



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

## National Colleges

National Colleges – a call for  
engagement

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# National Colleges – a call for engagement

## The need for a higher level vocational pathway

1. The British economy has benefitted recently from the growth of entrepreneurship and the enabling power of technology. This has led to the expansion of new industries where small, innovative businesses are increasingly important as employers and wealth-creators.
2. Ongoing changes to the world economy, in particular the competitiveness of long distance international trade markets are adding new dynamics; including some moves to 'on shore' service and manufacturing back to Western economies to be near to R&D operations or close to the market.
3. These changes are placing new demands on employers and employees. Higher level technical skills are essential in our labour market and have suffered a lack of focus for far too long. We are changing that. All jobs need knowledge, skills and behaviours. Abstract reasoning abilities learnt through academic study and practical workplace skills from vocational training are both increasingly essential in modern-day economies.
4. It follows that a vocational education pathway to higher level technical skills, that can enable people to release their talents, creativity and spirit of entrepreneurialism, should be an aspirational choice in a balanced modern economy; on a par with an academic route. This is all part of breaking down the barriers between academic and vocational learning.
5. For too long higher level technical skills have fallen through the gap between our Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) systems. This has contributed to the current shortage in higher level technical skills in our labour market about which so many businesses complain and which international comparisons reveal so starkly<sup>1</sup>. Addressing this will help the economy, and help thousands of young people realise their potential.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomorrow's Growth: new routes to higher skills, CBI July 2013; A Skills beyond School Review of England, OECD, September 2013

## The role of National Colleges

6. Our reform programme for Further Education<sup>2</sup> is designed to assist in putting vocational training on a par with an academic route by, for example, making Apprenticeships an equally attractive option as university study for school leavers. Our aim is to create a system which is responsive to the aspirations of employers and learners alike, and whose rigour and quality stands up to comparison with any of our international competitors.
7. But we are not there yet. We recognise that we need to do more; in particular to stimulate the high-quality, work-focussed, higher level technical skills which employers increasingly demand because they can support growth sectors of the economy, such as those with which Government has established industrial strategy partnerships. There are undoubtedly pockets of nationally recognised higher level vocational education within our current system, one example being Westminster Kingsway College's successful catering school. But such pockets are too few and far between.
8. That is why we are inviting you to work with us to support the development of National Colleges which will set a new standard for higher level vocational training.
9. National Colleges will deliver the higher level technical skills that businesses need<sup>3</sup>. They will enable the UK to compete at the cutting edge of vocational skills development, making us a more attractive location for investment, and providing greater scope to export our educational expertise. National Colleges will also have a wider impact in raising the status of vocational careers, demonstrating that there is scope to progress to a higher level by following a vocational route as an alternative to a purely academic pathway. This will generate an increase in the supply and demand for higher level vocational training across the Further Education sector.

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<sup>2</sup> Rigour and responsiveness in skills, BIS, April 2013

<sup>3</sup> Tomorrow's Growth: new routes to higher skills, CBI July 2013

## Development of National Colleges

10. National Colleges by their very nature will be limited in number. They will only emerge where there is real employer demand and commitment to their development, and where there is a strategic need for intervention at a national level. All will have the active participation of existing and prospective employers in the industries concerned. This aligns with the Government's industrial strategy approach.
11. We have already announced the establishment of National Colleges for advanced manufacturing, high speed rail and nuclear; and we look forward to working with other interested parties who believe that there is demand and an identified need for a college in their sector, industry or profession.
12. National Colleges will not duplicate existing provision, and must meet the following criteria to qualify for Government support:
  - An evidenced skills gap at Level 3, 4 and 5 in the identified sector, industry or profession;
  - Employer leadership at a national level, with a clear strategy for employer involvement in governance and the operation of the College, and appropriate mechanisms for engagement with businesses of all sizes; and
  - Financial commitment from employers to developing the new college, with an expectation that at least 50% of the initial investment required to set up and establish the college comes from employers.
13. The distinguishing characteristics of National Colleges are set out in the following pages, along with an illustration of how National Colleges will support new pathways for vocational training, and details of how to respond to this call for engagement.

