2019

Opportunity Areas programme extended

See item [1] in ‘National Reforms in School Education’

First Institutes of Technology open

The first new Institutes of Technology (IOTs) [2] were opened in September 2019. IoTs are collaborations between further education (FE) providers, universities and employers. They specialise in delivering higher technical education (at Level 4 [3] and Level 5 [4] of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) [5]), with a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, such as engineering, digital and construction. IoTs also focus on the specific technical skills needs required in their local area, with a view to providing employers with a skilled workforce and students with a clear route to technical employment.

Education Inspection Framework introduced

See the item [6] in ‘National Reforms in School Education’.

Adult education budget devolution

From 1 August 2019, the Government has devolved the adult education budget (AEB) to six mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) and to the Greater London Authority (GLA). (MCAs are groups of two or more local councils which collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries.) The intention is to allow MCAs and the GLA to make decisions about the allocation of the AEB to support the needs of residents and local economic priorities.

The adult education budget supports eligible learners aged 19 and over and aims to provide them with the skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship, or other learning.

Between 2015 and 2016, the Government agreed a series of devolution deals [7] between central government and local areas. As part of these deals, central government is transferring certain adult education functions specified in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 [8] from the Secretary of State for Education to the combined authorities.

The Government has published guidance [9] for providers on funding agreements and AEB allocation.
Higher technical education review

The Department for Education (DfE) began a consultation [10] on higher technical education (HTE) in July 2019. This forms part of a comprehensive review [11] of Level 4 [3] and 5 [4] qualifications in subjects aligned to technical routes, from accounting to engineering, management to laboratory science. The aim is to raise the prestige of HTE and strengthen its value to employers by improving quality.

Specifically, the consultation sets out a proposed approach to creating a system of employer-led national standards and invites views on the principles and processes underpinning this. It also sets out DfE's approach to ensuring high quality provision of higher technical education and the steps it proposes to take to stimulate demand for higher technical qualifications. These deliver on commitments in the Post-16 Skills Plan [12], which responded to the recommendations in the Sainsbury Report [13]. DfE also issued a policy paper [14] on higher technical education to accompany the consultation, which ran until 29 September 2019.


Post-18 education and funding review reports

On 30 May 2019, the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding (the Augar Review), which had been set up [16] in February 2018, issued its report [17]. This made recommendations concerning skills, further education (FE), apprenticeships and higher education. The recommendations relating to skills, further education (FE) and apprenticeships included those listed below.

- A lifelong learning loan allowance should be introduced, to be used at higher technical and degree level at any stage of an adult’s career, and for full- and part-time students.
- The Government should provide additional support and capital funding to specific FE colleges [18] in order to ensure a national network of high quality technical provision.
- The number of Level 4 [3] and 5 [4] qualifications should be streamlined and their status improved.
- The Government should promote, through the capital budget, partnerships, group structures, and specialisation to deliver a ‘national network of colleges’.
- The reduction in the core funding rate for 18-year-olds should be reversed.
- Investment in the FE workforce should be a priority, as colleges cannot afford to match the salaries paid in schools or higher education institutions [19], which causes problems in recruiting and retaining good staff.
- The Government should monitor closely the extent to which apprenticeship take-up reflects the priorities of the Industrial Strategy [20].
- Funding for Level 6 [21] apprenticeships and above should be available only for those who have not previously undertaken a publicly supported degree.
- Ofsted [22] should become the lead responsible body for inspecting apprenticeships at all levels, meaning that the Office for Students (OfS) [23] would no longer be the sole regulator for Level 6 and 7 [24] apprenticeships.


College oversight: support and intervention

In April 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a new policy document, College oversight:
The purpose of the college oversight regime is to improve financial resilience and quality by incentivising and supporting college leaders to recognise issues and take early action, well before colleges get into serious difficulty. In cases where intervention is needed, this policy document aims to set out clear and proportionate intervention arrangements, which protect provision and learners in the event of college failure.

The policy sets out a strengthened approach to supporting and intervening in colleges, including:

- a preventative function to identify problems sooner
- extended triggers for early and formal intervention
- a strengthened role for the Further Education Commissioner to review provision in a local area
- use of independent business reviews to support effective decision making
- introduction of the statutory college insolvency regime.

