



Department  
for Education

# Higher Technical Education

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 08 July 2019**

**Respond by 29 September 2019**

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## Foreword by the Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills



England has too few people gaining the technical skills that our economy needs. We need more computer programmers, engineers, electricians, veterinary nurses, and graphic designers. We need more technicians in fields from advanced manufacturing to healthcare, construction to telecommunications.

The Industrial Strategy White Paper and Conservative Party Manifesto (2017) set out long-term plans to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK. This included an ambition to have a gold standard technical education system so we get the skilled workers we need right up to the highest level. Reforms are already underway for a new approach to 16 to 19 technical education. T Levels will be a distinctive educational offer to prepare individuals for skilled employment. Our apprenticeships are offering high-quality work-based learning.

We now need to ensure there are high-quality progression routes for students achieving T Levels, as well as those already in work looking to upskill and retrain. Current uptake of higher technical qualifications is low by international standards, compared with the past and by comparison to other levels. Countries like Germany and France outperform us in this regard. We want to raise England's higher technical skills base to compete and improve our productivity.

To do this, we have already supported the establishment of four flagship employer-led National Colleges. These are delivering high-quality skills training for the digital, creative, nuclear and high speed rail sectors. We are rolling out across the country Institutes of Technology. These are collaborations between existing Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges and employers. These will specialise in capital-intensive Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths provision with a focus on engineering and manufacturing, digital, and construction. These institutions will increase the provision of higher technical education.

In addition, over the last year, the government has undertaken a comprehensive review of taught higher technical education (the Level 4-5 Review). In doing so, we have gathered evidence and listened to many Further and Higher Education providers, Awarding Organisations, employers and others.

This document sets out our proposals to address the multiple related challenges which we have identified through the Review. Our ambitions include:

- Ensuring we have **prestigious higher technical qualifications** that provide the skills that employers want. We want it to be clearer for employers and students which higher technical qualifications satisfy employer requirements, and which provide a high-quality option for young people looking to progress from T Levels or apprenticeships, or for adults looking to upskill or retrain. So our lead proposal is for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to approve qualifications which deliver the knowledge, skills, and behaviours set out in employer-led occupational standards.
- Making sure that **colleges, universities and other providers** offer high-quality higher technical courses. National Colleges and the 12 recently announced IoTs will be flagships for STEM courses.
- Improving **information, advice, guidance and support** to encourage more adults and young people to gain higher technical skills.

Change will not happen overnight. Higher technical education has been an area of relative neglect over decades. And the proposals in this consultation will take time and sustained focus to deliver. The contributions of employers, Local Enterprise Partnerships, providers, professional bodies, Awarding Bodies, families and students are essential.

We also recognise that the incentives and financial support for higher technical education are another important part of any successful higher technical education system. The government is considering how it can support access to high-quality courses and provision as part of the Post-18 Review of Education and Funding.

However, I believe that the reforms proposed in this consultation document are the first crucial steps on a path to transform higher technical education. I hope you will feed your views into this consultation so that together we can unlock the potential of our people and our economy.



**The Rt Hon Anne Milton MP**

**Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships**

## Introduction

This comprehensive review of higher technical education is the first for many years, working in partnership with Further Education and Higher Education providers, Awarding Bodies, employers and others. This review is looking at level 4 and 5 qualifications in subjects aligned to technical routes.

## Who this is for

The consultation is for anyone with an interest in technical education and training for young people and adults in England. This includes:

- Students, including Adult Learners
- Parents and carers
- Employers
- Awarding Organisations/Bodies
- Schools
- Further Education providers
- Higher Education providers
- Adult Education providers
- Head teachers and college principals
- Teachers and trainers
- Careers advisers
- Regulatory bodies
- Equality organisations
- Local authorities
- The devolved administrations
- Representative bodies, including sector bodies, employers' representative bodies and trade unions
- Governors of Education and Skills Providers
- Local Enterprise Partnerships

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 08 July 2019

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation, you can contact the team by emailing [higher-technical.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:higher-technical.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [consultation.unit@education.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@education.gov.uk) telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE contact us page](#).

## Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## Outcomes from the consultation

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on GOV.UK in early 2020.

## Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the on-line system wherever possible. Visit [consult.education.gov.uk](http://consult.education.gov.uk) to submit your response.

## Other ways to respond

If, for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example, because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the consultation document and email or post your response.

By email: [higher-technical.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:higher-technical.consultation@education.gov.uk)

By post to:

Higher Technical Education Review Team  
Level 5  
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St Pauls Place  
125 Norfolk Street  
Sheffield S1 2FJ

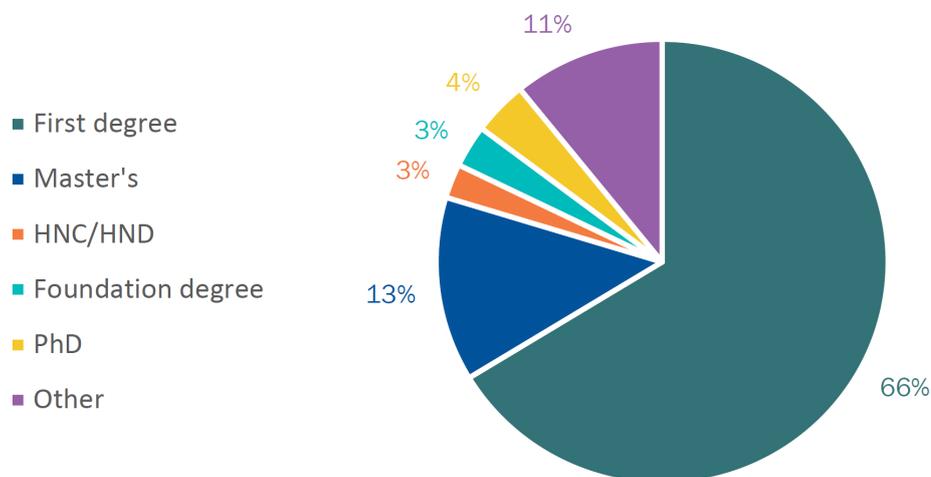
## Deadline

The consultation closes on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2019

## Summary of proposals

1. The UK has a fundamentally strong economy. We have some of the highest employment rates in Europe.<sup>1</sup> We are a location of choice for businesses at the cutting edge of innovation and technology, attracting more overseas investment in research and development than many major countries, including Germany, France and China.<sup>2</sup> And our flexible labour market, high levels of employment and competitive environment – with high standards and a dependable rule of law – make us a great place to do business.
2. But for all these strengths, we can do better in developing the skills of our workforce. As described in more detail in the Case for Change (published alongside this consultation document and referred to throughout), higher technical education (HTE) is poorly understood and lacks currency both with employers and students, despite increasing demand for skills at this level. As a result, we have fallen behind both international competitors in countries like Germany and France, and our own historic levels of student uptake. The current volume is unlikely to meet current and future skills needs. Change is needed to address skills shortages, boost productivity and support social mobility.

