



Department
for Education

The National Skills Fund

Government consultation

Launch date 15 July 2021

Respond by 17 September 2021

Contents

Who this is for	3
Issue date	3
Enquiries	3
Additional copies	4
Respond online	4
Other ways to respond	4
Deadline	4
Glossary of Terms	5
Introduction	8
Summary	8
Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults	11
Summary	11
Accessibility	12
Employer Involvement	16
Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults	17
Section 2: Skills Bootcamps	19
Summary	19
Expansion of the Skills Bootcamps	20
Providers	21
Accessibility	21
Employer Involvement	23
Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps	24
Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs	26
Summary	26
Critical Skills	26
Shorter Courses	28
Annex A: List of Consultation Questions	31

Who this is for

This consultation is for anyone with an interest in further education and training for adults in England, and we invite responses from a wide range of audiences. This may include:

1. Adults
2. Employers
3. Further Education providers
4. Adult Education providers
5. College principals
6. Teachers and trainers
7. Career advisers
8. Awarding Organisations
9. Regulatory bodies
10. Local authorities and local bodies (including Mayoral Combined Authorities)
11. Local Enterprise Partnerships
12. Representative bodies, including sector bodies, employers' representative bodies and trade unions
13. Equality organisations

We are particularly keen to hear directly from those who will engage most frequently with the offers funded through the National Skills Fund. These include:

- Adults (including both current learners and those who are not currently learning)
- Providers
- Employers
- Local bodies, including local authorities

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 15 July 2021.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team by email at:

NSF.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: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from <https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation>

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

Through consultation feedback events:

We will also be hosting consultation feedback events for those who would find it easier to provide their feedback in this way.

If 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 pdf version of the consultation document and email or post your response.

By email:

- NSF.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post:

National Skills Fund Division
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 17 September, 2021.

Glossary of Terms

- **Adult Education Budget (AEB):** The AEB is funding targeted at engaging adults and providing the necessary skills and learning for work, an apprenticeship or other learning. The national AEB is used to support statutory entitlements to full funding for eligible adults (aged 19 and above). The statutory responsibility for certain adult education functions, including for funding the statutory free entitlements has been transferred to certain Mayoral Combined Authorities (and delegated to the Mayor of London) in relation to their areas together with an associated portion of the AEB.
- **Advanced Learner Loan (ALL):** An Advanced Learner Loan helps eligible adults (aged 19 and above) with the costs of a course at a college or training provider in England. Further information can be found on GOV.UK. Qualifications for which an individual can take a loan out are known as “qualifications approved for ALL”. They can be found at: <https://www.qualifications.education.gov.uk/>.
- **Apprenticeship:** An apprenticeship is a job that combines practical training with study. These can be provided from intermediate level (level 2) to professional level (levels 6&7). See “A guide to apprenticeships” on GOV.UK for further information.
- **Awarding organisations:** Refers to individual organisations recognised by Ofqual that design, develop, and certificate qualifications but are not themselves education providers.
- **Degree Level:** Any qualification at level 6 or 7. Level 6 includes a full undergraduate degree (may be degree with honours/bachelor’s degree), or a graduate diploma. Level 7 includes a master’s degree, postgraduate diploma, and a level 7 diploma. Apprenticeships can also be delivered at levels 6 and 7.
- **Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA):** The ESFA is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Education. It is responsible for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. See the ESFA website for more information.
- **Employer-led standards:** Set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required for an occupation. Also known as occupational standards. Employer-led standards enable assessment of whether an individual has achieved the KSBs needed to be competent in an occupation. They are developed by groups of employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. They currently form the basis of the T Level technical qualification and apprenticeships (see also Apprenticeship Standards).
- **Further education college (FEC):** Refers to institutions conducted by further education corporations. Further education colleges offer a variety of courses from entry level through to higher level qualifications.
- **Higher level:** Any qualification at levels 4 and 5. Apprenticeships can also be at higher level.
- **Higher technical education (HTE):** Refers to technical education provided at levels 4 and 5.
- **Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ):** This refers to a level 4-5 Higher Technical Qualification that gains approval from the Institute where its content aligns with the Institute’s employer-led standards.
- **Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (The Institute):** The Institute is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education. It approves and publishes the employer-led standards for occupations (and their associated apprenticeship assessment plans), approves technical education qualifications, and advises government on funding for each

standard. See the Institute website for more information.

- **Institutes of Technology (IoT).** Collaborations between further education colleges, universities and employers, focused on providing higher-level technical STEM education.
- **Knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs):** These are the outcomes set out in employer-led standards, that demonstrate competence in an occupation. For an approved Higher Technical Qualification, and the T Level qualifications, an individual will attain as many of the outcomes as may be reasonably expected from a course of education.
- **Level (L):** Refers to the 9 qualification levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. See GOV.UK for more information.
- **Level 2:** Also known as Intermediate level. Level 2 qualifications include GCSEs (Grades A*-C/9-4) and level 2 Technical Award. Apprenticeships can also be delivered at Intermediate level.
- **Level 3:** Also known as Advanced level. Level 3 qualifications include A Levels, T Levels, Pearson BTECs, and Cambridge Technicals. Apprenticeships can also be delivered at Advanced level.
- **Levels 4 and 5:** Also known as higher level. Level 4 qualifications include certificate of higher education, level 4 diploma, and higher national certificate. Level 5 qualifications include, diploma of higher education, foundation degree, higher national diploma. Apprenticeships can also be delivered at higher level.
- **Levels 6 and 7:** Also known as degree level. Level 6 includes a full undergraduate degree (may be degree with honours/bachelor's degree), and a graduate diploma. Level 7 includes a master's degree, postgraduate diploma, and a level 7 diploma. Apprenticeships can also be delivered at degree level.
- **Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE):** A new transformative funding provision, enabling people to access four years' worth of student loan funding across further and higher education providers throughout their lifetime.
- **(Mayoral) Combined Authority (MCA):** A combined authority is a legal structure that may be set up by local authorities in England, with or without a directly elected mayor. Specified adult education statutory functions of the Secretary of State have been transferred to certain MCAs by way of affirmative orders under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. In addition, a delegation of those functions has been made by the Secretary of State in relation to London (which is not a combined authority) under section 39A of the Greater London Authority (GLA) Act 1999. We refer to MCAs and GLA as 'devolved authorities' throughout the document.
- **Non-regulated learning:** Learning which is not subject to awarding organisation external accreditation in the form of a regulated qualification.
- **Occupation:** A set of jobs whose main tasks and duties are characterised by a high degree of similarity. It is also an all-encompassing term for individuals' employment and is not restricted to a particular workplace. The term 'occupation' (for example in 'occupational standards') is a more general and all-encompassing term for 'employment in which individuals are engaged' and is not restricted to a particular workplace. It also points towards opportunities for progression, both within an occupation but importantly also to related occupations with a similar skill requirements.
- **Occupational standards:** The occupational standards (also referred to as employer-led standards) set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required for an occupation. Occupational standards make it possible to assess whether an individual has achieved the KSBs needed to be competent in an

occupation. They are developed by groups of employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

- **Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted):** The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted also inspects and regulate services that care for children and young people. Ofsted's role is to make sure that organisations providing education, training and care services in England do so to a high standard. Ofsted report directly to Parliament and are independent and impartial.
- **Provider:** An education or training organisation that is approved to deliver education to students.
- **Skills for Jobs White Paper:** Government White Paper titled 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth', published January 2021 by the Department for Education. This white paper sets out reforms to post-16 technical education and training to support people to develop the skills needs to get good jobs and improve national productivity.
- **Technical education:** Technical education encompasses any education or training, such as qualifications and apprenticeships, that focuses on progression into skilled employment and requires the acquisition of both a substantial body of technical knowledge and a set of practical skills valued by industry. Technical education covers provision from level 2 (the equivalent of GCSEs at A* to C or 9 to 4) to higher education (level 6), but it differs from A Levels and other academic options in that it draws its purpose from the workplace rather than an academic discipline.

