This article describes the administration and governance of the education system in England at central level.

Primary legislation for education in England is enacted by the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament at Westminster. Acts of Parliament give government ministers, or other authorities, the power to regulate administrative details by means of ‘delegated’ or secondary legislation in the form of Statutory Instruments made by the Secretary of State [1].

The Department for Education (DfE) is the government department with responsibility for the overall provision of the education service, for determining national policies and for planning the direction of the system as a whole. This includes responsibility for higher [1] and further education [2] policy, and for apprenticeships and skills, which was transferred to the DfE in July 2016 from the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Research and science policy remains with the successor department to BIS, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation is a joint role with the DfE and BEIS.

Although there is no regional government in England as such, in some parts of the country, some powers and budgets have begun to be devolved to large cities or city areas and regions. These changes were facilitated by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 [3], under which so-called ‘devolution deals’ [4] have been agreed. The core powers devolved vary, but most areas have some devolved responsibilities for adult education, alongside business support, and planning and land use.

Administration and governance of education are characterised by a high degree of autonomy. Local authorities (LAs) [5] and individual institutions implement and administer centrally determined policy and also have their own statutory powers and responsibilities. In addition to LAs, a new ‘middle tier’ has emerged in the form of Regional Schools Commissioners [6] and multi-academy trusts [7] (academy chains). Further information is provided in the article on ‘Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level [8]’.

**Department for Education**

The Department for Education is responsible for children’s services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, and apprenticeships and wider skills. The DfE is a ministerial department. The Secretary of State for Education [1] is responsible for the work of the DfE. The Secretary of State is supported by five ministers.

- The Minister of State for School Standards oversees teacher training, recruitment and retention; school admissions and school transport; the curriculum, assessment and qualifications; school revenue funding and the national funding formula for schools; children and young people's
mental health; behaviour and attendance; and school accountability.

- The Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills is responsible for apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy; traineeships and institutes of technology; technical education and skills; careers education, information and guidance; post-16 funding; further education colleges and sixth-form colleges; adult education; and reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

- The responsibilities of the Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (a joint role shared with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, BEIS) include universities and higher education reform; student finance; widening participation and social mobility in higher education; and international students.

- The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families is responsible for children’s social care; special educational needs; safeguarding in schools; disadvantaged pupils and the pupil premium; school sport, healthy pupils and school food; free school meals; early years policy; and social mobility.

- The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System is responsible for academies and independent schools; faith schools; home education; tackling school underperformance and school improvement; school governance; capital investment; and tackling extremism in schools and colleges.

The ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister and are responsible to the UK Parliament for controlling and giving direction to the public education system in England. They are supported by civil servants, led by the Permanent Secretary at the DfE, who is chief policy adviser to the Secretary of State and the ministerial team, and by teams of officials led by Director Generals.

The DfE’s single departmental plan, updated in May 2018, sets out seven principles to achieve its vision of providing a world-class education:

- ensure that academic standards match and keep pace with key comparator nations
- strive to bring technical education standards in line with leading international systems
- ensure that education builds character, resilience and well-being
- recruit, develop and retain the best possible workforce
- prioritise the most disadvantaged
- protect the autonomy of institutions
- ensure the effectiveness of funding.

The DfE is supported in its role by 18 agencies and public bodies. These include:

- non-ministerial government departments
- executive agencies of the DfE
- non-departmental public bodies.

**Non-ministerial government departments**

Non-ministerial government departments are not led directly by a minister, but are headed by senior civil servants and usually have a regulatory or inspection function. The two non-ministerial government departments supporting the DfE – Ofqual and Ofsted – are led by a permanent office holder (the Chief Regulator and Chief Inspector respectively) and by a board consisting of executive and non-executive directors. They are accountable directly to Parliament.

- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. The article on the ‘National Qualifications Framework’ provides further information on Ofqual.
The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) [17] is responsible for the inspection of children’s services, schools, colleges, initial teacher training, youth work, work-based learning and adult education, and for the inspection and regulation of day care and children’s social care. The article on 'Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education [18]' provides further information on Ofsted.

Executive agencies of the DfE

The DfE has three executive agencies which support and facilitate the implementation of policy. They do not determine policy, but carry out specific executive functions within government. Although executive agencies operate with a degree of autonomy from ministers and the DfE, they are accountable to ministers and their functions are determined by a regularly reviewed framework agreement. This sets out in detail the division of responsibilities between the agency and the central government department. Ministers do not concern themselves with the day-to-day running of executive agencies, but are directly accountable to Parliament and the public for the overall performance of the agencies and for their continued existence. Executive agencies typically deliver a service, do not have a separate legal personality and are staffed by civil servants.

The responsibilities of the DfE’s three executive agencies are summarised below.

- The Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) [19] regulates the teaching profession. It is responsible for awarding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) [20] to teachers and for considering allegations of serious teacher misconduct. It also maintains the database of qualified teachers, and is responsible for the recognition of the professional status of appropriately qualified teachers from outside England. Until April 2018, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) held this role.
- The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) [21] is responsible for the development and delivery of all statutory assessments from the early years to the end of Key Stage [22] 2 (age 11). It is also responsible for the development of the professional skills tests for trainee teachers.
- The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) [23] is the single agency accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults.

Non-departmental public bodies

Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) operate at arm’s length from ministers and departments. The DfE is supported by nine NDPBs which have an executive or advisory function. They work within a policy framework set by the Secretary of State but are not part of the DfE, although Ministers are ultimately responsible for their effectiveness and efficiency.

The two advisory NDPBs to the DfE are:

- the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) [24], which monitors progress towards improving social mobility in the UK and promotes social mobility in England; and
- the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) [25], which is the independent review body advising government on teachers’ pay and conditions.

Executive NDPBs to the DfE include the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, the Student Loans Company, and the Office for Students.

- The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education [26] is an employer-led organisation, which oversees the development, approval and publication of apprenticeship standards, and advises the Government on funding for each of the standards. It is also responsible for approving standards and outline content for T Levels [27], to become available as qualifications
in schools and colleges from September 2020.

- The [Student Loans Company (SLC)](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#FurtherEducation(FE)) provides loans and grants to students in universities and colleges in the UK.
- The [Office for Students (OfS)](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#LocalAuthority(LA)) is the regulator for the higher education sector. It is responsible for the funding of higher education in England, for holding higher education institutions (HEIs) to account, and for promoting students’ interests. It replaced the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in April 2018.

Further information on all 18 agencies and public bodies supporting the DfE in its role is available on this [webpage](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#LocalAuthority(LA)).

### Devolution to city areas and regions

In recent years, the devolution landscape in England has changed. Although there is no regional government in England, a number of agreements have transferred some powers, budgets and responsibilities from central government to large cities, or city areas and regions. These areas and regions cover areas larger than individual local authorities. These changes were facilitated by the [Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/contents/enacted), under which so-called ‘devolution deals’ have been agreed. The core powers devolved vary, but most areas have some devolved responsibilities for adult education and apprenticeships, alongside areas such as transport, housing, health and social care.

Article last reviewed May 2019.

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**Links**

[1] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#SecretaryOfState
[5] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#LocalAuthority(LA)
[6] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#RegionalSchoolsCommissioner(RSC)