**Figure 1: Students on higher education courses in England by qualification type, 2016/17<sup>3</sup>**



Source: HESA student record 2016/17; ILR 2016/17; AP statistics 2016/17

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<sup>1</sup> [Employment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level](#) (Eurostat 2018)

<sup>2</sup> [R&D expenditure](#) (Eurostat 2018)

<sup>3</sup> [Solving future skills challenges](#) (UUK 2018)

3. Our vision is for HTE to be a prestigious choice that delivers high levels of occupational competence, encourages more students to continue to study after completing A Levels or T Levels and attracts workers of all ages looking to upskill and retrain.
4. This is just one part of our wider plans to reform, strengthen and grow technical education as a whole. Through investments in apprenticeships, the roll-out of T Levels at level 3, and now – as set out below – through reform of HTE. These reforms share a common goal, to raise quality by putting employers at the heart of technical education. As explained below, they work through the common framework of employer-led occupational standards.
5. This consultation outlines our proposed reforms to HTE in England. These deliver on our commitments in the Post-16 Skills Plan, which responded to the recommendations in the Sainsbury Report. Where relevant the consultation references recommendations to improve the quality and uptake of higher technical qualifications (HTQs) made by the Post-18 Review independent panel in their recent report. Government has not yet taken decisions with regards to the recommendations put forward by the panel, but it will consider them carefully and will deliver its conclusions at the Spending Review.
6. Our starting point is to raise the prestige of HTE and strengthen its value to employers by putting quality first. Improving quality now will lead to increased uptake of HTE in the future. The following chapters set out the steps we are proposing to take to achieve this:

**A. Prestigious qualifications that are recognised nationally as providing the skills that employers want.**

Chapter 1 sets out our proposed approach to signalling which qualifications deliver the knowledge, skills, and behaviours set out in occupational standards, so that students and employers can have confidence in them. This will be delivered through the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute), working with employers through its Route Panels. Awarding Bodies that offer HTQs will have the opportunity to seek Institute approval of those qualifications against occupational standards, as part of a straightforward, streamlined process. We believe that this will help qualifications at this level command the confidence of students and employers alike.

**B. More high-quality courses delivered in FE and HE providers, including National Colleges and Institutes of Technology.**

Chapter 2 sets out our ambition to boost HTE quality and opportunities across the country, accompanied by regional/local leadership. We propose developing, with the Office for Students, a set of technical ongoing registration conditions to enable providers delivering courses leading to Institute-approved HTQs to demonstrate and improve the quality of their technical provision. We also propose linking student and provider funding for HTQs to those conditions. We welcome views on how we can ensure students' experience of HTE teaching and provision meets high standards and ensures that it delivers the skills that employers need.

**C. That higher technical qualifications become a positive and popular choice both for younger students and for those upskilling and retraining while in the workforce.**

Chapter 3 outlines how we intend to make HTE a more positive and popular choice for higher study and upskilling. It sets out the ways we propose to stimulate demand and raise awareness of our new suite of Institute-approved HTQs in schools and colleges, and among potential students and employers.

7. We recognise that these reforms will be challenging to deliver. We are committed to working with everyone who wants to build a better HTE offer to ensure these reforms are a success.

The accompanying **Case for Change** contains the evidence base drawn on throughout this consultation document. It sets out the interrelated challenges within the current system and provides the rationale for reform.

# 1. Higher technical qualifications (HTQs)

## Summary of proposals

- National approval of qualifications which deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in employer-led occupational standards (see paragraphs 10-23);
- Using panels of employers (the Institute's Route Panels) to oversee the approval of qualifications (see paragraph 24). We will work with the Institute to ensure the process of approval is streamlined and straightforward;
- Strong incentives including clearly signalling the approved qualifications using a clear, single name or kitemark, supported by wider information, advice and guidance. The Post-18 Review panel have recommended that these approved qualifications should be entitled to the same tuition fee support and teaching grant, and equivalent maintenance support, as level 6 qualifications. This will be considered as part of the Spending Review and the government's response to the Post-18 Review (see paragraphs 29-32);
- Wider regulation of bodies that award Institute-approved qualifications through the existing systems provided by Ofqual and OfS (see paragraphs 40-41).

8. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the Secretary of State announced the government's plan to identify and recognise existing and new qualifications that meet the knowledge and skills needed by employers. This chapter explains how we will implement this through the Institute's approval of qualifications against occupational standards.
9. Our vision is for higher technical education (HTE) to be a prestigious choice that delivers high levels of occupational competence and supports entry to skilled employment, for those seeking to enter industry or progress within an existing career. This means that the aims of HTQs should be to:
  - Deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are needed for an occupation(s) and valued by employers;
  - Be understood and recognised as high-quality by employers and so have labour market currency; and,
  - Give students confidence that qualifications are recognised by employers and are seen as a credible and prestigious alternative to other options such as direct entry to a degree or an apprenticeship.

**Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed aims of HTQs set out in paragraph 9 above?**

## **Key principles behind our reforms to HTQs**

- Evidence has shown that employer involvement in qualification design is crucial for high-quality technical education. We must place employers at the centre of our reforms;
- We want to retain the good practice that exists in a number of key sectors where qualifications are already well-recognised and valued by employers;
- Reforms must reflect the valuable role of Higher Education providers and Awarding Organisations in designing and awarding HTQs. Reforms must therefore engage with and work for both types of Awarding Body;
- Regulation should be coherent across the regulatory regimes operating at levels 4-5 led by the Office for Students (OfS) and Ofqual;
- Any new system should work for providers, students and employers;
- We want to encourage innovation and competition, without undermining quality;
- Reformed qualifications should be part of a coherent technical education system. Students should be able to progress easily to higher levels and between taught/apprenticeship-based approaches.

## **Occupational standards**

10. There is currently no consistent national approach to ensure that HTQs meet employer needs. This may be contributing to low employer awareness, understanding and confidence in qualifications at this level. It also means potential students would find it difficult to know which qualifications hold labour market currency.
11. We therefore propose to ask the Institute to signal which qualifications at levels 4-5 meet employer needs by approving those that deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in employer-led occupational standards.
12. Each occupational standard is developed on the initiative of a [trailblazer group](#), a group of employers who determine the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to acquire occupational competence. Trailblazer groups are also often supported by appropriate professional bodies and build on existing professional standards. Occupational standards are used as the basis for apprenticeships, as

well as T Level qualifications at level 3. We are therefore proposing to use them as the basis for Institute approval of HTQs at level 4-5 as well.

13. We see this alignment of employer-led standards across apprenticeships, T Levels and HTQs as central to the success of our technical education reforms. The approach brings several benefits: students will be able to progress more easily from taught programmes to apprenticeships and vice versa; training providers may be able to use the same teachers and equipment with both students and apprentices; and employers could potentially train different staff towards the same endpoint via either apprenticeships or taught courses, depending on circumstances.
14. [Occupational maps](#) are a graphical representation of this common framework of standards, which the Institute is responsible for developing and keeping up to date. The maps are defined through analysis of labour market information and the insight of employers, and list the occupations that may be accessed through technical education (whether apprenticeships or taught programmes). For each of the 15 technical educational routes defined in the Sainsbury Report, the maps categorise occupations into 'technical' (levels 2 and 3), 'higher technical' (levels 4 and 5) and 'professional' (level 6-plus), thereby showing how someone could progress to increasingly advanced occupations as they move through their career. The Institute is currently undertaking a programme of reviews of all of the occupations and accompanying standards in each route, and we have asked it, through this process, to ensure that there is comprehensive coverage of occupations and standards at levels 4 and 5.

## **Institute-approved qualifications**

15. We are proposing that Awarding Bodies will be able to put forward qualifications for approval, specifying in each case which occupational standard (or standards – see paragraph 35) their qualification aligns with. We want the first Institute-approved HTQs to be available to be taught from 2022, when the first T Level students will complete their courses.