Introduction

Summary

Starting from April 2021, the government is investing £2.5 billion through the National Skills Fund, a critical step towards the Lifetime Skills Guarantee and the ambition for people to be able to train, retrain and upskill throughout their lives in response to changing skills needs and employment patterns. National Skills Fund investment will help adults to gain the valuable skills they need to improve their job prospects. It will also support the immediate economic recovery and future skills needs by putting employers at the heart of the system and boosting the supply of skills that they require.

1. Investment for the National Skills Fund began in April 2021, and we have targeted that investment to start achieving outcomes for adults and employers and address the different needs that they can have. We had planned to consult on the National Skills Fund in Spring 2020 but were delayed by the onset of the pandemic, at which time it did not feel right to draw stakeholder attention away from other issues. We hope that now is a better time for stakeholders to respond to the consultation and help us to ensure that the investment is used as effectively as possible.
2. At the 2020 Spending Review, the Chancellor announced £375 million in the Financial Year 2021-22 for the National Skills Fund, which we are using to fund evidence-based offers as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee which supports adults to reskill and upskill. In future years, we want to build upon the solid foundations of the first year to drive even better results. This consultation therefore focuses on three primary areas: free level 3 qualifications for adults, Skills Bootcamps, and meeting critical skills priorities. Funding beyond the Financial Year 2021-22 is subject to future Spending Reviews.
3. Through National Skills Fund investment, this year we have launched **free level 3 qualifications for adults**, giving adults without a first level 3 qualification the chance to access around 400 free courses. This offer is focused on supporting adults to gain valuable, accredited skills that will help them access job opportunities. The offer removes financial barriers to learning and puts power in the hands of individuals to increase their skills and improve their job prospects. The qualifications have been selected to provide strong returns for both individuals and the economy, and the focus on accredited courses means that the skills they learn will be recognised by a range of employers. Going forward, we want to ensure that:
 - As many eligible adults as possible can benefit from this offer.
 - Employers can benefit from this offer and the skills it provides.
 - There are strong pathways to this offer and that we are targeting it effectively.

So this consultation explores:

- How we can make these free qualifications even more accessible to a wide range of people.
- How we can ensure these free qualifications meet the needs of a range of employers.
- Progression into level 3 courses and how we can best target the offer.

4. This year we are continuing to test and expand our **Skills Bootcamps**, which offer flexible courses that provide adults with in-demand skills and then fast-track them to an interview with an employer. This offer is focused on helping adults to quickly gain the skills that employers need so that they can move into employment or progress in work. The Skills Bootcamps help employers to fill much-needed vacancies and support adults to move into well-paid jobs. They are shorter and more intensive than many other training programmes. The focus on sector-specific courses means that Skills Bootcamps are targeted to meet the needs of specific employers, and the fast-track to an interview means that there is a direct line of a sight to a job. Going forward, we want to ensure that:

- As Skills Bootcamps become established and expand, the provision continues to improve.
- A wide range of eligible adults can access this offer.
- A wide range of providers can deliver this provision.
- Skills Bootcamps are meeting employers' needs and employers can easily make contributions to the Skills Bootcamps.
- Adults can easily move onto other training or learning after completing a Skills Bootcamp.

So this consultation explores:

- Which aspects of the current model are most valued.
- How we can ensure that Skills Bootcamps are as accessible as possible.
- How we can make it easier for more providers to deliver Skills Bootcamps.
- How we can ensure that Skills Bootcamps meet the needs of a range of employers, and the mechanisms through which employers can make contributions to Skills Bootcamps.
- How Skills Bootcamps can fit within longer progression pathways.

5. Finally, this year we are also using National Skills Fund investment to **meet critical skills priorities** which are below degree level. At the 2020 Spending Review it was announced that we would be using National Skills Fund investment to support economic recovery by funding the targeted Plan for Jobs and driving up technical education. We want to explore:

- Whether there are critical skills needs below degree level which we could do more to meet.
- If there is a need for more shorter courses or modules in the shorter-term to meet some of these critical skills needs.

So this section of the consultation explores:

- Respondents' views on where the skills system could do more to meet priority skills needs.
- How much employers and providers are already using shorter courses and for what purposes.

6. The responses from this consultation will help shape the provision which is currently funded through National Skills Fund investment. We have also published a consultation on reforms to FE Funding and Accountability. National Skills Fund investment will move to being delivered through our reformed funding system, when established.

Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults

Summary

The level 3 qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee give adults without a first level 3 the chance to access around 400 free courses, helping to boost their job prospects and address skills needs in the economy. This is a long-term offer and forms part of our commitment to transform the foundations of the skills system so that everyone has the chance to train and retrain. A large range of subject areas are included in the offer, such as engineering, accounting and finance, and health and social care; we will keep the list under review to ensure it meets the needs of the economy. These qualifications have strong returns for both individuals and the economy, and we want to make sure we help more people to benefit from them. To meet the needs of adults, this training should be delivered in a way that works for them, helping adults overcome barriers to accessing learning.

7. As of April 2021, any adult aged 24 and over who wants to achieve their first level 3 qualification, which is equivalent to A levels or an advanced technical certificate or diploma, can access around 400 fully funded courses.¹ Prior to the introduction of this offer, adults over the age of 24 had to self-fund their first level 3 qualification or could take out an Advanced Learner Loan. The Lifetime Skills Guarantee removes the financial barriers that have prevented many adults from gaining advanced level skills that can help them to improve their job prospects and progress in the labour market. There is strong evidence about the value of gaining a level 3 qualification: full level 3 qualifications on average result in a 16% earnings return and a 4% increase in the chance of employment.² However, 37% of people fail to reach level 3 by the age of 25,³ and not all level 3 courses are equally valuable – some adults who have achieved a level 3 will not have seen the same benefits as others.
8. We have targeted qualifications that will help eligible adults improve their wages and their chances of being employed, whilst also addressing strategic skills priorities. Awarding organisations and devolved authorities can suggest additions to the list through the qualification funding approval process⁴ and a full list of the free courses can be found online at www.gov.uk/government/publications/find-a-free-level-3-qualification/list-of-free-level-3-qualifications-available-to-eligible-adults. Some qualifications are more relevant to specific sectors, such as those in building and construction, and health and social care. Other qualifications, such as

¹ 19- to 23-year-olds will continue to be eligible for their first full level 3 via the adult education budget and will be eligible for any additional qualifications made available through this offer.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measuring-the-net-present-value-of-further-education-in-england-2018-to-2019> (2021)

³ Department for Education (2018). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-highest-level-of-achievement-by-age-25>

⁴ Details of the qualification funding approval process can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-funding-approval/new-funded-offers>

those in business management and accounting and finance, can benefit employers and adults working in a range of different sectors.

