



BRIEFING PAPER

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Technical education reforms

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Further education
Apprenticeships (section 1.2)

Summary

The proposals

The 2015 Government's [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), published in July 2016, set out proposed reforms to the technical education system in England. Under the proposals, there will be two education routes from age 16: a technical option and an academic option.

The technical option will group together occupations with shared training requirements into 15 technical education routes, which will continue to be delivered by a combination of college-based education and apprenticeships. The remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships will be expanded to cover all technical education and the Institute will be responsible for convening panels of employers to advise on the standards that individuals will need to meet in each route.

Two-year college-based programmes will be created at the start of each technical route, with nationally recognised certificates at levels 2 and 3. Each programme will include a 'common core', applying to all individuals studying that route and aligned to apprenticeships, followed by specialisation towards a skilled occupation or set of occupations. Certificates achieved through college-based study are likely to include a technical qualification (T-levels), and college-based learners will also be entitled to a work placement. For learners not able to access a technical route at 16, there will be a 'transition year' where tailored support will be provided based on their prior attainment.

Routes will then extend up to higher skill levels, with the Institute for Apprenticeships maintaining a register of technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5 which are eligible for Government-backed student loans. The five National Colleges will focus on delivering technical education at levels 4 to 6 in sectors crucial to the Government's productivity agenda. In addition, a network of Institutes of Technology will be created across the country, likely building on existing infrastructure, to provide technical education in STEM subjects at levels 3, 4 and 5.

It is intended that a small number of 'pathfinder' technical routes will be available for first delivery from September 2019, with additional routes becoming available for teaching in phases between 2020 and 2022.

Reaction and issues

The reforms set out in the Skills Plan were broadly welcomed by a range of stakeholders, with some contending that they will help to create a technical education system that has parity of esteem with the academic route. However, issues have been raised concerning specific aspects of the proposals, including that they risk reinforcing an artificial divide between technical and academic education; that the proposed 15 routes do not cover all occupations; and that the timescale for the reforms is overly ambitious.

Technical and Further Education Act 2017

The [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#) provides the legislative framework for the reform proposals. It provides for the remit of the Institute of Apprenticeships to be extended to cover all technical education – both college-based and apprenticeships – and for it to be renamed as the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. The relevant sections will come into force on a date determined by the Secretary of State.

Further developments

A consultation published by the 2015 Government in January 2017, [Building our Industrial Strategy](#), outlined the proposed reforms to technical education and provided further detail

in some areas. Among other things, it stated that the Government would provide £170 million of capital funding for the creation of Institutes of Technology, and would explore how to create a similar platform to UCAS for technical education.

The [March 2017 Budget](#) announced that the number of programme hours for 16-19 year olds on technical education routes would be increased to “over 900 years on average.” It stated that this would result in £500 million of additional funding per year once all the routes are fully implemented. The Budget additionally announced that further education maintenance loans will be available for students on level 4 to 6 technical education courses at National Colleges from 2019-20.

The Institute for Apprenticeships went live on 3 April 2017. [Strategic guidance](#) issued by the 2015 Government on the same day stated that the Institute should ensure it makes preparations in 2017-18 to assume the additional responsibility for class-room based technical education from April 2018. In April 2017, the Institute [announced](#) that it had appointed chairs for 15 route panels, which will be responsible for setting the standards needed by employers “for every occupation in England.”

2017 general election manifestos

The Conservative Party’s 2017 election manifesto outlined the proposed reforms to technical education as set out in the Skills Plan, Industrial Strategy and the 2017 Budget. It also provided further detail on work placements and Institutes of Technology, and stated that the party would review funding across tertiary education as a whole.

Of the other manifestos, only the Labour Party’s specifically referred to the technical education reforms. It stated that Labour shared the broad aims of the Sainsbury Review, but would include additional vocational routes and would drop plans to build new technical colleges. The manifesto additionally set out additional investment in the FE sector in order to implement the Sainsbury recommendations.

1. Background: Current technical education system

1.1 16-19 study programmes

Following Alison Wolf's 2011 report, [Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#), the Coalition Government made a number of reforms to 16-19 education. These included removing a large number of vocational qualifications from the 16-19 performance tables, and replacing the system of funding learning providers per qualification with a system of funding per student.¹

As part of the reforms, since the 2013-14 academic year all 16-19 year old students, whether they are studying academic or vocational qualifications, are expected to be given the opportunity to take a study programme that usually includes:

- substantial academic or applied and technical qualifications;
- non-qualification activity, such as work experience; and
- the study of English and maths where they do not hold a GCSE A*-C in these subjects.²

A national 16-19 funding formula has also been introduced. Under the formula, a single basic funding rate per full-time student, currently £4,000 for 16 and 17 year olds, is intended to fund a study programme of around 600 guided learning hours, regardless of where and what the student studies.³ The formula also includes additional factors, such as a large programme uplift, disadvantage funding, and an area costs adjustment.

