2020

Roll-out of T Levels

T Levels are new technical qualifications for study after the age of 16, which will begin to be introduced from September 2020. They will provide a technical pathway of equivalent standing to the academic option of A Levels [1], which lead to entry to an undergraduate degree course. One T Level will have equivalence to three A Levels.

The Government originally announced the introduction [2] of T Levels in its March 2017 budget [3], outlining its intention to replace thousands of technical qualifications with T levels in 25 subject areas.

The 2017 Budget also stated that the number of programme hours of training for 16- to 19-year-olds on technical (T Level) routes would increase by 50%, to an average of 900 hours per year, and that each student would undertake an industry work placement as part of their course. Maintenance loans (for living costs) will also 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 [4] for Education announced [5] that the first three T Levels (in digital production, design and development; design, surveying and planning; and education) would be introduced in 2020/21, with the full complement of T Levels planned to be available from 2022/23. Two guidance publications, the Introduction of T Levels [6] (updated 2019) and the T Level action plan: 2019 [7], provide further information.

A new T Level Professional Development (TLPD) [8] offer, led by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), launched in May 2019 and is accessible free of charge to providers planning to deliver T Levels. This offer is being shaped around the needs of providers and their workforce alongside relevant regional, employer and curriculum needs.

The House of Commons Library briefing [9] CBP-7951, published in December 2019, provides the policy background to the reforms to technical education.

In February 2020, in addition, the Government announced [10] the setting-up of the T Levels Capital Fund [11]. This aims to provide funding to allow providers to ensure they can provide access to the industry standard equipment and high-quality facilities that will be required to deliver T Levels. Providers can bid to access funds to refurbish existing buildings or create new spaces and, from spring 2021, all providers will be allocated funding for specialist equipment such as digital and audio-visual kit.
Further education workforce development and monitoring

In February 2020, the Secretary of State for Education announced a package of support to assist further education (FE) providers to ‘recruit, retain and develop excellent teachers’. The package includes:

- £11 million (€12 million*) to provide bursaries and grants worth up to £26,000 (€28,463*) to attract talented people to train to teach in FE, in priority subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), English and special educational needs (SEN) teaching.
- A £10 million (€10.9 million*) increase in funding for the Taking Teaching Further programme, which supports industry professionals working in sectors such as engineering and computing to retrain as FE teachers. The additional funding will support up to 550 more people to train to teach a range of technical subjects in 2020.
- £3 million (€3.28 million*) for mentor training programmes, designed and delivered by the sector body the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), to support FE teachers, including early career teachers, to develop and progress.

At the same time, following a consultation held between March and June 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed that it will introduce an annual data collection on the FE workforce, starting in the 2020/21 academic year. This data collection will be conducted by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), an executive agency of the DfE.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.91, ECB, 26 March 2020.

College Collaboration Fund

In February 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) launched the College Collaboration Fund, which will support colleges to work together to share their knowledge, expertise and best practice. The new fund, which will dispense £9 million (€9.86 million*), will build on the Strategic College Improvement Fund, which 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.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.91, ECB, 26 March 2020.

Institute for Apprenticeships consults on reform of funding and quality assurance arrangements

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education launched a consultation, in February 2020, on proposals to reform how apprenticeship funding levels are set. It aims to create a more transparent funding model, based on data showing the actual costs of delivering apprenticeships.

A research report published alongside the consultation found that, across the 54 apprenticeship standards studied, the overall mean cost per apprenticeship (for delivering elements eligible for government funding) was £8655 (€9475*), and the total including ineligible costs was £11,062 (€12,110), but costs varied widely by a range of factors related to apprenticeship level, duration and route.

The consultation runs until 6 April 2020 and the Institute plans to launch the new model later in 2020.

A second consultation from the Institute covers proposals for a simplified system of external quality assurance (EQA). This would see a move away from the delivery of EQA by a wide range of
different organisations to delivery by either Ofqual [25] or, for integrated degree apprenticeships, the Office for Students (OfS) [26]. This runs until 9 April and is anticipated to lead to proposals of next steps in the summer.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.91, ECB [18], 26 March 2020.

What Works Centre proposed for further education and adult learning sector

In January 2020, the Social Mobility Commission [27], an advisory non-departmental public body [28] sponsored by the Department for Education, published a policy brief [29] setting out the case for a What Works Centre for further education (FE) [30] and adult learning.