Measures to support further education college improvement

On 8 February 2019, the final round of the Strategic College Improvement Fund (SCIF) opened.

The SCIF is a £15 million fund aimed at helping struggling colleges to improve. It was launched in June 2018, following calls from the sector for a peer-to-peer support programme where stronger colleges help weaker ones to improve, and followed a successful pilot phase, which saw 14 colleges receive grants totalling over £2million. Outcomes from the pilot showed strong support for the partnership model, and led to colleges reporting that the fund helped build awareness of good practice, fostered mutual learning, and enabled rapid action to improve quality.

2018

College governance

On 20 November 2018, the Further education corporations and sixth-form college corporations: governance guide was issued. The guidance states the legal and regulatory requirements and recommended practice that apply to further education (FE) and sixth-form college corporations. This guide replaces ‘College governance: a guide’, published by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) in 2014. The guidance is updated periodically.

Performance reporting for further education colleges

In August 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) announced changes to strengthen performance reporting for further education (FE) colleges and sixth-form colleges from 2018/19.

Colleges that are part of groups will now need to provide individual performance reporting - at the college level - in addition to that provided at group level. For multi-site colleges, there would be reporting for individual delivery sites within the college, in addition to reporting at college level.

The statement was made in the DfE’s response to a consultation held between April and June 2018.
Flexible Learning Fund

On 29 March 2018, the Department for Education announced [34] the 32 projects that would receive a share of £11.7 million from the Flexible Learning Fund.

The Flexible Learning Fund will support projects to encourage more people to take part in new training, or in courses that will help them to progress in their current employment or to secure a new job.

Projects include training older workers and people whose jobs are affected by the need for greater digital skills, and increasing the maths skills and confidence of adults already in work.

In the March 2017 Budget [35], the Government announced that it would spend up to £40 million by 2018-19 ‘to test different approaches to help people to retrain and upskill throughout their working lives’.

In October 2017, the Flexible Learning Fund [36] was launched as part of this pilot programme. The Fund will provide grants to projects that ‘develop methods of delivering learning that are flexible and easy to access for adults who are in work, or returning to work, with either low or intermediate level skills’.

The House of Commons Library has published this background briefing [37] (CBP-7708) (March 2019) on adult further education funding since 2010.

Post-18 education and funding review

In February 2018, the Prime Minister launched [16] a review of post-18 education and funding, to be led by Philip Augar. The review will consider four main areas.

- Choice: identifying ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18. This could include more information about the earning potential of different jobs and the different qualifications needed to get those jobs, as well as ensuring that they have access to a genuine range of high quality academic, technical or vocational routes.
- Access: enabling people from all backgrounds to progress and succeed in post-18 education, while also examining how disadvantaged students receive additional financial support from the Government, universities and colleges.
- Skills provision: future-proofing the economy by ensuring that there is a post-18 education system that is providing the skills that employers need.
- Value for money: looking at how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies. This is to ensure that future funding arrangements across post-18 education are transparent and do not stop people from accessing higher education or training.

The Department for Education published the terms of reference [38] for the review.

A call for evidence [39] was made on 21 March 2018 to inform the review panel’s thinking on the issues set out in the terms of reference.

The House of Commons Library published a briefing [40] (CPB-8239) on the review in February 2019.

English and maths Functional Skills qualifications

English and mathematics Functional Skills are qualifications that offer an accessible and practical route for students who want to develop and improve their skills in these subjects. They are studied
primarily by students who are over the age of 16 and in a range of settings, including in further education (FE) colleges, adult and community learning settings, the workplace and prisons.

In February 2018, the Government issued its response to the outcome of a consultation on reformed subject content for Functional Skills qualifications in English and mathematics, held between 12 September and 7 November 2017.

The reforms aimed to improve the recognition and credibility of these qualifications with employers. The qualifications were introduced in 2010 and the reformed qualifications will be introduced in 2019.

In June 2018, following consultations, Ofqual, the examinations regulator, published its detailed decisions on the rules and guidance for how it would regulate the new Functional Skills qualifications in English and mathematics. The changes aim to increase comparability between qualifications offered by different awarding organisations and over time, and to ensure greater control of standards.