**Figure 2: Institute-approved HTQs and their level of award within the wider education framework**

Levels	Qualifications/ Programmes	Apprenticeships
6+	Degrees	Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
5	Institute-Approved Higher Technical Qualifications <sup>1</sup>	
4		
3	Level 3 including A Levels and T Levels <sup>2</sup>	Advanced Apprenticeships
2	GCSE and other Level 2	Intermediate Apprenticeships
1 and below	Level 1 and Entry Level	

<sup>1</sup> Review of Higher Technical Education at Levels 4 and 5 in England

<sup>2</sup> The Government is reviewing post-16 Level 3 and below qualifications in England (excluding T Levels, A Levels and GCSEs)

### Working with what is already good

16. Through our Review, we have found evidence of some good practice in HTQs. In particular sectors, individual high-quality qualifications are recognised and valued by employers and students. In light of this, we propose that Awarding Bodies should be able to submit their existing qualifications for Institute approval, as well as new qualifications developed for this purpose. We also expect that more than one high-quality HTQ might be approved as meeting the requirements of the same occupational standard.
17. We are proposing that this will be an opt-in system. Awarding Bodies will choose whether to submit their qualifications for Institute approval – but with clear incentives to take part as set out below (see paragraphs 29-32). We will work with the Institute to develop an effective process for managing the flow of qualifications coming forward for approval, which we expect will mirror the phased approach we are taking to the rollout of T Levels.
18. To secure approval, Awarding Bodies should review their qualification and make any necessary amendments to ensure that it delivers the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the occupational standard. This should happen before submitting the qualification for Institute approval. At the end of the process, the Institute will provide feedback to Awarding Bodies to ensure qualifications can be further revised, where appropriate, to meet the requirements of the occupational standard.

19. To ensure currency of the qualifications, approval will be reviewed on a regular basis, as and when occupational standards and/or qualifications are updated. This will align with the regular reviews of occupational standards, which is a statutory obligation of the Institute.

### **Ensuring consistency of learning outcomes**

20. The purpose of Institute approval is to ensure that qualifications deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for an occupation, to clearly signal that fact to employers, and thereby ensure that completing the qualification enables entry to that occupation. This means learning outcomes must be consistent and transparent.

21. We recognise that some knowledge, skills and behaviours that are required for full occupational competence may need experience in the workplace to be developed. In the same way that T Levels do not cover every occupation, we propose that the Institute and employer panels should therefore decide whether taught provision is appropriate for each occupation. For example, the Institute might decide not to approve qualifications relating to an occupation if it determines that taught provision cannot command the confidence of employers and/or deliver a sufficient breadth and depth of competence to enter that occupation.

22. To approve a qualification, the Institute must be satisfied that the qualification gives the student the opportunity to achieve all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that can reasonably be attained through taught provision. Before approving a qualification, the Institute must also check with the relevant agency (OfS/Ofqual) that the Awarding Body has met regulatory requirements (see paragraphs 40-41).

23. In order to ensure that a qualification delivers the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in an occupational standard, the Institute would review the qualification content to check that it has appropriate coverage. It will also need to review the assessment materials and methods, to ensure they appropriately cover the knowledge, skills and behaviours, and to the required level of competence.

### **Putting employers at the centre**

24. Institute approval will be overseen by panels of employers, called Route Panels, which currently provide occupational expertise in the approval of standards and T Level qualifications, and which make recommendations to the Institute's employer-led Board. Employers and industry experts will therefore be at the heart

of the approval process. We will work with the Institute to ensure that this process is streamlined, straightforward and timely, and will provide further detail in our response to the consultation. Securing approval will clearly signal to employers that a qualification delivers the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to enter that occupation. This approach aligns with the wider technical education framework, as outlined in paragraphs 12-14.

**Question: Are there any points you would like to raise regarding our proposal for Awarding Bodies to voluntarily submit qualifications for approval by the Institute against occupational standards?**

### **Arrangements for handling copyright and intellectual property**

25. There is currently a well-functioning market at level 4-5 with a broad mix of Awarding Bodies operating; few barriers to entry, exit and expansion; and opportunities for Awarding Organisations to differentiate themselves from their competitors<sup>4</sup>. There are individual examples of high-quality qualifications that are well-recognised by employers. These qualifications cater for a diverse set of situations and students, including people from a range of backgrounds studying for varied purposes, and a large volume of adult learners. We are proposing to maintain this diverse and competitive market through an opt-in system that enables more than one qualification to be approved against a given occupational standard.

26. This is in contrast to the position for T Levels, where, as recommended by the Independent Panel on Technical Education, only one qualification is approved per occupation or group of occupations. Development of the qualification is directly commissioned and funded by the Institute and transfer of copyright in the relevant course documents is required to maintain continuity of content and assessment over time and ensure that each qualification can be carried forward as necessary if, for example, the Awarding Organisation becomes insolvent. Requiring transfer of copyright as a matter of course for approved higher technical qualifications could act as a disincentive to Awarding Bodies opting in and thereby have a negative effect on the health of the market for HTQs.

27. In light of the above, we propose that where the conditions described above (paragraph 25) apply, no transfer of copyright is generally likely to be necessary. There may nevertheless be some cases where it could be appropriate for

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<sup>4</sup> [Review of the Level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

copyright in the relevant course documents to transfer to the Institute. For example, this might apply in cases where the Institute needs to prime the market (see paragraph 34). Equally, there might be cases where the market has only a very small number of qualifications suitable for approval against a given occupational standard. In such cases, the Institute might take a reservation over the copyright, to be exercised only where necessary to ensure continuity if there was a gap in the market caused by an Awarding Body becoming insolvent.

28. We will work with the Institute to develop a suitable approach to handling the transfer of copyright. This is likely to include producing a set of criteria that the Institute would apply in determining the circumstances in which copyright in a qualification's relevant course documents should transfer to the Institute. Awarding Bodies applying for approval would be informed of any such decision before the qualification is approved, with the opportunity to withdraw from consideration at that stage.

**Question: What is your view on our proposal that, upon approval of a higher technical qualification, there should generally be no transfer of copyright?**

**What are your views about the circumstances in which it could be appropriate for the transfer of copyright to apply?**

### **Signalling and incentivising quality**

29. We will create a clear set of signals that will enable employers and learners to easily identify the best qualifications with national labour market relevance. We want to incentivise providers to gravitate towards approved qualifications rather than those that have not met the Institute's quality requirements. This will tilt the playing field towards qualifications which have been identified by panels of employers as delivering the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for an occupation.
30. Qualifications approved by the Institute would be clearly identified through a single name or kitemark. This will enable employers to identify easily which qualifications deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need. In turn, this clear mark of employer recognition would give confidence to prospective students that the HTQs have labour market currency. Government-backed promotion and marketing of the kitemark, as well as public support of Institute-approved HTQs by employers and professional bodies, would help to make them prestigious and well-recognised. Institute approval will also come with wider support through information, advice and guidance (see chapter 3).
31. Approved qualifications will therefore clearly stand out as being high-quality, labour market relevant, and having national currency. These benefits will

enhance the offer and credibility of even those existing qualifications that have a relatively good level of employer awareness.

32. In addition, we know it will be very important to ensure that HTE is properly funded. Funding will also form an important incentive for Awarding Bodies to submit their qualifications for approval and discourage provision of rival qualifications that have not been approved by the Institute. The Post-18 Review panel has recommended that only approved HTQs should be entitled to the same tuition fee support and teaching grant, and equivalent maintenance support, as level 6 qualifications. We want to ensure there are clear incentives to deliver reformed qualifications in the future, and we will consider this as part of the ongoing Spending Review and the government's response to the Post-18 Review.

**Question: As Awarding Organisations and Higher Education providers, how important are the following as incentives to encourage the submission of your qualifications for Institute approval?**

- a. **A clear mark of labour market relevance**
- b. **A competitive funding package (which could include higher tuition fee support, maintenance funding, or better loan terms for students)**
- c. **Enhanced support for potential students through information, advice and guidance (e.g. careers advice)**
- d. **A swift and straightforward process for submission, appraisal and decision-making**
- e. **Other (please specify)**

#### **Addressing gaps in the market**

33. There may be areas of the market where the Institute recognises a need for HTQs to meet a specific skills need at level 4-5, and has published an occupational standard, but where no qualifications are put forward for Institute approval. This may be because Awarding Bodies with existing qualifications have not applied for approval, or because no such qualification exists.