Technical qualifications

While any qualification that has been approved for teaching to 16-19 year olds (section 96 approval) may be taught as part of a study programme, the 2015 Government published three lists of approved applied and technical qualifications that will be reported in performance tables alongside academic qualifications (e.g. A-Levels).

An outline of the three categories of qualification is provided in Department for Education [guidance](#) on 16-19 study programmes:

- i) **Tech level qualifications** are rigorous advanced (level 3) technical qualifications, on a par with A levels, and recognised by employers. Backed by employers, they equip young people with the specialist knowledge they need for a job in occupations ranging from engineering to computing, hospitality to accountancy.

The Technical Baccalaureate is a performance table measure which recognises the achievement of 16 to 19 students that includes a tech level qualification, a level 3

¹ HC Deb 2 July 2012, [cc34-5WS](#).

² Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes](#), January 2016, p3.

³ Department for Education and Education Funding Agency, [16-19 Funding formula review](#), July 2012, p12.

maths qualification and an extended project qualification (designed to extend students' writing, communication, research and self-motivation skills). This will first be reported in 2016.

- ii) **Applied general qualifications** are rigorous advanced (level 3) qualifications that equip students with transferable knowledge and skills. They are for post-16 students wanting to continue their education through applied learning and fulfil entry requirements for a range of HE courses – either by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside and adding value to other qualifications at the same level.
- iii) **Technical certificates** provide students aged 16 to 19 with a route into a skilled trade or occupation where employers recognise entry at this level (for example, most construction trades, care work and hairdressing). They will also provide access to tech levels or an apprenticeship.⁴

In order to be included in the performance tables, tech levels and technical certificates have to be recognised by a trade or professional body, or by at least five employers. Alternatively, they may be accepted by a national licensed professional registration scheme.⁵ A university must have pledged support for an applied general qualifications for it to be included in the performance tables.⁶

For students who are not yet ready for a level 2 qualification, providers are encouraged to focus on “work preparation, an extended work placement and other non-qualification activity in lieu of a substantial qualification.”⁷

1.2 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are full-time paid jobs which incorporate on and off the job training. They take between one and four years to complete and are available in 1,500 occupations across more than 170 industries. A successful apprentice will normally receive a nationally recognised qualification on the completion of their contract.⁸

Apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 16 living in England, although there are different entry requirements depending on the sector and job. Almost 900,000 funded apprentices participated on an apprenticeship in the 2015-2016 academic year, and up to 28,000 apprenticeship vacancies are available online at any one time.⁹

⁴ Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes](#), January 2016, p5.

⁵ Department for Education, [2017 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the tech level category](#), February 2015, p3.

⁶ Department for Education, [2017 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the applied general category](#), February 2015, p3.

⁷ Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes](#), January 2016, p6.

⁸ Gov.uk, [Key facts about apprenticeships](#), 21 Feb 2017.

⁹ As above.

There are two different types of apprenticeship schemes, frameworks and standards. Apprenticeship frameworks are being progressively phased out and replaced by the newer apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeship qualification levels

Apprenticeships can be studied at different qualification levels:¹⁰

Name	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	3	2 A level passes
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

Traineeships also provide education, training and work experience to young people to help them get an apprenticeship or other job. Further detail is available in the [Library Briefing Paper, Traineeships](#).

The Institute for Apprenticeships

The [Institute for Apprenticeships](#) was established in May 2016 by the [Enterprise Act 2016](#). The executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education, went live in April 2017. The aim of the institute is to ensure high-quality apprenticeship standards and to advise the government on funding for each standard.

Apprenticeship Policy Developments in 2017

Apprenticeship Levy

On 6 April 2017, the apprenticeship levy came into effect, with all UK employers with a pay bill of over £3 million per year paying the levy. The levy is set at 0.5% of the value of the employer's pay bill above the £3 million threshold, and will be paid into an apprenticeship service account by the employer. Funds in this account have to be spent on apprenticeship training and assessment with a training provider.

Other changes to apprenticeship funding

From May 2017, apprenticeship frameworks and standards will be funded in the same way. Each apprenticeship framework or standard will be associated with a funding band, and the government will only pay a share of the costs below the upper limit of the funding band.