The What Works Network [31] is a cross-government initiative, established in 2013, that aims to improve service delivery by government and other public sector organisations by basing decision-making on the best available evidence, and using high quality methods to find out what works if evidence is lacking. Existing What Works Centres cover areas including educational achievement, early intervention, and children’s social care.

The Commission undertook an evidence review which found that:

- the FE and adult learning sector lacks a structured approach to boosting research, experimentation and evaluation to fill evidence gaps, compared with other policy areas such as school education
- there is no sector-wide mechanism to share best practice with those commissioning and delivering provision.

Its policy brief recommends that the Government should create an independent What Works Centre with the remit of improving attainment for disadvantaged individuals aged 16 and over in FE and adult learning, covering both classroom and work-based training.

The Social Mobility Commission published its evidence review [32] alongside the policy brief.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.93, ECB [18], 23 March 2020.

2019

Opportunity Areas programme extended

See the item [33] in ‘National Reforms in School Education’.

First Institutes of Technology open

The first new Institutes of Technology (IoTs) [34] were opened in September 2019. IoTs are collaborations between further education (FE) [30] providers, higher education institutions (HEIs) [35] and employers. They specialise in delivering higher technical education (at Level 4 [36] and Level 5 [37] of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) [38]), 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.

The IoTs were launched in December 2017 when the DfE invited the first applications from collaborations of employers, and FE/HE and training providers, interested in establishing them.
The DfE invited applications to a second wave of IoTs in February 2020.

**Education Inspection Framework introduced**

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

**Adult education budget devolution**

On 1 August 2019 the Government 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. Funding for adult learners living outside the devolved areas is provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

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 an initial series of devolution deals 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 from the Secretary of State for Education to the combined authorities.

The Government has published guidance for providers on funding agreements and AEB allocation.

**Higher technical education review**

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

Specifically, the consultation set out a proposed approach to creating a system of employer-led national standards and invited views on the principles and processes underpinning this. It also set 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, which responded to the recommendations in the Sainsbury Report. DfE also issued a policy paper on higher technical education to accompany the consultation, which ran until 29 September 2019, while the House of Commons Library published a briefing (CBP-8732) on Level 4 and 5 education in November 2019.

At the time of writing (March 2020), the DfE is analysing responses to the consultation.

**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 in February 2018, issued its report. 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 [53] in order to ensure a national network of high quality technical provision.
- The number of Level 4 [36] and 5 [37] 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 [35], 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 [54].
- Funding for Level 6 [55] apprenticeships and above should be available only for those who have not previously undertaken a publicly supported degree.
- Ofsted [56] should become the lead responsible body for inspecting apprenticeships at all levels, meaning that the Office for Students (OfS) [26] would no longer be the sole regulator for Level 6 and 7 [57] apprenticeships.

The Conservative Government elected in December 2019 made a commitment, in the background briefing [58] to the Queen’s Speech that month, to consider ‘the thoughtful recommendations made in the Augar Review carefully’ (page 41).


College oversight: support and intervention

In April 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a new policy document, College oversight: support and intervention [60], setting out how it will support and intervene to improve financial resilience and quality in colleges.

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 [61] to review provision in a local area
- use of independent business reviews to support effective decision making
- introduction of the statutory college insolvency regime.

2018

College governance

On 20 November 2018, the Further education corporations and sixth-form college corporations: governance guide [62] was issued. The guidance states the legal and regulatory requirements and
recommended practice that apply to further education (FE) and sixth-form college corporations. The guidance is updated periodically; the 2018 publication replaced ‘College governance: a guide’, published in 2014.

**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 [53] and sixth-form colleges [63] from 2018/19.

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

The statement was made in the DfE’s response [64] to a consultation [65] held between April and June 2018.

**Flexible Learning Fund**

On 29 March 2018, the Department for Education announced [66] the 32 projects that would receive a share of £11.7 million (€12.8 million*) from the Flexible Learning Fund. The Fund supports 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 [3], the Government announced that it would spend up to £40 million (€43.8 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 [67] was launched as part of this pilot programme, with the aim of providing 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 a background briefing [68] (CBP-7708) (March 2019) on adult further education funding since 2010.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.91, ECB [18], 26 March 2020.

**English and maths Functional Skills qualifications**

English and maths 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 [53], adult and community learning settings, the workplace and prisons.

In February 2018, the Government issued its response [69] to the outcome of a consultation on reformed subject content for Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths, held between 12 September and 7 November 2017.

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

Article last reviewed March 2020.

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