Accessibility

We want to ensure as many eligible adults as possible can benefit from this offer, so through this section we are exploring how we can make these free qualifications even more accessible to a wide range of people.

9. Adults can face a variety of different barriers when it comes to training, such as covering the costs of learning, fitting learning around other commitments like work and caring responsibilities,⁵ or ensuring training undertaken is in line with conditions of receiving Universal Credit. Some adults might also face specific circumstances which could impact their experience of learning, such as having recently left prison. In delivering these free level 3 qualifications for adults, we want to help adults overcome these barriers so that as many eligible adults as possible can benefit from the offer.

Q10⁶. What do you think will be the key barriers to adults taking up the free level 3 qualifications? Please set out the barriers and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.

10. There are already some flexibilities within the current system which aim to make it easier for adults to access provision, including, for some groups of adults, access to financial support such as learner support. We want to explore how well both financial support and non-financial flexibilities are working, and each of these is discussed in turn below.
11. The government response to this consultation will also consider the interactions between its outcomes and that of the response to the Second Stage of the Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 and below in England, in particular the proposals in the review relating to technical qualifications for adults aimed at improving accessibility, for example through the recognition of prior learning and experience, and modular delivery of content.⁷ The final government response to the review was published on 14 July 2021. The National Skills Fund consultation asks questions about the operation of recognition of prior learning as an existing flexibility, rather than as the proposed principle set out in the review.

⁵ Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>.

⁶ The full list of consultation questions can be found at Annex A. Questions 1 to 9 are to provide identifying information that will help assess the responses. The full list of questions also provide opportunities to give additional comments on each section.

⁷ Department for Education (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-second-stage>

Financial Support

12. We know that the additional financial costs involved in training could be a barrier for some adults who are interested in taking up the offer. We want to explore how existing government support for learners funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) or the Advanced Learner Loan (ALL) Bursary Fund is working, and to what extent it meets the needs of eligible adults who wish to take up free level 3 qualifications through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
13. The AEB funding rules⁸ and ALL funding rules⁹ set out the rules governing learner support and the ALL Bursary Fund respectively. They provide financial support for individuals who might otherwise be prevented from participating or continuing in learning. While funding for the free level 3 qualifications is delivered through the AEB, we are also interested in evidence about the ALL Bursary Fund as adults taking a level 3 would previously have been funded through ALL. This support can help with things like:
 - Accommodation, where residency is necessary.
 - Financial hardship, including support for travel costs or course related costs like optional books or equipment that are not part of the fee.
 - Ofsted registered childcare.
14. Providers must identify a learner's needs before awarding support. Providers must also make available their own criteria for how they will administer and distribute the funds. These criteria will vary between providers but allow for local circumstances to be considered. Learners may face different eligibility criteria depending on which provider they are applying to, although financial need is the driving criterion all providers consider.
15. The AEB funding rules also allow providers to support disadvantaged learners who cannot undertake online delivery in the event of local or national measures in response to COVID-19. We also recognise the importance that the ALL Bursary Fund has had to loan-funded learners during the pandemic.
16. While providers have the flexibility to set their own criteria, there may be an opportunity for government to encourage best practice from providers on financial support for learners, including making it easier for potential learners to understand how much support they could receive. For example, government could publish guidelines for best practice, which providers could then refer to when deciding their policy and criteria and considering how to publicise the offer.

⁸ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/adult-education-budget-aeb-funding-rules-2020-to-2021>

⁹ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advanced-learner-loans-funding-rules-2020-to-2021>

Q11. This is a question for providers:

- a. How do you currently advertise your learner support offer?
- b. To what extent does the current learner support offer enable you to address the financial barriers which could stop adults participating in or continuing learning?
- c. Which financial barriers do you find it hardest to address and what is the reason for this?

Please provide examples and/or evidence for your response.

Q12. How easy is it for adults to find out whether they are eligible for the current learner support offer? Please provide an explanation for your answer.

- a. Really easy
- b. Easy
- c. Neutral
- d. Difficult
- e. Really difficult

Q13. Are there any other ways through which it would be useful to publicise learner support? Please set out what these other ways are and explain why they might be useful.

Q14. How do you think that government can support providers to deliver best practice in communicating and providing the current financial support for adults? Please explain your answer and, where possible, provide evidence for your response.

Non-financial flexibilities

17. Secondly, we would like to understand whether any non-financial flexibilities currently available for the free level 3 qualifications for adults are being underused. There are already flexibilities in the system which could make training more accessible for adults, and survey data from the Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2019 (outlined below) suggests that these existing flexibilities could be of some value to current or potential adult learners. To make sure the free qualifications for adults are accessible for everyone, we are interested in finding out how well the current system of non-financial flexibilities are working and if there are any barriers to their use. Findings from the consultation will inform both next steps on the National Skills Fund, and proposals set out in the FE Funding and Accountability consultation. Current flexibilities in the system include:

- Start dates: In the 2019 Adult Participation Survey, 7% of adult participants expressed that a flexible start date would make them more likely to take up learning in the future.¹⁰ This flexibility means that providers can choose

¹⁰ Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

when courses should begin and allows for courses which do not start at the beginning of the academic (September) or calendar (January) year.

- Breaks in learning: We know that adults will often have to fit learning around other commitments, such as work and caring responsibilities.¹¹ The ability to take breaks in learning allows a provider and student to agree on the student suspending their learning to take a break. The student can then continue the learning aim with the same eligibility that applied when they first started their learning.
- Recognition of prior learning: We know that time pressures can be a barrier to adults undertaking learning. Recognition of prior learning is an assessment method that considers whether a learner can demonstrate whether they can either meet the outcomes for a qualification or a component of a qualification through knowledge, understanding, or skills they already have. If so, they may not need to undertake a course of learning for that component or qualification.
- Modes of delivery: We know that how training is delivered can have an impact on its accessibility to adults. For example, 9% of respondents to the 2019 Adult Participation Survey stated that online delivery would make them more likely to take up learning in the future.¹² Providers can choose to deliver provision in different ways, including deciding whether to deliver part-time courses, face-to-face learning, online learning, or blended learning (a mixture of face-to-face and online learning).
- Weekend and evening learning: We know that adults will often have to fit learning around other commitments, such as work and caring responsibilities. For example, 11% of adult participants in the 2019 Adult Participation Survey indicated that the ability to learn at a time that suits them would make them more likely to take up learning in the future.¹³ This flexibility means that providers can choose to deliver provision at different times, including at the weekend and in the evening.

Q15. For the non-financial flexibilities below, please select which you think are valuable:

- Flexible start dates
- Breaks in learning
- Flexible modes of delivery
- Weekend and evening learning
- Recognition of prior learning

¹¹ Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

¹² Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

¹³ Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

- Other which is not listed (please specify)

Q16. Are there any barriers which make it difficult to use or deliver the existing non-financial flexibilities? Please set out what these barriers are and, where possible, suggest ways that these barriers may be overcome.