Apprenticeship levy funds will be used to pay for the training and assessment for employers paying the levy (up to the upper limit of the funding band). Employers who do not pay the levy will pay 10% of the cost of training and assessment with the government contributing the remaining 90% (up to the upper limit of the funding band).

Additional payments may be paid to the employer and training provider depending on the characteristics of the apprentice and the type of apprenticeship.

¹⁰ Gov.uk, [Become an apprentice](#).

Register of apprentice training providers

From May 2017, employers paying the apprenticeship levy will be able to choose a provider from a new register – the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. To be eligible to deliver apprenticeship training for apprenticeships, organisations must be listed on the register.

The [Library Briefing Paper, Apprenticeships Policy in England: 2017](#) contains additional information on apprenticeships and the policy changes in 2017.

2. Proposals for reform

2.1 Report of the independent panel on technical education

In November 2015, the then Minister for Skills, Nick Boles, established an independent panel chaired by Lord Sainsbury to “advise on measures which could improve technical education in England.”¹¹

The [report of the independent panel](#) was published in July 2016. It stated that the UK’s economy was being held back by a “long-term productivity problem” and that years of undertraining had led to “a chronic shortage of people with technician-level skills.” Investment in the development of technical skills was, the report argued, essential to enhancing productivity.¹²

In addition to this economic rationale, the report also outlined a social need for change: that individuals should have access to a national system of technical qualifications that is easy to understand, has credibility with employers and remains stable over time. The current system, it argued, failed on all three counts, comprising “a confusing and ever-changing multitude of qualifications”, many of which “hold little value in the eyes of individuals and are not understood or sought by employers.”¹³ The report added that learners, teachers and the public have “long regarded technical education qualifications as inferior to academic qualifications” and that at higher levels, technical qualifications “have too often become divorced from the actual occupations they should be preparing individuals for.”¹⁴

The report made a series of recommendations aimed at “systematically reform[ing] technical education for the long term” and “ensuring individuals can develop the technical knowledge and skills that industry needs through education and training.”¹⁵

2.2 Post-16 Skills Plan

The 2015 Government published a [Post-16 Skills Plan](#) in response to the independent panel’s report, with both reports published on the same day. An [additional document outlining the rationale for the proposed changes](#) and echoing much of the argument set out by the independent panel was also published by the Department for Education at the same time.

¹¹ [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), July 2016, p8.

¹² As above, p22.

¹³ As above, pp22-3.

¹⁴ As above, p23.

¹⁵ As above, p8.

The Skills Plan “unequivocally” accepted all of the independent panel’s recommendations, where...possible within existing budgets” and set out proposed reforms to technical education based on its report.¹⁶

Under the proposals, every young person will be presented with two choices of education route at age 16: an academic route and a technical route. It is intended that learners will also be able to switch between the routes via “appropriate bridging courses.”¹⁷

The Skills Plan argued that the academic option is “already well regarded” and so focused on the technical option, which, it said, “must also be world-class.”¹⁸

The technical option

The technical option “will prepare individuals for skilled employment which requires technical knowledge and practical skills valued by industry.”¹⁹ It will consist of 15 routes, which will “group occupations together to reflect where there are shared training requirements.” The 15 proposed routes are:

- Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
- Business and Administrative
- Catering and Hospitality
- Childcare and Education
- Construction
- Creative and Design
- Digital
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Hair and Beauty
- Health and Science
- Legal Finance and Accounting
- Protection Services
- Sales, Marketing and Procurement
- Social Care
- Transport and Logistics

Technical education will continue to be delivered by a combination of college-based education and apprenticeships, with the final four routes in the list above delivered primarily through apprenticeships. It is intended that employers will “sit at the heart of the system” and will,

¹⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7.