## Illustrative characteristics of a National College

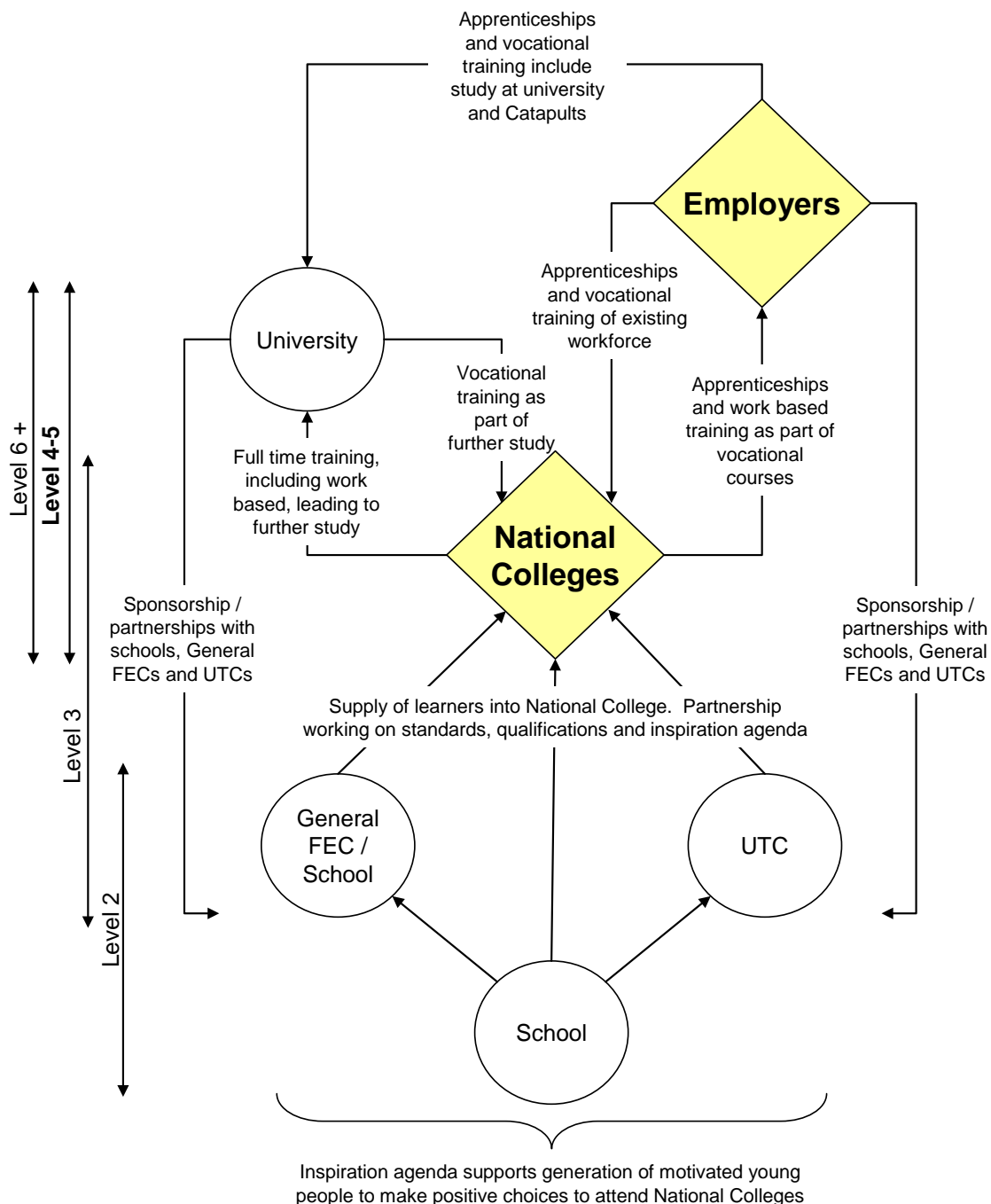
14. The distinguishing features which we would expect to be present within each National College, which will be established as incorporated FE Colleges, are set out below. All will deliver first rate teaching and learning in their chosen specialism.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>The National College...</b>
Long term strategic focus	...has a long term strategic focus on delivering high quality vocational training in its chosen industry, sector or profession. This is underpinned by a long term investment plan and is set out in the college's governing documents.
Strong employer leadership	...has strong employer leadership, through direct involvement in the governance of the college, and through formal partnerships which show real long term employer commitment at a national level, with appropriate mechanisms for small business engagement. Employers will also play a role in supporting delivery, for example by offering placements and providing real life work challenges for courses.
Support employers in setting standards for the sector	...will be expected to work with employers to set the curriculum and apprenticeship standards for their sector, with National Colleges being expected to attain awarding body status. They will also have strong links to innovation centres, which will provide insight into future skills needs when developing curriculum and standards.
Significant level of private income	...generates a significant level of income from employers, including paying directly to send employees on higher level skills and professional development courses. This would supplement public subsidy through grant funding and loan funded tuition fees.
Focus on higher level skills	...operates in a sector where there is a demand for, and an identified gap in the supply of, higher level skills. The college would deliver the majority of its provision at Level 3 and above, with a significant portion at Levels 4 and 5 or higher.
Progression partnerships and knowledge sharing arrangements with universities	...establishes formal partnerships with universities, which facilitate progression of learners to higher study and where appropriate give the college access to the latest research, development and training facilities. The college will be able to evidence the progression outcomes they have secured for learners.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>The National College...</b>
Linkages with compulsory education (schools, General FECs, UTCs, Academies, Free Schools and Sixth Forms)	...has a strong relationship with compulsory education, including influence over the development of the curriculum for vocational courses in its area of specialism. Through its linkages, it will encourage employers to inform, motivate and inspire young people to make positive career choices, including pursuing courses at the college which have a clear link to specific occupations and professions.
At the forefront of innovation in the sector	...will be in a strong position to develop the skill sets which will be needed in future, and to lead innovation in training. This could be through linkages with Catapults, or other innovation centres which focus on the future technology and processes in a sector.
Outstanding status (or on the pathway to outstanding status)	...must aspire to 'Outstanding' status as determined by Ofsted. New colleges would be expected to achieve this status within 3 years of incorporation.
Setting standards in teaching	....will demonstrate excellence in teaching and relevance to the workplace by having a significant number of teachers who are dual professionals, who are exemplars in relevant pedagogy and use of technology in learning. The college will work to improve the quality of the wider workforce in its chosen specialism.
National scope	...will have a national presence. It is likely to operate a 'hub and spoke' model, with a central hub and a network of affiliated 'spokes' around the country, including existing FE Colleges and providers, offering progression pathways to and from the college. Its national standing will mean it will have a residential component and learners will be expected to relocate in order to study at the college.
International recognition	...will be operating at an internationally recognised level of performance. It will have relationships in place with equivalent colleges overseas, and will attract learners from overseas onto its courses.
Best practice in learner support	...has long term commitment to attracting and supporting learners from diverse backgrounds and with diverse learning needs, to achieve a step change in participation across different gender, ethnic, disability and age groups. The colleges will be at the forefront of supporting learners with diverse needs, using its networks, employers, resources, and technological and pedagogical innovation to provide higher level technical skills for all with the potential to achieve them.

