
To pursue higher education in Cyber Security in the UK, it's crucial to choose A-level and AAS subjects that will prepare you for this field and provide a strong foundation in relevant areas. Cyber Security involves protecting computer systems, networks, and data from cyber threats and attacks. Here are some A-level and AAQ subjects that can be beneficial for study in a mixed study programme:	
Option 1	
A Level	Mathematics
A Level	Computer Science
Small AAQ	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner may study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2, whilst studying the Diploma AAQ over 2 years. The other option is to study all 3 subjects over a 2 year period.	
Option 2	
A Level	Mathematics
A Level	Computer Science
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period, whilst studying the Certificate AAQ in year 1 and then the Diploma in year 2.	
Option 3	
A Level	Mathematics
A Level	Computer Science
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	180glh Certificate in Policing
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period. Alongside this, the learner has the option to select 2 x 180glh AAQs (equivalent to A/S Levels) whereby they will typically study one in year 1 and the other in year 2.	
Option 4	
A Level	Mathematics
A Level	Computer Science
A/S Level	Business Studies
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 2.5 A Levels across a typical 2 year study programme alongside 1 x 180glh AAQ equivalent to an AS Level to make up a 2 year study programme equivalent to 3 A Levels in total.	
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Software Engineering - Mixed study programme examples	
To pursue higher education in Software Engineering in the UK, it's important to choose A-level and AAQ subjects that will prepare you for this field and provide a strong foundation in relevant areas. Software Engineering focuses on designing, developing, and maintaining software systems. Here are some A-level and A Level subjects that can be beneficial for study in a mixed study programme:	
<b>Option 1</b>	
A Level	Computer Science
A Level	Physics
Small AAQ	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner may study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2, whilst studying the Diploma AAQ over 2 years. The other option is to study all 3 subjects over a 2 year period.	
<b>Option 2</b>	
A Level	Computer Science
A Level	Physics
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	360glh Diploma in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period, whilst studying the Certificate AAQ in year 1 and then the Diploma in year 2.	
<b>Option 3</b>	
A Level	Computer Science
A Level	Physics
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
	180glh Certificate in Creative Digital Media
In this option, the learner has options to study 1 A Level in year 1 and the other in year 2 or to study both A Levels over a 2 year period. Alongside this, the learner has the option to select 2 x 180glh AAQs (equivalent to A/S Levels) whereby they will typically study one in year 1 and the other in year 2.	
<b>Option 4</b>	
A Level	Computer Science
A Level	Physics
A/S Level	Mathematics
Small AAQ	180glh Certificate in IT & Computing
In this option, the learner has options to study 2.5 A Levels across a typical 2 year study programme alongside 1 x 180glh AAQ equivalent to an AS Level to make up a 2 year study programme equivalent to 3 A Levels in total.	
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Each mixed study programme option is equivalent to 3 A Levels