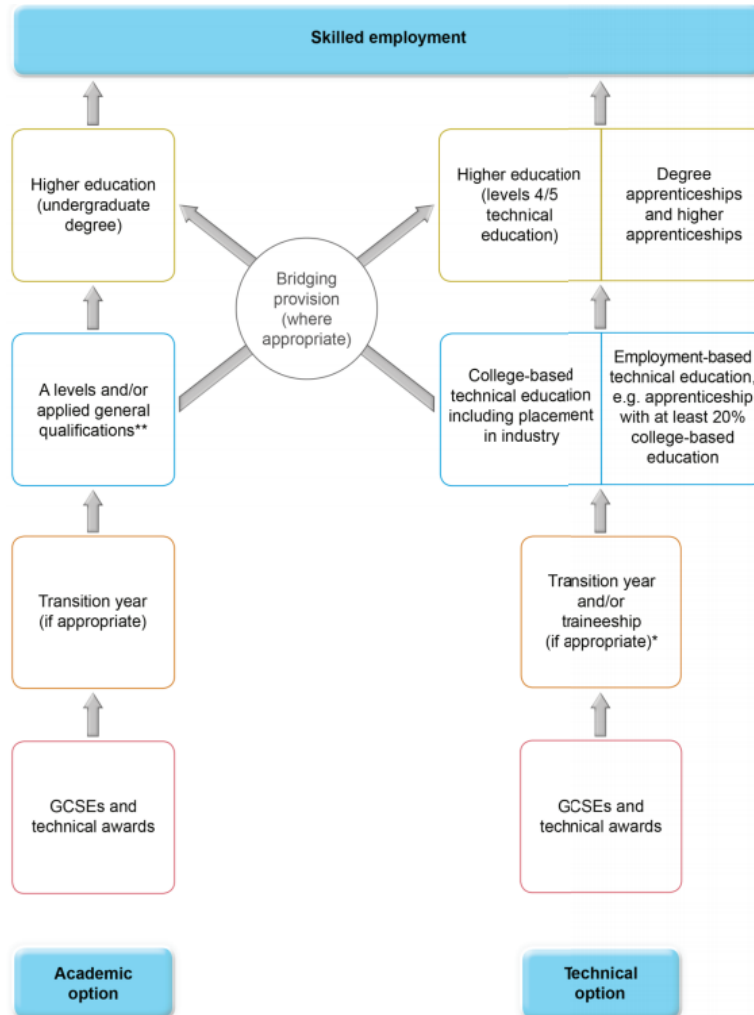
¹⁷ As above, p20.

¹⁸ As above, p7.

¹⁹ As above.

supported by education experts, design the standards across all technical education – college-based and apprenticeships.²⁰

The Skills Plan included the following diagram as an illustration of the main features of the proposed new system:²¹



* Where a student does both, the traineeship will follow the transition year. Students doing both the transition year and a traineeship may progress directly to employment.

** Some students will move directly from A levels and/or applied general qualifications to degree and higher apprenticeships.

Technical certificates and T-Levels

Two-year college-based programmes will be created at the start of each route, with nationally recognised certificates at levels 2 and 3. Certificates achieved through college-based study are likely to include a technical qualification (which have been referred to as T-levels). Programmes will be suitable for 16-18 year olds, but may also be accessed by learners aged 19 and over. Each programme will be “closely aligned” to the apprenticeship at the start of each route and it will be possible to move from one to the other.²²

²⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7.

²¹ As above, p15.

²² As above, p23.

Each programme will include a 'common core', applying to all individuals studying that route and aligned to apprenticeships (including English and maths requirements, and digital skills), followed by specialisation towards a skilled occupation or set of occupations. Learners on college-based routes will also be entitled to "quality work placements."²³

The Skills Plan argued that competition between awarding organisations has led to "a race to the bottom" where awarding organisations compete to offer easier and lower value qualifications. Under the proposals, there will only be one approved tech level qualification for each occupation or cluster of occupations within a route. It is intended that exclusive licenses will be granted for the development of tech levels following a bidding process.

Box 1: Applied general qualifications

The Skills Plan stated that applied general qualifications are not designed to be part of the technical option. It added that the Government intended "to review the contribution of [applied general] qualifications to preparing students for success in higher education; what part they can play in the reformed system; and the impact any reform would have on the government's ambitions on widening participation."²⁴

In March 2017, *FE Week* reported that the Government had privately briefed stakeholders that it had decided to retain applied general qualifications.²⁵

Progress to higher skill levels

Routes will then extend up to higher skill levels, with a wider range of qualifications available at levels 4 and 5 as a reflection of the greater specialisation at tertiary level. However, the 2015 Government stated that it expected "to see a reduction in the number of regulated qualifications that exist at levels 4 and 5".²⁶

Box 2: Degree apprenticeships

The Skills Plan stated that it will remain the responsibility of higher education institutions, under the regulation of the OfS, to determine the degree content of degree apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeships will not regulate the degree qualification but will approve the apprenticeship standard, which sets out the knowledge and skills the apprentice will need to demonstrate, and the associated assessment plan.²⁷

For each of the 15 routes, the Institute for Apprenticeships will maintain a register of technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5 which are eligible for government-backed student loans. Initially these will be drawn from existing qualifications that best meet national standards set by panels of professionals and aligned with apprenticeship standards in the same route. Only qualifications that meet the prescribed standards and are

²³ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp23-4.

²⁴ As above, p20.

²⁵ [Government decides to retain Applied General qualifications](#), *FE Week*, 28 March 2017.

²⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp25-7.