34. In such exceptional cases, we will ask the Institute to consider whether there is a need to prime the market. This could include the option to commission the development of a new qualification in a similar way to those technical qualifications that form a part of a T Level. For T Level qualifications, this involves developing outline content and then inviting tenders from Awarding Bodies to develop a qualification.

## Approving qualifications as part of a flexible system

35. Our intention is to establish a flexible system for qualification approval. As described above, Awarding Bodies will be able to choose whether to submit their qualifications for Institute approval against a standard, with clear incentives to do so (as set out in paragraphs 29-32). This model – approval of qualifications against the knowledge, skills and behaviours in a single occupational standard – is the core model we are proposing. However, we want to understand whether there is demand for additional features including:

- Flexibility to include additional content: it may be beneficial for Awarding Bodies to include a certain amount of occupationally-relevant content in a qualification, which is not aligned to occupational standards. This could respond to specific local and sectoral skills needs or reflect innovative or emerging practices. We are considering to what extent this added value outweighs the dilution of qualification focus and purpose, and whether there should be a limit on such additional content;
- Broader qualifications: whether there is business need for qualifications to be able to cover the knowledge, skills and behaviours in more than one occupational standard;
- Smaller qualifications: whether there is value in Institute approval of smaller, more specialised awards that might cover some but not all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours in a relevant occupation;
- Flexible learning: whether and how modules or smaller qualifications should be approved by the Institute to allow students, especially adults, to step on and off of their course;
- Other requirements: whether it would be beneficial for the Institute to require proficiency in the following, alongside HTQs;
  - Maths, English and Digital skills;
  - Other essential transferable and employability skills;
  - Alignment with professional body standards;
  - A period of work-based learning.

We will work with the Institute to consider these points in more depth.

**Question: Would you support incorporating the above flexibilities/requirements in the Institute approval process, and are there any specific points you would like to raise in relation to the above?**

## Qualifications that are not approved by the Institute

36. Although approximately 88% of level 4-5 students are studying courses that align to technical routes<sup>5</sup>, there may be some level 4-5 qualifications which are not approved by the Institute once the system is implemented. Some of these may fulfil a different purpose to Institute-approved HTQs and therefore fall outside the Institute's remit, for instance:

- Non-technical qualifications, such as a Foundation Degree in English;
- Technical qualifications which, for instance, are not aligned to occupational standards, or are too small or specialised.

37. There may also be qualifications that do fall within the Institute's remit, but are not approved by the Institute. These might include:

- Technical qualifications that have been put forward for Institute approval, but fail to achieve it; and
- Technical qualifications that have not been put forward for Institute approval.

38. We know that clear funding incentives will be of vital importance in encouraging Awarding Bodies to come forward for Institute approval of their HTQs as set out above (paragraph 32). We also need to encourage providers to deliver these qualifications in larger numbers. The Post-18 Review has proposed that non-approved level 4-5 qualifications should attract lower funding in the future in comparison to approved HTQs. For non-approved level 4-5 qualifications, this could include a lower fee cap than for approved qualifications and the removal of eligibility for teaching grant.

39. These proposals will be considered as part of the Spending Review and we will consider what other changes to funding and regulation of non-approved qualifications may be required as the process for Institute approval is implemented. We want to work towards a system that encourages and rewards the study of those qualifications approved by the Institute as delivering the skills that employers want. Similarly, this system should discourage students from studying HTQs that relate to occupational standards but have not been approved by the Institute.

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<sup>5</sup> [Mapping the higher technical landscape](#) (RCU 2018)

## Regulation of bodies that award HTQs

40. Regulation of Awarding Bodies is undertaken by the OfS (for Higher Education providers issuing their own awards) and Ofqual (for Awarding Organisations). The qualifications offered by these bodies are covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition, respectively, which help ensure consistent standards in terms of complexity and challenge.

41. Although there are two separate regulatory regimes operating at level 4-5, they both share broadly similar aims and are currently broadly aligned in approach. Importantly, most Awarding Bodies deliver other qualifications alongside HTQs, and are accustomed to interacting with these regulatory regimes for all parts of their business. On this basis, we intend to retain Ofqual and OfS regulatory arrangements, covering the same parts of the market that they do now.

**Question: Are there any points you would like to raise regarding our approach to retaining existing Ofqual and OfS regulatory arrangements?**

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## 2. Delivery of higher technical education (HTE)

### Summary of proposals

- We want to grow high-quality HTE provision, boost leadership, and encourage greater specialisation and close collaboration with local architecture, so that providers are more effectively and efficiently able to respond to the local skills needs of employers, complementing Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and National Colleges (see paragraphs 42-52);
- We will do this in part by setting out what good quality provision looks like, and strengthening this in the regulatory assurances of providers. This includes developing with the OfS a set of technical ongoing registration conditions for providers delivering courses leading to Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). These will align with the model used to assess the quality of applications for the IoT programme, and act as a precursor to secure access to full public funding for HTQ provision (see paragraphs 53-64);
- We aim to ensure that regulatory assurance means that only high-quality providers deliver the Institute-approved HTQs with access to student finance where appropriate, and other funding and support (see paragraphs 65-76).

42. High-quality qualifications alone will not make HTE the prestigious, distinctive and valued offer that it must become to attract students and employers, and deliver the occupational competence industry needs. These reformed qualifications will only support students to acquire industry-relevant skills if they are delivered by high-quality providers<sup>6</sup>. The quality of teaching, courses and facilities are key to the success and value of HTE.

43. We want high-quality providers regulated by the Office for Students (OfS) to be able to demonstrate the quality of their technical provision. This will help prospective students and employers make informed choices, will encourage providers to consider options for specialisation and help to achieve greater efficiency and value for money. Our reforms to the sector will help us to achieve the Government's ambitions set out in the Industrial Strategy, by ensuring we have a workforce with the right skills to help us close the productivity gap.

44. Responses to this consultation will help us to determine how we should signal and support the quality of provision. We also want to understand what providers

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this chapter, the term 'provider' is used to refer to the full range of providers of Higher Education, including colleges, universities, and other providers.

think they will need to successfully deliver the qualifications.

## Where higher technical education is taught

45. HTE is taught in a range of providers of Higher Education (HE), including Further Education (FE) colleges, universities, alternative providers, and private training providers. In addition, the Government has supported the establishment of four flagship employer-led National Colleges, which are charged with delivering high-quality skills training for the digital, creative, nuclear and high speed rail sectors. We are also rolling out new IoTs to specialise in capital-intensive technical provision in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) at levels 4 and 5.
46. This diversity enables students and employers to choose the type of course and provider that best suits their needs. It also brings other advantages. For example, the best universities can be well placed to offer great facilities and help to build the prestige and kudos attached to higher education. Equally, there are high-quality colleges with a track record of occupationally-focused, employer-led delivery in a number of local areas. Alternative and private providers often develop innovative approaches and new courses to meet specialist skills needs.
47. We want to ensure that the very best providers are delivering our approved high-quality HTQs, whilst also considering how providers could specialise, or adjust their offer to address local skills needs. The Post-18 Review has recommended additional capital funding, for FE colleges, with a particular focus on growing specialist HTE provision in specific colleges. We will consider these recommendations, and develop our plans in more detail, as part of the Spending Review.
48. Research that has informed this Review tells us that, of all level 4-5 qualifications delivered in 2015/2016, about 33% was in core-STEM subjects aligned to the technical routes of Health and Science, Engineering and Manufacturing, Digital, and Construction. Around 18% was in related-STEM subjects of Creative and Design, Protective Services, and Social Care. The remaining half (49%) was in non-STEM subjects, aligned to the remaining technical routes<sup>7</sup> of Education and Childcare, Business and Administration, and Hair and Beauty, etc.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This group also includes those qualifications not aligned to a technical route.