## Vocational training pathways in National Colleges

15. National Colleges will play a central role in strengthening existing, and establishing new, pathways for learners to progress into and on from vocational training. Through their partnerships with universities and employers they will establish clear and accessible pathways for learners from vocational study onto further academic study or progression into work. Their status and profile, and the partnerships they form with schools, colleges, FE providers and UTCs will inspire and attract a wide range of people to follow a vocational training pathway.





16. Through their close linkages with employers, National Colleges will also play a role in improving levels of ongoing professional development.

### **National College pathways at the Manufacturing Training Centre**

The Lloyds Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre is being established by the Manufacturing Technology Centre to deliver more than 1,000 engineering apprenticeships over 10 years.

The apprentices will spend the first year of their apprenticeship in full time education at a local Further Education College. They will then spend their second year at the Lloyds Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre, with years three and four either spent at the Manufacturing Technology Centre or in a placement at a manufacturing company, when they will also spend a day a week at the Training Centre.

The Manufacturing Technology Centre, part of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult supported by the Technology Strategy Board, is a collaboration between four of the leading universities and technology organisations in the UK; the Universities of Birmingham, Loughborough and Nottingham and TWI Ltd, and has industrial members ranging from small businesses to large multi-national corporations.

## National Colleges – a call for engagement

17. We want to work with interested parties who believe there is a need for a National College in their sector, industry or profession. BIS has £50m to invest in match funding National Colleges from April 2015 up to March 2017.

18. If you support the vision for National Colleges, and can meet the criteria for engagement, then we would like to hear from you. Interested parties should send responses to this call for engagement to [nationalcolleges@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nationalcolleges@bis.gsi.gov.uk) by 5 September 2014.

19. Responses should set out:

- The rationale for establishing a National College in the identified sector, industry or profession; including why a new college is the most appropriate intervention.
- Evidence of:
  - A gap in the supply of skills at Level 3, 4 and 5 in the chosen sector, industry or profession.
  - Employer leadership at a national level, with a clear strategy for employer involvement in governance and the operation of the College, and appropriate mechanisms for engagement with businesses of all sizes; and
  - Financial commitment from employers to developing the new college, with an expectation that at least 50% of the initial investment required to set up and establish the college comes from employers.

20. We will work with interested parties whose responses meet these criteria to develop their proposals and consider opportunities for government investment.

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