**National Leaders of Further Education appointed**

In January 2018, the Apprenticeships and Skills Minister announced the setting up of a group containing some of the country’s top college principals, to provide support to underperforming colleges to help drive up standards and improve the quality of teaching.

The seven National Leaders of Further Education (NLFE) are college leaders from colleges judged to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ through inspections, and who have a strong track record of delivering improvement, both in their own colleges and in working with others.

**2017**

**All-age careers strategy**

See the item in ‘National Reforms in School Education’.

**Establishing Institutes of Technology**

In December 2017, the Department for Education invited applications from employers and higher and further education and training providers to establish new Institutes of Technology (IoTs), which will specialise in delivering higher level technical skills.

Businesses and providers will work together to deliver provision to learners that offers the skills required by employers in technical disciplines, and in particular in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths). The aim is for these new institutions to help tackle the skills gap at local, regional and national levels.

**Select Committee inquiry into apprenticeships and skills training**

In November 2017, the House of Commons Education Committee began an inquiry into the quality of apprenticeships and skills training.

The inquiry will examine all forms of apprenticeships and skills training funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The Committee is considering the following issues.

- The quality of current provision, how this varies by sector, level and region, and the impact of
the quality and oversight of training provided by subcontractors.

The quality of training received by the socially disadvantaged, and barriers to them undertaking this training.

On 8 October 2018, the Committee published its report from the inquiry. The Government response was published in December 2018.

Expanded role for Further Education (FE) Commissioner

In November 2017, the Department for Education published details of an expanded role for the Further Education (FE) Commissioner.

The FE Commissioner role was established in 2013 as an independent adviser to ministers. The Commissioner was given responsibility for assessing the capacity of leadership and governance in colleges and adult learning services funded by local authorities and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that have serious weaknesses in quality or financial health.

The expanded role for the FE Commissioner will focus on earlier engagement with colleges with significant risks or that are failing to improve. By engaging with colleges earlier, it is intended that the FE Commissioner will be able to support leadership teams and governing bodies with recommendations that will enable improvement to be accelerated. The Commissioner will also be able to recommend that colleges access greater support to strengthen their capacity - including through the Strategic College Improvement Fund and the National Leaders of Further Education programme.

The FE Commissioner’s annual report, published in November 2018, found that the expanded role of the FE Commissioner has allowed issues in colleges to be proactively tackled, reducing the need for formal intervention across the sector.

Apprenticeship funding from May 2017

The policy for apprenticeship funding in England from May 2017 was announced in a policy paper published in October 2016.

The funding policy supports the changes to the way apprenticeships in England are paid for, underpinned by the apprenticeship levy. It also aims to simplify some of the complex arrangements that previously existed. Funding now follows employer choice, moving away from the previous provider-led model.

Funding principles include that the Government will pay, in full, the training costs of employers with fewer than 50 employees who take on apprentices aged 16 to 18 years. This will also apply to smaller employers who take on 19- to 24-year-olds who were in care (looked after by the local authority), or 19- to 24-year-olds with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. In addition:

- employers of any size, and training providers, who take on 16- to 18-year-olds and 19- to 24-year-olds who were in care, or who have an EHC plan, will receive additional cash
payments to help them to adapt to the new funding model
- providers who train apprentices from the most deprived areas will receive additional funding
- employers will have a longer period than previously to spend apprenticeship funds, and will be able to transfer digital funds to other employers in their supply chains or sector, or to apprenticeship training agencies
- there will be more funding for science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) apprenticeship frameworks.

The policy was updated for apprenticeships starting from August 2018, and included the introduction of a £1000 (€1120*) bursary payment to support care leavers aged 16-24 starting an apprenticeship. It was further updated [58] from 1 April 2019.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.89, ECB [59], 6 August 2018.

**Technical and Further Education Act 2017**


The Act takes forward policies relating to technical and further education [61], [61] which support the Government’s social mobility agenda and seek to boost the country’s productivity by addressing skill shortages and ensuring high quality technical education.