<sup>8</sup> [Mapping the higher technical landscape](#) (RCU 2018)

49. Government is boosting the supply of higher technical core-STEM provision through the creation of IoTs. It is also important to boost HTE opportunities amongst a range of the highest quality providers who can demonstrate the capacity and capability to offer them, to ensure coverage across the full range of disciplines.

## Institutes of Technology and National Colleges

50. National Colleges and the new IoTs are employer-led institutions, set up to provide the specialist higher technical provision needed to meet employer demand through a distinctive and complementary learning offer, with new leading-edge equipment and facilities supported by around £250m of government investment.

- IoTs are collaborations of existing HE and FE providers and employers, and will spearhead the delivery of HTE in the core-STEM subjects needed to drive future economic growth in a region or sub-region (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnership area), and respond to the specific local needs of employers for STEM skills.
- National Colleges have been set up to provide the specialised higher technical training needed to support specific sectors identified as critical to the UK economy, where employers have identified a gap in supply. There are currently four National Colleges: High Speed Rail, Creative and Cultural Industries, Digital Skills, and Nuclear.

51. In 2016/2017, around 45,000 students undertook qualifications in core-STEM subjects.<sup>9</sup> IoTs and National Colleges will significantly increase overall capacity within the system to deliver level 4-5 courses in core-STEM subjects, and it is important that any further growth of STEM provision should maximise government's investment in these institutions.

52. As this first wave of IoTs becomes established, there will be scope for them to expand their capacity further by bringing new FE colleges, universities, and employers into the collaborations. Work is also underway to review the extent of geographical 'cold spots' and consider the need for a further competition. So far,

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<sup>9</sup> [Review of the Level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

We define core-STEM provision as those courses in the following sector subject areas: Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies, Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, Information and Communication Technology, and Science and Mathematics.

12 IoTs have been announced, but the government's ambition is to establish an IoT in every major city in England.

## How the quality of provision is assessed

### OfS

53. A large number of higher education providers are regulated by the OfS. The OfS maintains a register of English HE providers that have successfully met applicable initial conditions of registration, giving a single authoritative reference about a provider's regulatory status. The OfS assesses quality and standards at providers that are registered or are applying for registration, and can assess quality and standards at unregistered HE providers.

### Ofsted

54. Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, as well as services that provide education and skills for learners of all ages. Among other things, it is responsible for assuring the quality of education delivered at level 3 and below, and will also inspect provision where courses are funded through Advanced Learner Loans (ALL) at level 4 and above and apprenticeships at all levels.

## Working with what is already good

55. Providers that are registered are fully regulated by the OfS and are required to meet conditions of registration. In order to achieve and maintain registration the OfS requires each provider to demonstrate that it:

- Designs and/or delivers high-quality courses;
- Has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience; and
- Has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

56. Registration is voluntary, but brings with it a number of benefits. Providers may choose to register in one of two categories:

- **Approved**

This gives access to HE student finance for those courses that attract student support of up to the basic amount of circa £6,000 with no limit on the fee the provider can charge. It also gives eligibility to apply for research grant funding from some research councils.

- **Approved (fee cap)**

This gives access to HE student finance for those courses that attract student support. It also gives eligibility to apply for research grant funding (including from Research England). Additionally, it gives eligibility for both

the Teaching Grant and the Teaching Capital Grant (subject also to other specific eligibility requirements that may apply to particular grants). These providers are subject to a capped fee limit, and can only charge the higher amount of around £9,000 if they have an OfS-approved access and participation plan.

57. Once registered, providers must continue to meet ongoing conditions, and may be subject to a further detailed review if indicators or other evidence suggests that there is an increased risk of poor student outcomes or poor quality provision.
58. Under the current student finance regime access to student finance for HE courses (which will include courses leading to Institute-approved qualifications) is restricted to only those providers, including both universities and FE colleges, who are registered with OfS.
59. Currently, if a provider does not have OfS registration (or is delivering a non-recognised qualification) they can access ALL funding for certain level 4-5 courses. ALL funding would therefore not be applicable to approved HTQs. We will further consider the impact of the proposals set out in this document on ALL funded provision following the close of the consultation.

## Going further on the quality of provision

60. We want the reformed higher technical offer to be the best it can be. We therefore propose taking the requirement to register with the OfS a step further, and to develop with the OfS an additional set of ongoing registration conditions specifically for higher technical provision (technical conditions). Providers would be required to meet these technical conditions, in addition to the general ongoing registration conditions that are applicable to all providers, to be able to deliver the approved HTQs with access to relevant student finance for courses leading to those HTQs, and to be eligible for any additional public funding.
61. We expect this to be a rigorous process that would specifically assess and signal the quality of a provider's higher **technical** education provision. Criteria for this would:
- Specifically indicate high-quality higher technical provision by expanding on the key elements already assessed by OfS as part of the registration process, such as:
    - Suitably qualified and experienced teachers with current, relevant occupational and industry experience and expertise, as well as high quality pedagogical skills. Leaders have the capacity and ability to ensure provision is sustainable and retains a clear focus on quality

- Strong links with employer networks, thus ensuring the knowledge, skills and behaviours being delivered are valued by, and relevant to, employers who are engaged and investing in training; and
- Learning environments that provide access to facilities and equipment that are reflective of the workplace, including industry-relevant, up-to-date equipment.
- Draw from the IoT assessment process, which uses a range of criteria including evidence of support for regional and national economic growth; employer engagement; relevance to occupational skills needs; and quality industry relevant teaching.

62. The aim would be to raise the standard of – and confidence in – the market of higher technical provision. We also want to better signal provider quality to students and employers. Specific technical conditions would help to put a spotlight on the key elements of high-quality **technical** provision in tertiary education.

63. IoTs have already gone through a rigorous assessment process. Core delivery partners within IoTs would therefore be deemed to have met the separate OfS technical conditions for the courses they deliver through the IoT. However they would need to obtain separate assurance for all other higher technical provision they wish to offer and this would be subject to ongoing OfS monitoring.

64. Similarly, the Department for Education has robust arrangements in place for assessing the quality of the National Colleges, and they will therefore also be deemed to have automatically met these technical conditions, subject to the OfS' ongoing monitoring.

**Question: Are the suggested criteria suitable markers of high-quality technical provision?**

**Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the principle of the OfS applying technical ongoing registration conditions that a provider would be required to meet to indicate the high quality of their HTE provision? If you disagree, what could an alternative approach be?**

## **Funding and incentives**

65. Helping providers to demonstrate the quality of their offer, including how they are specialising and addressing local skills needs, could attract students and employers to their courses. However, we recognise that financial arrangements and incentives are also important. We therefore want to ensure that public

funding for the delivery of HTE is focused towards providers that meet the proposed technical conditions. Budgets will be determined through the Spending Review, but we would like to gather views on how best to link quality assurance of technical provision with funding.

66. The Post-18 Review panel recommends that a competitive student finance package should be available for providers of approved HTQs, with non-approved qualifications receiving lower funding. Our proposals at paragraph 60 would mean that only providers achieving the proposed OfS technical conditions are able to deliver courses that lead to the approved HTQs with access to student finance where appropriate. We will consider the panel's proposals, including those on the relative funding levels of approved and non-approved qualifications, as part of the Spending Review.
67. The panel has also recommended that additional support and capital funding should be provided to grow capacity for, and ensure, high-quality technical provision, and that quality indicators could identify how best to allocate that funding. This could mean that only providers meeting the technical conditions would be eligible for any higher technical capital or grant funding for their HTE provision. For example, this could be to support providers to expand their provision, specialise or tailor their offer to meet local skills needs, or enhance teaching facilities and equipment.<sup>10</sup> As stated above, we will be considering these funding proposals and wider reforms as part of the Spending Review.
68. We also believe it is important that the provision available locally and regionally is appropriate to both the strengths of providers and to the skills needs of employers in each area. HTE already tends to serve local students and employers but more could be done to ensure provision balances student and employer demand appropriately.
69. We want to encourage providers to continue to work with their local economic architecture, such as Mayoral Combined Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Skills Advisory Panels, to understand the right mix of provision needed in their area. This will help them to offer a range of qualifications that meet local and regional skills priorities, including considering how they might specialise and deliver best value, whilst also taking account of other factors such as national skills needs, breadth of provision and social mobility.

