



Policy paper

Higher technical education reforms

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What qualifications reforms are being proposed

The Department for Education (DfE) is planning to improve higher technical education to help people train or retrain for high-skilled jobs. These reforms will cover learners studying for higher technical education qualifications.

The reforms are designed to:

- improve the quality of higher technical education on offer
- encourage more people to take higher technical education courses and get high-skilled work
- introduce a national approval scheme, to show which higher technical qualifications meet employers' skills needs

To support reforms to technical education, the government has already announced:

- £1.5 billion to upgrade the existing further education (FE) estate in England as announced in the [2020 budget](#)
- up to £290m for [Institutes of Technology](#)
- £2.5 billion for a national skills fund to help adults and employers access training as announced in the [2020 budget](#)

Why we need the reforms

Currently, learners find it hard to:

- choose courses which are right for their chosen career
- judge the value or quality of a course before they enrol
- see how courses might lead to employment or what employers are looking for
- see the benefits of higher technical education because trusted people like parents and careers advisors are often less aware of it

Employers find it hard to:

- recruit enough highly skilled people as there is currently a higher technical skills shortage
- recruit people who have the right level of specialist skills for the roles they're advertising
- identify the right training to upskill their staff

The government consultation found broad support for the proposed reforms, which includes:

- 96% of consultation respondents supporting our plan to introduce a national, employer-led scheme to approve level 4 and 5 courses
- 93% of respondents agreeing that there is a need for more people to participate in higher technical education
- 95% of respondents supporting our proposals to boost the profile and awareness of higher technical education
- 91% of respondents supporting our proposals to improve information, advice and guidance relating to higher technical education

These reforms will help:

- learners, who will have more information about higher technical education, a clearer sense of which courses offer what employers are looking for, and access to high-quality courses that lead to high-skilled jobs
- employers, who will benefit from more highly skilled workers, and can play a role in developing high-quality courses

They will also help:

- awarding bodies, who will see increased demand for their approved, employer-recognised qualifications
- providers, who will see increased demand for courses which have been developed with employers and may lead to better employment prospects for learners

How we'll carry the reforms out

We're working with further and higher education providers, employers, awarding bodies, learners, career advisors and representative bodies to put in place these reforms. This follows a government consultation, which ran between 8 July and 29 September 2019 on improving higher technical education, and the [government's response](#) to the consultation and the [Higher technical education: consultation analysis](#), both published in July 2020.

Approval scheme

We plan to develop a national opt-in approval scheme, run by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which will demonstrate where higher technical qualifications provide the skills that employers need. Employers will define the skills and requirements for approved higher technical qualifications by participating in higher technical education route panels. We plan to introduce newly-approved digital qualifications in 2022, potentially leading to jobs like network engineer or software developer. Approved qualifications in health and sciences and construction will follow in 2023.

Course quality

We plan to work with Institutes of Technology, National Colleges and other providers to support them to offer high-quality higher technical courses. At the next Spending Review, we will explore the possibility of additional funding to help providers improve the quality of their courses and increase the number of places available for learners. We also plan to work with the Office for Students and Ofsted to ensure that higher technical education meets the needs of learners and employers.

Raising awareness and encouraging uptake

We plan to develop a new brand for approved higher technical qualifications, and to run a campaign to encourage people of all ages looking to upskill or retrain to study higher technical courses. We also plan to work with UCAS, the [National Careers Service](#) and other careers organisations to improve information and guidance around higher technical education.

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