The technical education (TE) measures in the Act focus on supporting the implementation of the reforms to post-16 TE which were set out in the Skills Plan [12] (published in July 2016), and which follow the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education [62] (the Sainsbury Report), published in April 2016. The Act also extends the Institute for Apprenticeships’ remit to cover college-based TE in addition to apprenticeships, and includes measures which support the Institute’s establishment and remit regarding apprenticeships.

The further education (FE) measures introduce a further education insolvency regime, which seeks to support the financial resilience of further education and sixth-form colleges [63], and build on the ongoing area-based reviews of the sector. The regime follows a consultation [64] that was launched in July 2016.

There is also a provision requiring Ofsted, the inspectorate, to comment on careers guidance provided to certain students at further education institutions.

The House of Commons Library published a briefing [65] (CBP-7951) on the reforms to technical education in August 2019.

**Institute for Apprenticeships**

A new Institute for Apprenticeships [66] became operational in April 2017. Established by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 [67], as amended by the Enterprise Act 2016 [68], the Institute is a non-departmental public body [69], sponsored by the Department for Education (DfE) [70]. It is employer-led, with an independent chair, who leads a board of employers, business leaders and their representatives.

The Institute’s main functions are:

- developing and maintaining quality criteria for the approval of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans
- supporting the development of standards and assessment plans by employer groups, and
reviewing and approving these
• publishing approved standards and assessment plans
• advising on the maximum amount of government funding that can be drawn down by
employers for individual apprenticeship standards
• quality assuring the delivery of apprentice end-point assessments, where employer groups have
been unable to propose other arrangements.

The Institute’s remit was expanded under the Technical and Further Education Act 2017 [60]. Since
April 2018, it has also covered school-based technical education. On 31 January 2019, its name
changed to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to reflect this expanded remit.

Apprenticeship levy

An apprenticeship levy came into effect on 6 April 2017. All UK employers with a pay bill of over £3
million (€3.50 million*) per year must pay the levy, which is set at 0.5% of the value of the employer’s
annual pay bill, minus an apprenticeship levy allowance of £15,000 (€17,525*) per financial year.

The House of Commons Library briefing [71] SN03052, published in January 2019, provides background
information on apprenticeships policy.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.85, ECB [59], 6 April 2017.

Apprenticeship targets

On 1 April 2017, an apprenticeship target for public sector bodies came into force. This requires a
minimum of 2.3% of workers starting each year in larger public sector bodies in England (those with
250 or more employees) to be apprentices.

The Enterprise Act 2016 [68] provided the Secretary of State [72] with the power to set targets for
apprenticeships in public bodies in England to contribute towards meeting national targets. A national
target of three million new apprenticeships by 2020 was set in the 2015 Queen’s Speech [73]. In
addition, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 [74] placed an obligation on the Government to report
annually on its progress towards meeting this target.

The Department for Education issued updated guidance [75] for public bodies in scope of the public
sector apprenticeship target in February 2018.

The House of Commons Library briefing [71] SN03052, published in January 2019, provides background
information on apprenticeships policy.

T Levels: Technical pathways for post-16 education

In its March 2017 Budget, the Government announced the introduction [76] of new 16-19 ‘T Levels’. T
Levels will replace thousands of technical qualifications with T levels in 25 subject areas. At age 16,
students will choose between the ‘academic option’, studying A levels [77], leading to entry to an
undergraduate degree course, and the new ‘technical option’. Both options will be on an equal
footing.

The 2017 Budget confirmed that the number of programme hours of training for 16- to 19-year-olds
on technical routes would increase by 50%, to an average of 900 hours per year. Each student will
also undertake an industry work placement as part of their course, and maintenance loans (for living
costs) will be available to students taking higher-level technical courses at National Colleges and
Institutes of Technology, as they are for university students.

In October 2017, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the first three T Levels would be introduced in 2020/21, rather than 2019/20 as previously announced. The full complement of T Levels is planned to be available from 2022/23. See the updated (October 2019) guide on the Introduction of T Levels and the T Level action plan: 2019 for more information.

The House of Commons Library briefing CBP-7951, published in August 2019, provides the policy background to the reforms to technical education and related reforms.

Article last reviewed November 2019.

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