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<sup>10</sup> This funding would complement, not duplicate, IoT and National College capital support.

70. These quality assurance reforms also imply regulatory changes. In the event that these regulatory changes require changes to the OfS's Regulatory Framework there may be a need for the OfS to consult. However, we want to understand providers' views on these choices through this consultation and how we can best raise and signal quality of provision.

**Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that linking grant or capital funding to meeting the technical ongoing registration conditions would encourage providers to deliver high-quality provision?**

**a. How might this work to ensure provision best meets local skills needs?**

**b. What specifically would additional funding support?**

**c. Would additional costs be a barrier to delivering high-quality HTQs? Why?**

**d. Which would be a greater priority for providers: 'capital' or 'recurrent grant' funding? Why?**

**Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should explore how providers that meet the ongoing registration conditions specific to Higher Technical Education could have access to a more competitive student finance package for courses leading to approved HTQs than those who do not meet the technical conditions? Why?**

## **Building and supporting capacity**

71. Providers also delivering qualifications at level 3 will be starting to work through their plans for the introduction of T Levels, and be considering what this might mean for their organisation and future subject offer. This includes assessing whether they have teachers and leaders with the right skills set, as well as the right facilities and equipment.

72. Providers not currently offering level 3 qualifications may not be directly affected by the introduction of T Levels, but are likely nonetheless to be considering how the flow of students completing T Levels will affect their future intake and recruitment.

73. A programme of support is being designed to ensure that providers have the support they need for successful implementation and delivery of T Levels. Over time, we want to build on that and ensure that providers also have the support they need to successfully deliver the Institute-approved HTQs.

74. We are interested in respondents' views regarding how the T Level programme can also support HTE delivery, the extent of the gap between current capacity and capability between level 3 and level 4-5 provision, and what providers think that they will need to bridge that gap.

75. Our investment in IoTs and National Colleges will build a network of prestigious centres to attract student numbers; act as a focus for employers; and attract the industry experts needed to help teach high-quality courses. But we also want to support the capability and capacity of other high-quality providers that are not National Colleges or part of an IoT collaboration to deliver higher technical provision which complements that provided by IoTs and National Colleges.

76. Provider support (which would also be available to National Colleges and IoTs) could include:

- Helping providers to grow the FE workforce, not only to have sufficient volumes of teachers and technical staff but also to have those who are suitably skilled with industry relevant experience and appropriate pedagogies.
- Supporting employer engagement, particularly from small and medium enterprises, in ways that overcome the challenges to engagement. We are seeking to put employers at the heart of our qualification reforms. We also know that the best providers ensure strong engagement through:
  - Employer advice in the curriculum;
  - Employers in the lecture room;
  - Work-based learning (placements);
  - Work-related learning (live briefs to completed as part of the course);
  - Mentoring;
  - Scholarship/sponsorship;
  - Employability modules.

**Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that additional non-financial support will be needed to enable providers to develop their workforce and engage fully with employers? What might examples of non-financial support be?**

**Question: We welcome ideas from respondents on:**

**a. How providers could best allocate their existing resources to build and support capacity and delivery of approved HTQs;**

**b. Where additional help may be needed; and**

**c. What providers think should be prioritised in terms of any future funding allocation.**

**If you have any further comments that are not covered in the above, please include here.**

## 3. Student and employer demand

### Summary of proposals

- Increasing awareness, prestige and recognition of higher technical education (HTE) (see paragraphs 88-98);
- Improving the information, advice and guidance available to potential students and improving employer knowledge of how these qualifications can address their skills needs (see paragraphs 98-112);
- Improving accessibility of HTE through flexible delivery of qualifications and improved signposting of financial support (see paragraphs 113-122);
- Ensuring that students have the ongoing personal support to continue and complete their course of study (see paragraphs 123-124).

### Background

77. Raising the quality of qualifications and provision is important, but we must also consider why so few students and employers are choosing HTE at the moment and how we might support uptake in the future.

78. Through our initial evidence gathering, we have identified a number of barriers to uptake of higher technical qualifications (HTQs), as set out in the accompanying Case for Change. We want to better understand how we might shift student and employer attitudes and participation in HTE. So, we will shortly be commissioning more targeted user research to enrich our analysis and help us to continue to develop effective policy for HTE.

### Future students

79. We anticipate that growth in student numbers will come from a number of sources, including young people (under 21s) and adults (21+).

#### Young People (under 21s)

80. Survey findings suggest that only 3% of 18-year-olds have indicated that they are considering study at higher technical level.<sup>11</sup> We believe that there is potential to

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<sup>11</sup> [Omnibus survey – wave 3](#) (DfE 2018)

grow the number of people from under the age of 21 progressing to HTE, either as an alternative to a 3 year degree, or as a progression opportunity from level 3 for the 26% of young people aged 16-24 holding a level 3 as their highest qualification.<sup>12</sup>

81. ONS projections estimated the population of 18-year-olds to be 766,000 in 2017. This population is projected to grow rapidly from 2020 onwards, reaching an estimated 887,000 in 2030.<sup>13</sup> This represents a significant market of students for HTE.

## Adults (21+)

82. Although we don't have robust data, we believe that there are a large number of adults who need or could benefit from the opportunity to retrain and have the potential to upskill and would therefore benefit from studying a HTQ. This is set out in the Case for Change.

83. We believe that there is further growth potential amongst adults (21+), particularly amongst lower socio-economic groups. Studies have consistently demonstrated persistent patterns of inequality in participation. For example, participation levels decline with age and distance from the labour market, and are lowest for those with fewer or no formal qualifications.<sup>14</sup>

**Question: To what extent do you agree that there is a need and opportunity for more young people and adults (including those who need to upskill/retrain) to be undertaking HTE in the future? Please provide examples from your own experience.**

## Deciding to learn higher technical skills

84. We have identified four key stages of an individuals' decision-making journey when considering and taking up HTE. This is based on the COM-B model, which was used in the Decisions of Adult Learners study.<sup>15</sup> We have then considered how people might be supported along these stages of the journey.

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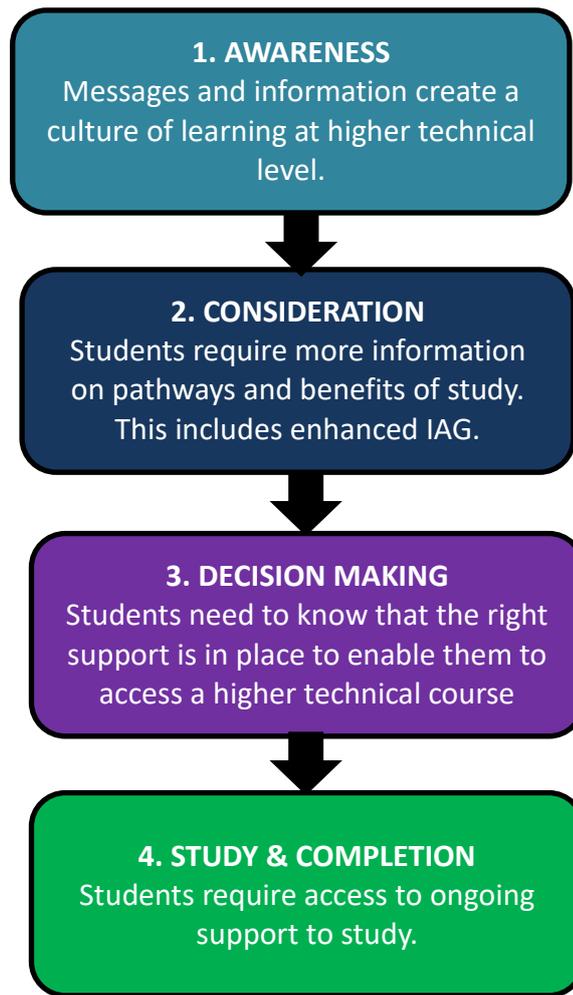
<sup>12</sup> [2011 census: qualifications and labour market participation in England and Wales](#) (ONS 2014)

<sup>13</sup> [Being 18 in 2018](#) (ONS 2018)

<sup>14</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

<sup>15</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

**Figure 3: Stages of the student journey**



85. As we prepare to deliver high-quality HTQs from 2022, our focus will be on improving the ‘Awareness’ and ‘Consideration’ stages of the student journey. We need to start as soon as possible to engender a long-term shift in public understanding and attitudes towards HTE. In doing so, we will link this with the communication work underway for T Levels and Apprenticeships, emphasising a coherent and strong technical education offer. From 2022, we will increase our focus on the later stages of the student journey.