Q17. This is a question for providers: What could encourage providers to deliver these non-financial flexibilities more often? Please set out which of these non-financial flexibilities your answer refers to (e.g., “all the non-financial flexibilities above” or “flexible start dates only”).

Employer Involvement

We want to ensure that employers can benefit from this offer and the skills it provides, so through this section we are exploring how we can ensure these qualifications meet the needs of a range of employers.

18. Employers can also play an important role in encouraging more adults to participate in learning. We recognise that if the offer is beneficial to employers, they will be more likely to promote the free level 3 qualifications to their employees (who will benefit in turn). For example, findings from the Cost and Outreach pilot suggest that learners find that opportunities communicated by employers are particularly influential because they are understood to be implicitly endorsed by the employer.¹⁴ In the same pilot, learners also cited employer support as crucial in enabling them to complete their course.

There are a variety of different qualifications available through the offer, more details of which can be found online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/find-a-free-level-3-qualification/list-of-free-level-3-qualifications-available-to-eligible-adults.

Q19. Different sectors may use the offer in different ways, depending on their skills needs. How do you think different sectors might make use of the offer and why? If you are answering as an employer, you might want to talk about how your specific sector could use the offer.

Q20. How might we adapt the offer to better meet the needs of employers, including those from a range of different sectors, and a range of sizes? Where possible, please set out the proposed adaptation and which types of employers it would suit.

Q21. How else can we encourage employers to use the free level 3 qualifications for adults to train or upskill their workers? Please set out your suggestion and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.

¹⁴ Department for Education (2021). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-and-outreach-pilots-evaluation>

Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults

We want to ensure that there are strong pathways to this offer and that we are targeting it effectively, so this section explores progression into level 3 courses and how we can best target the offer.

19. The level 3 qualifications included as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee are currently available to the approximately 11 million adults aged 24+ in England who do not hold a level 3 qualification or higher.¹⁵ This cohort is rightly our first priority, as they are most likely to be in low skilled, low wage employment. They have also been disproportionately affected by the economic damage caused by COVID-19. The free qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee will support some of the country's lowest-skilled adults to gain new skills and access new opportunities that can support them to secure better jobs. We want as many adults within this group as possible to do these qualifications.
20. We recognise that for some adults accessing the free level 3 qualifications may prove challenging as they may lack some of the prior learning or experience needed to engage in learning at level 3. This may particularly be the case for those adults wanting to use the free level 3 qualifications to change sector. There are a number of flexibilities built into the AEB to support people to learn, such as learning support to meet the cost of putting in place a reasonable adjustment for learners who have an identified learning difficulty and/or disability. We would like to understand how else providers could support adults to access the free level 3 qualifications, where they may lack some of the necessary prior learning or experience. We would also like to understand, for different sectors, what the de facto prior learning requirements are to take a level 3 course.

Q23. This is a question for providers: What prior learning requirements (if any) do you have for someone taking a level 3 course? Please set out the prior learning requirements and how those requirements differ between different courses and sectors (if at all).

For example, you may require an adult to have gained the equivalent level 2 qualification before taking a level 3 course. Do the prior learning requirements differ depending on the sector at which the course is aimed?

Q24. This is a question for employers: Are there any particular requirements for learners looking to achieve a level 3 qualification in an area that supports your sector? Please set out these requirements and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics, (2019). <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> January, 2019-December, 2019 [Query: Annual Population Survey, January 2019-2019, England only, Age 25 and above, Qualification levels].

Q25. How else can providers best support adults without a level 3 to access the level 3 qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, given that they may lack some prior learning or experience? Please provide evidence and/or examples to illustrate your response.

21. We would welcome views more generally on how we can ensure that we achieve the best impact for adults through the free level 3 qualifications, particularly given the current labour market. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on England's economy, and that this may have increased the need for retraining options. At the same time, the changing nature of the labour market, including the emergence of new technologies and the opportunities that brings, will mean that more and more adults will need to retrain over the course of their lifetime. Our priority is to support adults without existing level 3 qualifications.

Q26. How else can we achieve the best impact for adults with the most to gain from the free level 3 qualifications for adults, alongside funding the courses? Please provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.

Section 2: Skills Bootcamps

Summary

Skills Bootcamps are an innovative new offer of flexible, level 3-5 equivalent courses of up to 16 weeks which are free to eligible adult learners. They provide adults with in-demand skills and then fast-track them to an interview with an employer – supporting adults to move into well-paid jobs and helping employers to fill much-needed vacancies. Skills Bootcamps fill a crucial gap in skills provision for both employers and individuals, providing short, technical courses that are aimed specifically at meeting the needs of adults and the labour market.

22. In September 2020, the Prime Minister announced that government would deliver Skills Bootcamps as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. Skills Bootcamps form a key part of our ambition to transform the foundations of the skills system so that everyone has the chance to train, retrain and upskill throughout their lives to respond to changing skills needs and employment patterns. By the end of March 2021, the first digital Skills Bootcamps will mean that approximately 2,500 adults have gained digital skills that are in high demand from employers; and the aspiration is that three quarters of these adults will have moved into new roles directly linked to these skills by the end of September.

23. The Department for Education have rolled out Skills Bootcamps in response to user research findings which highlighted that adults tend to want a clear route to a new job, and that employer endorsement can be an important factor in encouraging adults to undertake training. At the same time, employers showed a strong preference for someone who could ‘hit the ground running’ over offering training to new recruits, and some employers expressed interest in a shorter, more flexible training offer¹⁶ - a training programme that was designed to meet their needs rather than an ‘off-the-shelf’ course, to deliver the higher skills that they required. The Skills Bootcamps aim to meet these needs – they have a clear line of sight to a new job, endorsement from an employer, provide up-front training before someone starts a job, and are targeted specifically at the skills employers want. Both the West Midlands Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Combined Authority had already delivered bootcamp-style training, and we drew upon learning from those models in designing how the Skills Bootcamps could work.

¹⁶ Department for Education (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-retraining-scheme>

Expansion of the Skills Bootcamps

We want to ensure that Skills Bootcamps provision continues to improve over time, so this section of the consultation explores which aspects of the current provision are most valued.

24. From April 2021, we are using £43 million of National Skills Fund investment to expand the Skills Bootcamps. We focused the first Skills Bootcamps on digital skills because this is an area of high demand: a lack of digital skills has been reported as a factor in around two-fifths of skills gaps (38%).¹⁷ We will roll out digital Skills Bootcamps so that they are running in all nine geographical regions of England. We will also begin funding Skills Bootcamps focused on technical skills¹⁸ which are in demand by local employers: the Employer Skills Survey 2019 reported a shortage of technical skills, with 84% of vacancies caused by a lack of practical or technical skills.¹⁹ Finally, we want to explore how Skills Bootcamps can be used to support emerging skills in sectors where there is likely to be growing demand in the coming years, for example to support our net zero ambition.