²⁷ As above, p27.

included on the Institute's register will be eligible for loans as technical qualifications.²⁸

Learners not ready to access a route

The proposals focus primarily on learners able to start at the beginning of a technical route and progress upwards. However, the Skills Plan stated that it will be ensured "that up to a year of tailored and flexible support" is available for young people not able to access a route at 16, which will be "based on their prior attainment and aspirations." It added that the Government intended to carry out further work and to consult on this "transition year".²⁹

Students with special educational needs

The Skills Plan noted that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have a wide range of needs and abilities and many "could achieve a high level of technical skill with the right support." It stated that the Government would ensure that the technical routes are "accessible, inclusive and sufficiently flexible to be adapted to individual needs" and that learners with SEND should receive the support and reasonable adjustments they need to access a route.

For the "significant proportion" of students with SEND who are unlikely to be able to access routes because of poor prior attainment, the Skills Plan stated that the transition year will be "crucial".³⁰

Institute for Apprenticeships

Under the proposals, the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships will be expanded to cover all technical education, both college-based and apprenticeships. As part of its role, the Institute will convene panels of professionals "to advise on the knowledge, skills and behaviours that individuals will need to meet the standards in each [technical] route, and on suitable assessment strategies for college-based learning."³¹

Technical education providers

The Skills Plan stated that it was for local areas to decide which of the 15 routes to focus on in order to meet the demands of their local economy. It added that the post-16 area reviews would also identify scope for greater collaboration and efficiency in each area. Further information on the area reviews is available in Library Briefing Paper 7357, [Further Education: Post-16 Area Reviews](#).

National Colleges

In the [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), the 2015 Government announced that five National Colleges would be created with the intention of training around 21,000 students by 2020 in "industries that are crucial to [its] productivity agenda."³² The Colleges will focus on delivering technical education at levels 4 to 6 in

²⁸ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp26-7.

²⁹ As above, p28.

³⁰ As above, pp30-1.

³¹ As above, pp7 &21.

³² HM Treasury, [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), Cm9162, November 2015, p46.

five sectors: digital skills, high-speed rail, onshore oil and gas, and the creative and cultural industries.

In May 2016, the 2015 Government announced around £80 million of funding to support the creation of the colleges. The National College for Digital Skills, and the National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries opened in September 2016. The remaining colleges were expected to open in September 2017, although it has been reported that the opening of the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas has been delayed.³³

The Skills Plan stated that the Institute for Apprenticeships will expect to include qualifications offered by National Colleges on its register of qualifications, and will look to the Colleges to fill any gaps in qualifications in its area of specialisation.³⁴

Institutes of Technology

The 2015 Spending Review also announced that the Government would “support a new network of Institutes of Technology across the country.”³⁵ The Skills Plan stated that the Institutes would likely “build on infrastructure that already exists but will have [their] own independent identity, governance arrangements which directly involve employers, and national branding.” It is intended that the Institutes will provide technical education in STEM subjects at levels 3, 4 and 5.³⁶

Timetable for implementation

The Skills Plan stated that the reforms to technical education would be phased in progressively. A small number of ‘pathfinder’ routes will be established which can start developing standards in 2017 for first delivery in September 2019. It is expected that additional routes will become available for teaching in phases between 2020 and 2022. It is anticipated that the Institute for Apprenticeships will be “fully operational” by April 2017 and until it takes over its broader remit, the Government will be responsible for setting the standards for the college-based element of the technical routes.³⁷

³³ [Government confirms £80 million for National Colleges to deliver the workforce of tomorrow](#), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 9 May 2016; [National College for Onshore Oil and Gas opening delayed](#), *FE Week*, 30 April 2017.

³⁴ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p27.

³⁵ HM Treasury, [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), Cm9162, November 2015, p46.

³⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p35.

³⁷ As above, p42.

3. Reaction and issues

The proposals in the Skills Plan received a broadly positive response from a number of stakeholders, many of which were collated in a blog posted in the Gov.uk website: [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#). For example, Martin Doel, the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (Association of Colleges), stated that:

Technical education has for too long been regarded as a poor cousin of academic study. The Government's Post-16 Skills Plan provides a welcome roadmap to redressing this longstanding anomaly.

The Plan rightly sees colleges being at the heart of the reforms with the new qualifications providing them with a cornerstone to build distinctive courses that meet the needs of employers, students and the economy.³⁸

Similarly, Neil Carberry, Director of Employment and Skills at the CBI, welcomed the proposals as a "real step forward" in terms of creating a vocational route of equal attraction and prominence to A-Levels, and for the emphasis they placed on employer involvement.³⁹

There was also comment on specific aspects of the proposals, with some issues being raised.