86. The following pages set out which measures we propose to take during each stage of the student journey to shift attitudes and improve demand. Where appropriate, we distinguish between measures specifically targeted at young people, adults in the workplace and employers.

### **Improving awareness and prestige of HTE**

87. Currently, there is a strong awareness and pull towards 3-year bachelor degrees.

There is limited knowledge or awareness of other types of learning, such as HTE.

‘...So we had an hour a week in Sixth Form, which we called tutorial...but when we got to Year 13, it was just solely...applying for what you’re going to do next. Most people push you to go to university...me and one other person were the only people who didn’t apply to university because everyone just, sort of, felt you had to.’ Apprentice<sup>16</sup>

88. We want a shift in understanding and attitudes towards HTE. This means young people knowing about and viewing HTQs as a valuable and prestigious choice alongside degrees, apprenticeships and employment. We want potential students already in work to have confidence in them as a good route to upskill or retrain. We want people to start seeing HTQs, alongside higher apprenticeships, as the best route into highly skilled, higher technical occupations.

89. We have identified several interventions, which could help to raise awareness of HTE before students have begun to consider studying them:

### **Raising the profile of HTE overall and the new suite of Institute-approved HTQs**

90. A number of reputable qualifications already exist at higher technical level in certain sectors with clear occupational relevance and widespread recognition across employers.

91. However, we believe there is a need to raise the profile of HTQs overall, in a way that commands the confidence of students and employers. So we will make sure that Institute-approved qualifications are clearly badged and signal high quality to both students and employers. We currently intend to couple this with a campaign to promote HTE and the occupations to which it leads. We will commission user research to establish how we should go about achieving this. We will use this to inform what to call the reformed qualifications, and whether there is a need for a distinct ‘brand’ for HTE overall. The Post-18 Review panel have recommended improving the status of HTQs.

92. We also need to ensure that HTQs are systemically recognised by different groups right across society. For example, schools and teachers have a vital role in promoting these qualifications and enhancing the prestige associated with them. To help to do this, destination measures will include data on how many students progress to higher study overall (level 4+) rather than focusing narrowly

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<sup>16</sup> [Careers strategy: making the most of everyone’s skills and talents](#) (DfE 2017)

on the number of students that go to university. We hope this will increase the prestige and uptake of HTQs.

### **Helping employers to recognise the value of these qualifications and supporting recruitment**

93. We want employers to feel more confident about employing people and upskilling their workforce with HTQs. As outlined in chapter 1, a key way to do this is through the system of approving qualifications against employer-led national occupational standards. But there is more we can do to build awareness and confidence.

94. We will also work with key sectors involved in the Industrial Strategy and local employers through their local industrial strategies in order to ensure that the importance of HTE is recognised and understood.

95. Government will look at how we can use our convening and influencing power to promote the HTE agenda amongst employers. We want to learn from the examples set by initiatives such as the Social Mobility Business Compact Champions and Social Mobility Employer Index, which celebrate the work of those employers taking the most effective action to widen access into particular progressions. We also welcome views from employers on whether and how we might make it easier for them to access and recruit people who are qualified to higher technical level.

### **Harnessing the prestige of providers and professional bodies**

96. The reformed HTQs will be delivered by high-quality providers. National Colleges and the forthcoming Institutes of Technology will have a lead role in showcasing good practice and building prestige in HTQs. They will provide high-tech training in state of the art facilities and motivate students to undertake these qualifications. But we are also keen that HTQs are taught in other high-quality Higher and Further Education (HE/FE) providers and we welcome views on how we might best leverage these providers' strong track-records, reputations and employer networks to ensure HTQs quickly become understood and valued by prospective students and employers.

97. We also welcome views on how we might work with relevant professional bodies, including capitalising on their role managing professional standards, schemes of professional registration and the award of post-nominal letters.

**Question: To what extent do you agree with these measures to improve the profile of HTE?:**

## Improving consideration of HTE study options

98. Once prospective students are aware of HTQs, they need more information to help them to decide which route is right for them. Research suggests that potential students at this stage require more specific information about what the course will entail than for study at level 3 or below. They also want to know more about how it will benefit them, to inform their assessment of the benefits and costs of undertaking this type of education.<sup>17</sup> Potential students need evidence of a clear pathway of how they can develop the knowledge and skills they need for a specific career or goal and how this leads into skilled employment or further study. Yet currently, some individuals have limited knowledge of what these qualifications will mean for them.

‘I see it as important for my career, I'm much more willing, I'm much more motivated to do work because now I've found what I want to do whereas before it just seemed...like you have to go to university.’ (Level 5, female, carer).<sup>18</sup>

99. We are proposing a number of measures to support the consideration phase for young students, adults who need to upskill/retrain, as well as employers. We hope this will ensure that prospective students can search and compare information that is meaningful to them and understand the benefits of undertaking a HTQ. To do this we will work with and through a number of organisations that provide information for prospective students to encourage publication of clear information and useful data on HTQs. We have already commissioned the Institute to develop the occupational maps to make them more accessible to the public, allowing for a clearer understanding of the progression options that will apply in the reformed technical education system.

## Improving the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) of HTQs available to young students

100. Providers and other stakeholders report that there is a lack of clear IAG to help students to navigate the number of options available to them at higher technical level. Promotion of these qualifications in schools and colleges has a key role to play in increasing uptake. As demonstrated earlier, individuals choosing to undertake HTQs represent a fraction of those going on to further study. We are therefore keen to promote HTQs within schools and colleges.

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<sup>17</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

<sup>18</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

101. All schools and colleges must deliver independent and impartial careers guidance for 12 to 18 year olds. Following the publication of the Careers Strategy, schools and colleges are expected to use the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance. We will build on the Careers Strategy and the introduction of the Baker Clause. The Baker Clause requires schools to invite in colleges and other providers of approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships to talk to pupils about their offer. Specifically, we will build on the work of The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through, for example, their Enterprise Adviser Network and Careers Hubs to raise awareness of HTQs as a viable alternative to degrees during school visits and other engagement activities.
102. We will work with the Career Development Institute to explore the important role that careers professionals play in helping people of all ages to make an informed choice about qualifications and future pathways. We will also work with the Gatsby Foundation, including through its 'Technicians Make it Happen' campaign, to seek opportunities to promote, to young people and their parents and carers, the rewarding occupations that HTQs can lead to.
103. HTQs can play a crucial role in enhancing social mobility and helping to improve outcomes for young people in areas that are facing challenges (as explained below in paragraph 118). We will work closely with existing partnerships in areas of low social mobility (e.g. through Careers & Enterprise cornerstone roundtables and other communication/engagement activities) to build employer/regional knowledge and demonstrate how the skills gained from completing a HTQ can address the needs of students, employers and the region. Eventually, we will look to extend this approach to other areas, building on the best practice identified.
104. We want to ensure that the application process for HTQs is as streamlined and easy to navigate for students as possible. Currently, most HE Providers and some FE Colleges use the UCAS portal to manage their applications to higher technical courses. There are benefits to this for students. For example, by featuring HTQs on the same portal as degrees, it may help to increase choice for students and build the profile of HTE as a credible option, alongside academic and degree-level study. We want to see this maintained where appropriate and we will also look at ways of encouraging more alignment of UCAS and HE Providers information and advice, so that higher technical courses are promoted alongside degrees at HE or careers fairs, for example.
105. We believe that there is also value in maintaining alternative application routes to UCAS. This is particularly relevant for mature students, and those

considering studying part-time, who may only be looking at providers in their local area.