25. Pending the evaluation results of the Skills Bootcamps and the outcome of the next Spending Review, we will consider whether to expand the Skills Bootcamps further in future years. We have rolled out the Skills Bootcamps in stages, starting on a small scale and building up, so that we can learn what works best and improve them over time. As we move into the next stage of the Skills Bootcamps, we want to ensure that we take forward the best parts of the Skills Bootcamps and continue to improve those elements that could work even better. We are conducting an evaluation of the Skills Bootcamps and will also use the findings of this evaluation to inform the decisions that we make.

Q29. Which current aspects of the Skills Bootcamps do you think are most valuable? Select all that apply.

- Short, intensive courses
- Industry-specific training, designed to meet the needs of employers
- Focused on in-demand skills
- Fast-track to an interview
- Line of sight to a job
- Recruitment pipeline for employers
- Flexible delivery model
- Emphasis on improving diversity in technical skills
- Other, please specify

Please explain the reason for your response.

¹⁷ Government Social Research (2019). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2019-uk-excluding-scotland-findings>

¹⁸ Examples of technical courses. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-skills-fund>

¹⁹ Government Social Research (2019). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2019-uk-excluding-scotland-findings>

Providers

We want to ensure a wide range of providers can deliver this provision, so this section explores how we can make it easier for more providers to deliver Skills Bootcamps.

26. As we continue to grow the Skills Bootcamps, we would like to expand the range of providers involved in delivering Skills Bootcamp provision. For instance, some Further Education (FE) colleges and other providers have said to us that they have held back from delivering Skills Bootcamps because - while they have been delivered on a smaller scale - Skills Bootcamps have been funded through a separate procurement process targeted at Skills Bootcamps alone.

Q31. This is a question for providers: What do you think are the challenges in delivering Skills Bootcamps? Where possible, please provide evidence for your response.

Q32. This is a question for providers: How best do you think we might help providers to overcome the challenges to delivering a Skills Bootcamp? Please refer to the challenge you have set out in answer to the previous question. Where possible, please provide evidence for your response.

Accessibility

We want to ensure a wide range of eligible adults can access this offer, so this section explores how we can ensure that Skills Bootcamps are as accessible as possible.

27. Our ambition is that Skills Bootcamps provision is inclusive and accessible to a wide range of eligible adults. The Skills Bootcamps are open to employed, self-employed and recently unemployed (under 12 months) people aged 19 and over. They have been designed to meet the needs of adults and can be used to gain new skills or to update existing skills. Adults who are in work or have busy lives can find it difficult to access training; and user research indicates that they are more likely to be motivated to do training if there is a direct line of sight to a job.²⁰ The flexible and shorter format of the Skills Bootcamps model has been designed to make it easier for adults to access these training courses; and the fast-track to an interview provides a clearer sense of how the training links to job opportunities. Providers are also adapting the delivery of Skills Bootcamps to suit the varied needs of adults. For example, some providers offer online learning, deliver courses at a variety of times including weekends and evenings, host regular drop-in sessions so that adults can learn at their own speed but access support when they need to, or record session content for viewing at a time that suits the learner.

²⁰ Department for Education (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-retraining-scheme>

Providers can also choose to allow adults to participate in the Skills Bootcamps on a part-time basis.

28. Some examples of other actions that we have taken to ensure that the Skills Bootcamps are accessible to as many adults as possible are set out below:

- Some of the digital Skills Bootcamps have a particular focus on supporting cohorts who may be less likely to take up this type of training, such as women, who are underrepresented in the digital sector. Since this first wave of Skills Bootcamps we have continued to consider what more we could do to improve access to people with protected characteristics.
- In the latest wave of Skills Bootcamps, we set clear expectations that local partners should consider the impact on groups with protected characteristics. In grant offer letters, bid specifications and contracts for the Skills Bootcamps we included expectations around ensuring those with protected characteristics can access the programmes as far as possible.
- Potential suppliers for these Skills Bootcamps were required to provide evidence of their approach to learner engagement, enrolment, and participation, including marketing, recruitment, and engagement of underrepresented groups and those with protected characteristics. This was one of the criteria by which we evaluated bids and chose those that would be successful.
- We are also collecting data from learners to ensure that the bootcamps are attracting a diverse cohort, and that this diversity flows through to completion of the course and jobs following the course.

Q34. Skills Bootcamps currently run for up to 16 weeks. Other than the length of the courses, do you think we could adapt Skills Bootcamps in any other way to:

- a. Support adults to access this training more easily?
- b. Support adults who are self-employed to access this training and use what they learn to benefit their business?
- c. Better meet the needs of employers, including those from a range of different sectors, and a range of sizes? Where possible, please detail the proposed adaptation and which types of employers it would suit.

Please provide a reason and/or evidence for your responses.

29. Currently, the Skills Bootcamps last up to 16 weeks when done on a full-time basis, although adults can take longer to complete the course if they do it part-time. This timing was set to balance the need to keep the courses short enough to work for as many adults as possible, but long enough to provide the skills needed by employers for in-demand jobs. We have allowed different lengths of up to 16 weeks because we recognise that the skills needed for different jobs may take more or less time to learn. We have set a maximum length because we want Skills

Bootcamps to address the need for shorter courses specifically.

Q35. Skills Bootcamps are designed to give adult learners the skills they need to fast-track them to an interview for a specific job. Do you think Skills Bootcamps courses should continue to be a maximum of 16 weeks long? Please explain and provide evidence for your answer.

Q36. What is the minimum length of time that you think a Skills Bootcamp course should be? Please provide evidence for your response.

When answering both of these questions: if you are an adult learner, you might want to think about how much time you would be willing to commit to training through a Skills Bootcamp, including how many hours per week. If you are an employer or provider, you might want to give an example of a technical skill needed for a specific job and set out how many weeks it would take to learn that skill on a full-time basis.

Employer Involvement

We want to ensure that employers can easily make contributions to Skills Bootcamps, so this section explores the mechanisms by which they can do that.

30. Employers can use the Skills Bootcamps either to train their existing employees and move them into other roles or to find and hire new staff. We are not asking employers to contribute towards Skills Bootcamp training for people who are not currently their workers, but we are asking them to pay 30% of the course fees where they are using Skills Bootcamps to train their existing employees. This is to reflect the benefit that the employer will receive from the training, through having employees with improved and valuable skills. For example, in the Employer Skills Survey 2019, 90% of employers who arranged or funded vocational training for their workers reported that this led to better business performance.²¹ Initial roundtables with employers indicated that 30% would be a reasonable contribution, and we are testing that proportion within our current Skills Bootcamps.

Q38. This is a question for employers: We understand that how an employer is required to make this financial contribution could have an impact on them – for example, whether employers are required to make an upfront payment before the start of the course. Are there any ways that we could make the mechanism for contributing as easy as possible?

²¹ Government Social Research (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2019-uk-excluding-scotland-findings>

Q39. It may be valuable if employers could also make non-financial contributions to training. These non-financial contributions could be made by both those employers who are using a Skills Bootcamp to retrain their current workforce, in addition to the 30% contribution where they are using Skills Bootcamps to train existing employees, and by those who are not.

Please select the non-financial contributions below that you think it would be most valuable for employers to make, and add any other contributions not listed that you think would also be valuable. Please select all that apply.