Box 3: Government assessment of the equalities impact of the proposals

The 2015 Government published an [assessment of equalities impacts](#) alongside the Skills Plan. This stated, among other things, that:

- Although the reforms will primarily affect young people aged 16-19, the Government expects that they will also help adults to access technical education.⁴⁰
- Individuals with SEND are expected to be over-represented on technical routes and the flexibility built into the transition year will "allow students with SEND to be offered the additional support they need."⁴¹
- The transition year is likely to disproportionately affect young mothers and learners who are pregnant. Moving towards two-year programmes could make it more difficult for people to re-enter education and it is expected that transition years will make this easier.⁴²

A choice of routes at 16

While there was support expressed for the division between an academic option and a technical option, concerns were also raised about young people potentially being faced with a binary choice at 16 between academic or technical pathways.⁴³ Gordon Marsden MP, the Shadow FE and Skills Minister, for example, contended that "people will be worried it's going to be another form of the 11-plus" and stated that

³⁸ [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), Gov.uk, 13 July 2016.

³⁹ As above.

⁴⁰ Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: assessment of equalities impacts](#), July 2016, p5.

⁴¹ As above, p6.

⁴² As above, p8.

⁴³ For example, [Post-16 Skills Plan published by Government](#), Association of Colleges, 8 July 2016.; [Tread carefully in taking forward Sainsbury](#), Association of Employment and Learning Providers, 20 July 2016; [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

more details were needed to reassure people that the technical route will be as prestigious as the academic route.⁴⁴

In his Edge Foundation report, [14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate](#), Lord Baker, welcomed the Skills Plan as an “excellent plan for simplifying post-16 technical routes” but raised concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide between academic and technical education:

However, while simplicity is more than welcome, I have concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide at 16 between the academic and technical routes. England is in a minority of European countries in making young people make such far-reaching choices at 16, and in expecting young people to narrow their curriculum quite so dramatically. I am convinced that many young people would benefit from taking a mixture of technical and academic programmes, in varying proportions according to their talents and ambitions, throughout the period from 14 to 18/19.⁴⁵

Coverage of the 15 routes

Concerns were also raised regarding the coverage of the 15 proposed technical routes. For example, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the AoC, contended that the creative arts and sports were “under-represented” in the 15 pathways and Rob May, Director at YMCA Awards, argued that the “proposed technical routes cover only half of occupations, meaning they’re at risk of ostracizing an enormous part of the labour market.”⁴⁶

Awarding bodies and quality of qualifications

As mentioned in section 2.3, the Skills Plan proposes that any technical education qualification at levels 2 and 3 will be offered and awarded by a single awarding body under an exclusive licence.⁴⁷

There was some support for this proposed simplification of technical qualifications. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), for example, welcomed the “move to streamline the immensely messy landscape of technical education.”⁴⁸ The Managing Director of City and Guilds was more equivocal in welcoming the idea and questioned whether it was right to take away choice altogether:

At first glance, we would support the idea of streamlining qualifications so that there is one high quality route per occupation. While vocational options remain so fragmented and confusing they will never achieve parity of esteem among young people, or even with their parents, compared with the apparently simple and more recognisable academic routes. However, is it

The Skills Plan proposes one qualification per occupation or cluster of occupations within a route. There may, therefore, be more than one qualification per route.

(See: [Lead DfE civil servant debunks Skills Plan ‘myth’](#), *FE Week*, 4 Nov 16.)

⁴⁴ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), TES, 8 July 2016.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Baker, [14-19 Education A new Baccalaureate](#), September 2016, p9.

⁴⁶ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), TES, 8 July 2016; and [Government's Post-16 skills plan overlooks a number of key issues](#), FE News, 8 August 2016.

⁴⁷ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24. See [PQ 49316](#), 3 November 2016, for more on the Government's rationale for the change.

⁴⁸ [Small firms support streamlining of technical education](#), Federation of Small Businesses, 8 July 2016.

right to take choice away altogether in terms of awarding organisations who can deliver the pathways? We don't with academic routes. Is there a risk that we fixate too much on rationalisation rather than quality as the driver for change, resulting in some unintended consequences and wrong behaviours?⁴⁹

The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) rejected that a market-based approach had led to large numbers of competing qualifications and raised concerns that "single licences will create monopolies with all of the associated disincentives and perverse results."⁵⁰

Funding of technical education

Some responses to the Skills Plan raised the issue of funding for further education. For example, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) offered support for the aim of boosting technical education but stated that "it is essential that the Government backs up these plans with sufficient resources."⁵¹ The AoC welcomed the 2015 Government's acknowledgment that additional funding may have to be provided to colleges to support work placements:

However, if we truly want a world class system our colleges will need the additional funding to provide world class resources. The plan's provision for everyone to have work experience alone would cost hundreds of millions of pounds and require much input from employers nationwide to be a success. We therefore welcome the Government's acceptance of the need to review the level of funding for college-based technical education and the Sainsbury Panel's specific suggestion that the intended work placements should receive additional funding.⁵²

Timetable for implementation of reforms

Some commentators questioned the proposed timescale for implementing the reforms. The UK Managing Director of City and Guilds, for example, highlighted "the totally unrealistic timing set out in the Skills Plan" as probably their biggest concern with the proposals.⁵³

David Hughes, chief executive of the AoC, stated that while the "timescale seems reasonable at one level...there's a lot of other stuff going on in Whitehall, not least Brexit and all of that sucking out [of the civil service], so there are some real worries about whether there's enough infrastructure, enough capacity in the system to do this." He additionally questioned whether the Institute for Apprenticeships was equipped to deal with its new responsibilities.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁵⁰ [Post-16 skills plan and the Report of the independent panel on technical education \(Sainsbury Review\) released](#), Federation of Awarding Bodies, 8 July 2016.

⁵¹ [Technical education plan must be backed up with funding](#), Association of School and College Leaders, 27 October 2016.

⁵² [Post-16 Skills Plan published by Government](#), Association of Colleges, 8 July 2016. See also, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp50-1.

⁵³ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁵⁴ [Not enough 'capacity' to implement Sainsbury review, warns AoC leader](#), *TES*, 15 September 2016.

4. Technical and Further Education Act 2017

The *Technical and Further Education Act 2017* received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017, having been introduced to Parliament on 27 October 2016. Library Briefing paper 7752, [Technical and Further Education Bill](#), provides information on the Bill as introduced to Parliament.

A further two Briefing Papers provide information on issues raised during the Bill's passage through Parliament:

- Library Briefing Library Briefing 7782, [Technical and Further Education Bill: Committee Stage Report](#), 20 December 2016
- Library Briefing 7941, [Technical and Further Education Bill: Lords Stages and Ping Pong](#), 9 June 2017.

Many of the issues raised during the passage of the Bill were similar to those raised following the publication of the Skills Plan. Other issues discussed included:

- The quality of careers advice.
- Access and participation in technical education.
- The quality of apprenticeships.
- The representation of learners and apprentices on the board of the Institute for Apprenticeships.
- The representation of students, trade unions and other stakeholders on the groups formed to set standards for occupations.

4.1 The Act's technical education provisions

Among other things, the Act provides the legislative framework for the proposals set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan.

Section 1 of the Act renames the Institute of Apprenticeships as the "Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education" and Schedule 1 amends the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009* to extend the remit of the Institute to cover all technical education. Among other things the Schedule:

- Enables the Secretary of State to specify broad groups of occupations with shared training requirements (which may be referred to as 'routes'). The Institute will be required to map occupations in relation to these routes and must publish information to show how standards for occupations relate to the occupational map.⁵⁵
- Requires the Institute to publish standards for occupations and to describe the expected outcomes required to successfully achieve

⁵⁵ Schedule 1, paragraph 7.

the standard. Standards will be drafted by groups approved by the Institute.⁵⁶

- Allows the Institute to approve technical education qualifications in relation to one or more occupations, and requires the Institute to maintain a list of approved technical education qualifications.⁵⁷

Section 2 of the Act, which was inserted during Lords Committee Stage, provides that schools in England must ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access pupils during the relevant phase of their education, for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships. Lord Baker, who moved the amendment, stated that this would give all young people the chance to hear directly from providers of apprenticeships and technical qualifications” and would be of particular benefit to University Technical Colleges (UTCs) which recruit learners at 14 years of age.⁵⁸

Section 41, inserted at Lords Report Stage and amended during Ping Pong, requires Ofsted to comment on the careers advice provided to students when inspecting FE providers.

The relevant provisions of the Act are set to come into force on a day, as yet unspecified, appointed by the Secretary of State.

⁵⁶ Schedule 1, paragraph 8.

⁵⁷ Schedule 1, paragraphs 15 and 21.

⁵⁸ HL Deb 22 February 2017, [cGC54](#).

5. Further Developments

This section provides information on further developments related to the reforms to technical education since the publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan.

5.1 Industrial Strategy

In January 2017, the 2015 Government launched a consultation, [*Building our Industrial Strategy*](#). The consultation on the industrial strategy closed in April 2017 and the Government had not responded prior to the dissolution of Parliament prior to the 2017 general election.