### **Improving the IAG of HTQs available to adults in work**

106. We need to put better IAG in place for adults. The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance on different routes into a variety of careers and signposts individuals to relevant training opportunities, including HTQs. As qualification reforms are implemented, we will ensure the National Careers Service website and course directory contains up-to-date information on HTQs and that National Careers Service advisers are well-placed to deliver impartial, professional advice and guidance to potential students about the new qualifications.

107. For individuals looking at opportunities to upskill or retrain, Jobcentreplus and the forthcoming National Retraining Scheme (NRS) could act as important sources of information and guidance. The NRS is an ambitious programme to drive adult retraining in response to changes in the labour market. The scheme will give individuals the skills they need to redirect their careers and secure better, more stable jobs of the future.

108. We recognise that providers themselves, professional bodies and trade unions are also a key channel for promoting HTE to adults. Informed by our user research and consultation views, we will consider what national communication resources will help support providers to promote higher technical options. For example, social media may be a good way to reach a broad range of potential students. Evidence suggests that peer-support may also be effective here.<sup>19</sup>

### **Improving the IAG of HTQs available to employers**

109. Employers choose whether to recruit people with HTQs and can choose to upskill their existing workforce through these qualifications. Better IAG will help educate employers about the benefits of HTQs and give them greater confidence when recruiting people with these qualifications.

110. Professional bodies, chambers of commerce, Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are key pathways to engaging with employers. We will

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<sup>19</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018) has confirmed that it is helpful for students interested in study to speak 'to those who have done the course to understand course requirements, experiences and outcomes' with 'work shadowing provid[ing] opportunities to visualise day-to-day experiences in a new career, where retraining is being contemplated'

include these in our plans to engage and promote HTQs to employers. This will include helping employers understand their skills needs and how HTQs can address them.

111. We will also work through the National Apprenticeships Service to promote HTE to a range of employers. In particular, their account managers will promote HTE as a potential way for employers to meet their skills needs.

112. Local areas also have a role to play. Led and governed by LEPs, Growth Hubs bring together and simplify the business support landscape by bringing together information on all organisations from across the public and private sectors, at a local and national level. This enables Growth Hubs to offer a single local point of contact to businesses seeking advice and support. We will work closely with the network of 38 Growth Hubs to promote HTQs through information transfer or via engagement events to demonstrate how the HTQs can support skills development in the local area.

**Question: To what extent do you agree with these measures to improve IAG for young people, adults and employers?**

**Please give further thoughts on other ways we could help fill the HTE information gap for:**

- **Young people and their teachers considering their options after completing a level 3**
- **Adults in the workplace who need to upskill/retrain**
- **Employers who have skills shortages at higher technical level**

## **Supporting individual decision making**

113. When prospective students understand the benefits of studying HTQs they are better able to weigh up the pros and cons of whether to study these qualifications. Interventions which are likely to encourage prospective students to commit to a course of study include flexibility of provision.<sup>20</sup> Financial support is also a key consideration at this stage.<sup>21</sup>

114. Factors that will encourage uptake include the following:

**Ensuring that the offer is sufficiently flexible so that it can accommodate the**

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<sup>20</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

<sup>21</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

## **different needs of students.**

115. Our Review has found various examples of flexibility in provision. This includes different times and methods of delivery. The Good Practice study confirmed that ‘Generally, providers reported that fitting with learners’ skills, learning styles and other commitments or needs was an effective approach to delivery – i.e. by offering flexible methods, online learning/assessment, and distance learning’.<sup>22</sup>
116. We want to ensure we’re learning about and making the most from new approaches. The Flexible Learning Fund<sup>23</sup> – part of the National Retraining Scheme - is piloting flexible and accessible learning delivery to maximise adult participation and attainment, including the use of digital learning tools and modular study. We will promote best practice identified in this work to help providers to develop the flexibility of their higher technical provision.
117. We will also work closely with SAPs and LEPs to help identify examples of best practice in encouraging flexible provision and disseminate these.

## **Supporting access to HTE**

118. Improving HTE could act as an engine for social mobility. This is particularly pertinent for disadvantaged groups who may have the greatest to gain from developing higher technical skills in terms of wage returns. However, for this to be a success, we need to ensure that there is a steady pipeline of people with the entry requirements to undertake a HTQ. We know that 52.2% of disadvantaged students leave education or training aged 19 without basic English or maths.<sup>24</sup>
119. To support this, the government is offering traineeships and developing basic skills centres. The NRS will also support adults to study English and maths education if they require it. From 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019, certain adult education functions, which are funded by the adult education budget, will also be devolved initially to 6 MCAs and to the Mayor of London. On top of responsibility for delivering the statutory entitlements for English and Maths, these MCAs will have responsibility for funding a first full level 2 and/or 3 for 19 to 23 year olds.
120. We also recognise that recognition of prior learning/work experience can

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<sup>22</sup> [Good practice in Level 4 and 5 qualifications](#) (DfE 2018)

<sup>23</sup> This finishes on 31 July 2019.

<sup>24</sup> [Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2017](#) (DfE 2018)

be helpful in making HTE accessible to a wider audience. This is first and foremost an admissions issue for providers to determine, however, we will work with providers to explore/understand their admissions process and how the process might work to support those from all backgrounds, as part of our wider provider strategy (chapter 2). We hope that these measures combined will create a pipeline of people from disadvantaged backgrounds ready to benefit from studying a HTQ.

### **Providing students with adequate and appropriate sources of finance**

121. We know that financial support is a key consideration for prospective students.<sup>25</sup> Currently, government has a mixture of support packages available to students on HTE courses, including the HE student finance package and Advanced Learner Loans.
122. We also recognise that childcare and other care provision can influence a student's decision as to whether a course is feasible for them or not. There is currently a range of different options which can help support an individual, depending on the age, employment status, type of study (part time or full time). Informed by user views, we will consider how we can best promote and signpost this support to prospective students. We will also signpost any provider support in this area.

### **Enabling students to study & complete a HTQ**

#### **Measures to support continuation and completion of HTE**

123. Students may face a number of barriers and constraints which inhibit their ability to complete their course. Ongoing support and guidance needs to be available from providers, employers and others to help the student to remain in education. Continuation and successful outcomes are required and tracked through the frameworks Office for Students (OfS) and Ofsted use to assess providers.
124. Good welfare and mental health support may also be key to ensuring students complete their course of study. We will look to promote what is considered to be best practice in this field. Interesting practice includes [flying start](#) style induction activities, creation of [welcome ambassador](#) roles and using best practice from the Student Minds – [know before you go](#) work.

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<sup>25</sup> [Decisions of adult learners study](#) (DfE 2018)

**Question: Do you have any further evidence on what works in this space and what more government can do to improve access and help support students to undertake and complete a HTQ?**

**Question: With reference to the impact assessments published alongside this consultation - Do you have any comments about the potential impact the proposals outlined in this consultation may have on individuals with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010? Please give reasons for your answer.**



Department  
for Education

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