- Providing space for training
- Providing technical equipment for learning
- Helping delivery of the training – e.g., providing some learning materials or teaching part of the course content
- Giving their workers time to learn
- Any other additional non-financial contributions not already listed that you think would be valuable. Please specify.

Q40. This is a question for employers: Would you be willing to make a non-financial contribution to training? Please explain your response.

Q41. How do you think we can encourage more employers to make non-financial contributions? Where possible, please give examples and explain your answer.

Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps

We want to ensure that adults can easily move onto other training or learning after completing a Skills Bootcamp, so this section explores how a Skills Bootcamp can fit within longer progression pathways.

31. Skills Bootcamps fast-track adults to an interview with an employer and are directly linked to specific jobs. Currently, Skills Bootcamps courses do not need to carry formal accreditation and adults who complete the course do not receive a qualification. Providers design the training around the skills that employers' value. Employers signal that they value those skills by offering an interview for those who complete the bootcamp and can then use that interview to check that potential recruits meet their requirements.
32. As set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper, it is our ambition to align a substantial majority of post-16 technical education and training to employer-led standards, managed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. As Skills Bootcamps expand, we are considering how much we should require they also align to a certain percentage of knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the relevant standard, and as part of the tender process we would ask providers to demonstrate evidence of this. This would ensure that Skills Bootcamps are

coherent with the wider technical offer. In future, a requirement to align more closely to employer-led standards could be seen as a further signal that Skills Bootcamps are delivering on the skills employers' value; putting employers at the heart of the skills system. We know that adults who currently participate in learning are also more likely to learn in the future so this would also support progression opportunities for adults who want to undertake further training or learning that is based on standards, such as apprenticeships or Higher Technical Qualifications.²² For example, we support learners with the relevant prior learning to progress onto 'accelerated apprenticeships', so that they can reach occupational competency in quicker time.

Q43. What further learning do you think a Skills Bootcamp should enable adults to progress onto?

- No further learning
- Job-based training in the workplace
- A higher technical qualification
- An apprenticeship
- Other further training and/or learning opportunities not already listed which you think a Skills Bootcamp should enable adults to progress onto. Please specify.

Q44. We welcome any further comments on how we can best enable progression from Skills Bootcamps onto further training and/or learning, such as apprenticeships or higher technical education.

²² Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs

Summary

Over the past year, we have faced substantial challenges as we have dealt with restrictions brought about by the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Now we have the opportunity, not just to recover, but to build back better – fixing some of the shortcomings that have held our country back for too long to ensure that our people, businesses, and the economy can flourish. As part of our drive towards growth, we want to explore where there may be priority skill needs we could do more to meet, so that we can help adults improve their job prospects and businesses to access the skills they need to thrive.

Critical Skills

We want to ensure that we help to meet critical skills needs below degree level, so this section of the consultation explores whether there are specific skills gaps we need to do more to fill.

33. The Government has put in place an unprecedented economic package to support the country, and while COVID-19 has significantly impacted both the lives of individuals and our economy, we now plan to build back better than before. One of the three pillars of our plan for growth is skills, and our commitment to ensure people have the support they need to improve their skills throughout their life.²³ Not only will that support adults, but businesses and the economy too. Productivity has been a long-standing problem for our country and high-quality education and skills training can help sustain productivity growth and our international competitiveness: skills improvements accounted for 20% of the UK's productivity growth before the financial crisis.²⁴

34. We have a strong education system, but there is a substantial and growing employer demand for higher technical skills which is not being met. The Employer Skills Survey 2019 reported skills shortages in key industries like manufacturing and construction, which use higher technical skills.²⁵ Other research suggests the acute shortage of technician-level STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) skills can be attributed to an undersupply of people with level 3 to 5

²³ HM Treasury (2021). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>

²⁴ 7 BIS (2015), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-skills-and-productivity-in-an-international-context>

²⁵ Department for Education (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2019-uk-excluding-scotland-findings>

vocational qualifications over the last 20 years.²⁶

35. In the *Skills for Jobs White Paper*, we set out our ambition to ensure employers are at the heart of Post-16 skills and that the provision of technical education and training is well aligned to what employers need in their areas. We also know that the skills we need as a country are changing – that was the case even before the impact of COVID-19. As we take our place as a fully sovereign trading nation after exiting the European Union, we will ensure that the UK remains a leading destination for global investment and that we support opportunities for trade and collaboration: businesses will be able to take advantage of new opportunities this provides. At the same time, technology is transforming the sectors and the way that we work, changing the skills we need. And we are working towards critical national priorities that will be challenging to meet without the right skills in place, such as our commitment to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, where demand for skills may grow rapidly. We want to understand how the skills system can ensure that employers can find and hire the workers they need to take advantage of these new opportunities, and that adults can continue to improve their skills and prosper in the changing labour market.²⁷ We also want to understand how the skills system can better meet the current skills gaps specific to employers' local areas.

Q47. Are there any current critical skills gaps below degree level and in particular sectors, occupations, or locations that you think the skills system will not meet, either now or in the next five years?

For example, some sectors might have specific skills needs which have emerged since exiting the European Union, whereas other sectors might encounter skill needs in the future – for instance, because of new technologies linked to transitioning industries or our ambition to reach net zero by 2050.

- a. What are these skills gaps? Please set out what these skills gaps are and specify whether they apply to a particular sector, occupation, or location.
- b. At what level are these skills gaps?
- c. Is this a current skills gap, or something that you see emerging in the future? If in the future, please detail when you think this skills need is likely to arise.
- d. Why do you think the skills system does not meet this skills gap?

²⁶ National Audit Office (2018) <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/delivering-stem-science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-skills-for-the-economy/>

²⁷ Department for Education (2021). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>

Shorter Courses

We want to explore if there is a need for more shorter courses, so this section explores the extent to which employers and providers are currently using shorter courses and for what purposes.

36. The offers funded through the National Skills Fund have been designed to address gaps in technical skills provision, so that adults can gain the valuable skills that employers require. Prior to investment through the National Skills Fund, only adults aged 19-23 could gain full funding to access their first level 3. Our new offer of free level 3 qualifications now expands that offer to adults of all ages, and the qualifications included have been identified to help adults improve their wages and chances of being employed, whilst also addressing strategic skills priorities. Similarly, Skills Bootcamps are level 3 – 5 equivalent and aim to address a gap in shorter provision specifically targeted at meeting the needs of local employers. They now provide flexible and responsive training which is designed to fill in-demand vacancies and respond to changing labour market demands.

37. A key way that we might address critical skills needs below degree level and meet the needs of adults is by exploring further options for shorter courses (under 12 months) of provision. Much of the current regulated training provision requires a longer period to complete. However, some adults have reported that time pressures can prevent them from enrolling on training courses and are a difficulty for those who do decide to learn.²⁸ Some employers have also expressed an interest in a shorter, more flexible retraining offer than those currently available.²⁹ This may indicate that there is a need to boost access to, or provision of, shorter or more flexible training courses to supplement opportunities for longer periods of learning. Moreover, while some people may need substantial training to be ready for a job, others may be able to build on existing knowledge and skills and may therefore need only a shorter period of learning. For example, this might apply to those looking to upskill in transitioning industries and emerging technologies linked to net zero.

38. We are already looking to improve options for adults to take shorter courses and modules. This year, we are expanding our Skills Bootcamps, which currently last up to 16 weeks and help adults to learn in-demand technical skills. There are also a number of shorter Level 3 qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. While apprenticeships will continue to last for a minimum of 12 months, we are introducing changes to respond to the needs of employers and apprentices. The government is seeking views on how new flexi-job schemes could be run in sectors with flexible employment patterns and short-term roles. These schemes would enable an apprentice to work across a range of projects and with

²⁸ Learning and Work Institute (2019). <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>

²⁹ Department for Education (2019). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-retraining-scheme>

different employers to gain the full skills and experience to complete their apprenticeship programme.

39. We will also be introducing pilots to stimulate higher technical education and incentivise more flexible and modular provision. For example, as set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper, this financial year the National Skills Fund is supporting the adoption of emerging skills and technologies through funding the High-Value Manufacturing Catapult's 'Skills Value Chain'.³⁰ This process assesses future skills needs in manufacturing, develops courses to meet these needs, and makes those courses widely available through high-quality providers such as Institutes of Technology. It will support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to work with emerging technologies in the manufacturing sector, such as additive manufacturing, AI and robotics. We are now exploring applying the Skills Value Chain approach to technology and skills relating to electrification, in support of the government's net zero ambitions. Subject to the Spending Review, we will consider expanding our approach to emerging skills to other government priority sectors.
40. From 2025, we have committed to introducing a Lifelong Loan Entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. It will be available for both modules and full years of study at higher technical and degree levels (level 4 to 6) regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities. The Lifelong Loan Entitlement will make it easier for people to study more flexibly - allowing them to space out their studies, transfer credits between institutions, and undertake more part-time study. We will be consulting on the detail and scope of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement this year.
41. We want to explore if there is a need for more shorter courses. We also want to explore if there are specific sectors or occupations which could particularly benefit from greater access to shorter courses or modules. For example, this might be the case in areas which are changing quickly, such as in jobs related to new technologies or the green economy, where adults may need to update their skills to meet new needs or requirements. We want to ensure that shorter courses have labour market currency and are therefore beneficial to a learner's career, rather than just their next job.

Q49. Are there any particular sectors or occupations which would benefit from improved access to shorter courses? Please set out which sector or occupation and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.

Q50. Could more options for shorter courses or more modular learning opportunities help adults to overcome barriers to learning? Please explain your answer and, where possible, provide evidence for your response.

³⁰ Department for Education (2021). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>

Q51. This is a question for providers: Are you currently delivering short courses (under 12 months) or modules outside of full qualifications?

If you answered yes, please specify:

- a. What short courses/modules you are delivering.
- b. What level these short courses/modules are.
- c. Why you chose to deliver these short courses or modules.
- d. How you designed these short courses or modules. For example, did you work with employers to do so?

Q52. This is a question for employers: Have you funded short courses (under 12 months) or modules outside of full qualifications?

If you answered yes, please specify:

- a. What short courses/modules you have funded, and why.
- b. Whether you worked with the provider on the design of any of these courses.

Q53. This is a question for employers: Do you have any skills needs that you think might be met by a short course or module outside of a full qualification? If you answered yes, please set out what these are.

Q54. Considering the provision we have already made available through National Skills Fund investment, do you think there are any further gaps below degree level in adult skills provision which would benefit from targeted support?

If you answered yes, please:

- a. Specify what these gaps are.
- b. Provide evidence for your answer, including evidence on the impact of this gap.
- c. Suggest ways that these gaps in provision might best be met.

Annex A: List of Consultation Questions

Heading	Question
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q1. What is your name?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q2. What is your email address?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q3. Are you responding as an individual or as part of an organisation?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q4. If you are responding as an individual, how would you describe yourself?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q5. If you are responding as part of an organisation, how would you describe yourself?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q6. What is the name of the organisation you are responding as part of?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q7. Which local authority area are you responding from?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q8. Do you consent to the data you provide being held in accordance with UK GDPR as covered in the Department for Education's personal information charter?
Introduction: The National Skills Fund	Q9. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?
Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults	
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q10. What do you think will be the key barriers to adults taking up the free level 3 qualifications?
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q11. This is a question for providers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do you currently advertise your learner support offer? b. To what extent does the current learner support offer enable you to address the financial barriers which could stop adults participating or continuing in learning? c. Which financial barriers do you find it hardest to address and what is the reason for this? <p>Please provide examples and/or evidence for your</p>

	response.
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q12. How easy is it for adults to find out whether they are eligible for the current learner support offer?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Really easy Easy Neutral Difficult Really difficult <p>Please provide an explanation for your answer.</p>
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q13. Are there any other ways through which it would be useful to publicise learner support?</p> <p>Please set out what these other ways are and explain why they might be useful.</p>
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q14. How do you think that government can support providers to deliver best practice in communicating and providing the current financial support for adults?</p> <p>Please explain your answer and, where possible, provide evidence for your response.</p>
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q15. For the non-financial flexibilities below, please select which you think are valuable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible start dates Breaks in learning Flexible modes of delivery Weekend and evening learning Recognition of prior learning Other which is not listed (please specify)
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q16. Are there any barriers which might make it difficult to use or deliver the existing non-financial flexibilities?</p> <p>Please set out what these barriers are and, where possible, suggest ways that these barriers may be overcome.</p>
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	<p>Q17. This is a question for providers: What could encourage providers to deliver these non-financial flexibilities more often?</p>

	Please set out which of these non-financial flexibilities your answer refers to (e.g., “all the non-financial flexibilities above” or “flexible start dates only”).
Accessibility (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q18. If you have any further comments or reflections on ‘Accessibility (Section 1: Free level free qualifications for adults)’ you can add them here.
Employer Involvement (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q19. Different sectors may use the offer in different ways, depending on their skills needs. How do you think different sectors might make use of the offer and why? If you are answering as an employer, you might want to talk about how your specific sector could use the offer.
Employer Involvement (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q20. How might we adapt the offer to better meet the needs of employers, including those from a range of different sectors, and a range of sizes? Where possible, please set out the proposed adaptation and which types of employers it would suit.
Employer Involvement (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q21. How else can we encourage employers to use the free level 3 qualifications for adults to train or upskill their workers? Please set out your suggestion and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.
Employer Involvement (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q22. If you have any further comments or reflections on ‘Employer Involvement (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)’ you can add them here.
Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)	Q23. This is a question for providers: What prior learning requirements (if any) do you have for someone taking a level 3 course? Please set out the prior learning requirements and how those requirements differ between different courses and sectors (if at all). For example, you may require an adult to have gained the equivalent level 2 qualification before taking a level 3 course. Do the prior learning requirements differ depending on the sector at which the course is aimed?

<p>Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults: (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)</p>	<p>Q24. This is a question for employers: Are there any particular requirements for learners looking to achieve a level 3 qualification in an area that supports your sector?</p> <p>Please set out these requirements and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.</p>
<p>Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)</p>	<p>Q25. How else can providers best support adults without a level 3 to access the level 3 qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, given that they may lack some prior learning or experience?</p> <p>Please provide evidence and/or examples to illustrate your response.</p>
<p>Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)</p>	<p>Q26. How else can we achieve the best impact for adults with the most to gain from the free level 3 qualifications for adults, alongside funding the courses?</p> <p>Please provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.</p>
<p>Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)</p>	<p>Q27. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Pathways to free level 3 qualifications for adults (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)' you can add them here.</p>
<p>Further comments (Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults)</p>	<p>Q28. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Section 1: Free level 3 qualifications for adults' you can add them here.</p>
<p>Section 2: Skills Bootcamps</p>	
<p>Expansion of Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)</p>	<p>Q29. Which current aspects of the Skills Bootcamps do you think are most valuable? Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, intensive courses • Industry-specific training, designed to meet the needs of employers • Focused on in-demand skills • Fast-track to an interview • Line of sight to a job • Recruitment pipeline for employers • Flexible delivery model • Emphasis on improving diversity in technical skills. • Other – please specify

	Please explain the reason for your response.
Expansion of Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q30. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Expansion of Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)' you can add them here.
Providers (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q31. This is a question for providers: What do you think are the challenges in delivering Skills Bootcamps? Where possible, please provide evidence for your response.
Providers (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q32. This is a question for providers: How best do you think we might help providers to overcome the challenges to delivering a Skills Bootcamp? Please refer to the challenge you have set out in answer to the previous question. Where possible, please provide evidence for your response.
Providers (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q33. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Providers (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)' you can add them here.
Accessibility (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q34. Skills Bootcamps currently run for up to 16 weeks. Other than the length of the courses, do you think we could adapt Skills Bootcamps in any other way to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support adults to access this training more easily? b. Support adults who are self-employed to access this training and use what they learn to benefit their business? c. Better meet the needs of employers, including those from a range of different sectors, and a range of sizes? Where possible, please detail the proposed adaptation and which types of employers it would suit. Please provide a reason and/or evidence for your responses.
Accessibility (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q35. Skills Bootcamps are designed to give adult learners the skills they need to fast-track them to an interview for a specific job. Do you think Skills Bootcamps courses should continue to be a maximum of 16 weeks long? Please explain and provide evidence for your answer.

<p>Accessibility (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)</p>	<p>Q36. What is the minimum length of time that you think a Skills Bootcamp course should be?</p> <p>Please provide evidence for your response.</p> <p>Providing evidence: If you are an adult learner, you might want to think about how much time you would be willing to commit to training through a Skills Bootcamp, including how many hours per week. If you are an employer or provider, you might want to give an example of a technical skills needed for a specific job and set out how many weeks it would take to learn that skill on a full-time basis.</p>
<p>Accessibility (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)</p>	<p>Q37. If you have any further comments or reflections on Accessibility (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps) you can add them here.</p>
<p>Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)</p>	<p>Q38. This is a question for employers: We understand that how an employer is required to make this financial contribution could have an impact on them – for example whether employers are required to make an upfront payment before the start of the course.</p> <p>Are there any ways that we could make the mechanism for contributing as easy as possible?</p>
<p>Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)</p>	<p>Q39. For all stakeholders, it may be valuable if employers could also make non-financial contributions to training. These non-financial contributions could be made by both those employers who are using a Skills Bootcamps to retrain their current workforce, in addition to the 30% contribution where they are using Skills Bootcamps to train existing employees, and by those who are not.</p> <p>Please select the non-financial contributions below that you think it would be most valuable for employers to make, and add any other contributions not listed that you think would also be valuable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space for training. • Providing technical equipment for learning. • Helping delivery of the training – e.g., providing some learning materials or teaching part of the course content. • Giving their workers time to learn. • Any other additional non-financial contributions

	not already listed that you think would be valuable. Please specify.
Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q40. This is a question for employers: Would you be willing to make a non-financial contribution to training? Please explain your response.
Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q41. How do you think that we can encourage more employers to make non-financial contributions? Where possible, please give examples and explain your answer.
Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q42. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Employer Involvement (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)' you can add them here.
Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q43. What further learning do you think a Skills Bootcamp should enable adults to progress onto? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further learning. • Job-based training in the workplace. • A higher technical qualification. • An apprenticeship. • Other further training and/or learning opportunities not already listed which you think a Skills Bootcamp should enable adults to progress onto. Please specify.
Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q44. We welcome any further comments on how we can best enable progression from Skills Bootcamps onto further training and/or learning, such as apprenticeships or higher technical education.
Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q45. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Pathways leading on from Skills Bootcamps (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)' you can add them here.
Further comments (Section 2: Skills Bootcamps)	Q46. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Section 2: Skills Bootcamps' you can add them here.
Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs	
Critical Skills (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	Q47. Are there any current critical skills gaps below degree level and in particular sectors, occupations, or locations that

	<p>you think the skills system will not meet, either now or in the next five years?</p> <p>For example, some sectors might have specific skills needs which have emerged since exiting the European Union, whereas other sectors might encounter skill needs in the future – for instance, because of new technologies linked to transitioning industries or our ambition to reach net zero by 2050.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are these skills gaps? Please set out what these skills gaps are and specify whether they apply to a particular sector, occupation, or location. b. What level are these skills gaps at? c. Is this a current skill gap, or something that you see emerging in the future? If in the future, please detail when you think this skill need is likely to arise. d. Why do you think the skills system does not meet this skills gap?
Critical Skills (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	Q48. If you have any further comments or reflections on ‘Critical Skills (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)’ you can add them here.
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q49. Are there any particular sectors or occupations which would benefit from improved access to shorter courses?</p> <p>Please set out which sector or occupation and, where possible, provide a reason and/or evidence for your response.</p>
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q50. Could more options for shorter courses or more modular learning opportunities help adults to overcome barriers to learning?</p> <p>Please explain your answer and, where possible, provide evidence for your response.</p>
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q51. This is a question for providers: Are you currently delivering short courses (under 12 months) or modules outside of full qualifications?</p> <p>If you answered yes, please specify:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What courses/modules you are delivering. b. What level these short courses/modules are. c. Why you chose to deliver these short courses or

	<p>modules.</p> <p>d. How you designed these short courses or modules. For example, did you work with employers to do so?</p>
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q52. This is a question for employers: Have you funded short courses (under 12 months) or modules outside of full qualifications?</p> <p>If you answered yes, please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What short courses/modules you have funded, and why. b. Whether you worked with the provider on the design of any of these courses.
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q53. This is a question for employers: Do you have any skills needs that you think might be met by a short course or module outside of a full qualification?</p> <p>If you answered yes, please set out what these are.</p>
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q54. Considering the provision we have already made available through National Skills Fund investment, do you think there are any further gaps below degree level in adult skills provision which would benefit from targeted support?</p> <p>If you answered yes, please:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Specify what these gaps are. b. Provide evidence for your answer, including evidence on the impact of this gap. c. Suggest ways that these gaps in provision might best be met.
Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q55. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Shorter Courses (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)' you can add them here.</p>
Further comments (Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs)	<p>Q56. If you have any further comments or reflections on 'Section 3: Meeting critical skills needs' you can add them here.</p>



Department
for Education

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