Echoing the Post-16 Skills Plan and the Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education, the consultation stated that “poor performance in basic and technical skills is key to the UK’s persistently lower levels of productivity compared with other advanced economies”. It added that the current technical education system “can be complex and confusing, which often does not deliver either for individuals, for the skills needs of employers, or for the wider economy.”⁵⁹

The Green Paper then went on to outline the proposed reforms to technical education, providing additional detail in some areas.

The transition year

The consultation stated that a key part of any effective education system “must be a firm grounding in basic skills”. It added that the proposed transition year for students with basic skills gaps will provide “intensive support in basic skills for those who need it most” and will “[reduce] significantly the numbers of young adults at risk of leaving full-time education without the skills needed for employment.” It set out the purpose of the transition year as follows:

The primary purpose of the transition year will be to develop achievable career plans and the skills needed for them, including numeracy and literacy. For some, the transition year will be an opportunity to ‘catch up’ with their peers before progressing to technical education the following year; for others it will be about developing the skills to make them more employable and continuing their education in the workplace. The transition year will help ensure no-one drops out of education at the age of 16.⁶⁰

Work Placements

The Green Paper stated that the Government would launch pilots with employers and colleges later in 2017 to test and learn how to roll out work placements for students undertaking one of the technical education routes in college.⁶¹

Institutes of Technology

The consultation announced that £170 million of capital funding would be provided to create the network of Institutes of Technology to ensure

⁵⁹ HM Government, [*Building our Industrial Strategy*](#), January 2017, p37.

⁶⁰ As above, p40.

⁶¹ As above, p41.

that high-level technical education is available “in all areas.”⁶² It additionally stated that:

- Within the framework set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan “there will be flexibility for Institutes of Technology to adopt different models suited to their local needs.”
- The Government had worked with stakeholders to test the viability of some delivery and governance models and that the lessons learned “will feed into the process to be launched [in 2017] to establish new Institutes of Technology.”⁶³

UCAS for technical education

The Green Paper stated that the Government would explore how to create a similar platform to UCAS for technical education students so as to “make it easier for students to compare options in technical education and higher education.”⁶⁴

5.2 Budget 2017

The [March 2017 Budget](#) stated that the number of programme hours for 16-19 year olds in technical routes would be increased to “over 900 hours a year on average.” It stated that this would result in over £500 million of additional funding per year once routes are fully implemented.⁶⁵

The Budget additionally announced that from 2019-20, further education maintenance loans will be available, like those available for higher education students, for students on technical education courses at level 4 to 6 at National Colleges and Institutes of Technology.⁶⁶ This followed an earlier [consultation](#) on further education maintenance loans, which was launched in March 2016.⁶⁷

5.3 Institute for Apprenticeships

The Institute for Apprenticeships, chaired by Antony Jenkins, went live on 3 April 2017.⁶⁸ Following an earlier consultation, strategic guidance on how the Institute should carry out its functions for the 2017-18 financial year was published by the 2015 Government on the same day. It is expected that such guidance will be issued annually.⁶⁹

The guidance outlined the Government expectation that the Institute’s remit will be expanded to include all technical education from April 2018. It stated that the Institute should “ensure that it is making preparations during 2017-18 to assume this additional role and for all

⁶² HM Government, [Building our Industrial Strategy](#), January 2017, p43.

⁶³ As above.

⁶⁴ As above.

⁶⁵ HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), HC 1025, March 2017, p41.

⁶⁶ As above.

⁶⁷ Department for Education, [Further education maintenance loans \(technical and professional\)](#), last updated September 2016.

⁶⁸ [Institute for Apprenticeships to ensure quality skills training](#), Department for Education, 3 April 2017.

⁶⁹ Department for Education, [Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships](#), April 2017, p3.

technical education – whether work-based or classroom-based – to sit within...the framework of 15 routes to skilled employment.”⁷⁰

On 21 April 2017, the Institute announced that it had appointed chairs for 15 route panels, which will be responsible for “setting the standards, of knowledge, skills and behaviours needed by employers for every occupation in England.” The groups will also be responsible for reviewing and recommending apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. A panel of apprentices, made up of current or recent apprentices, has also been appointed to advise the board and to “ensure the apprentice voice is heard within the decision making structure of the institute.”⁷¹ This followed a commitment given by the Minister, Robert Halfon, during the Technical and Further Education Bill’s Committee Stage in response to concerns about the lack of apprentice representation on the board of the Institute.⁷²

5.4 2017 general election manifestos

Conservative Party

The Conservative Party’s 2017 general election manifesto outlined the proposed reforms to technical education as set out in the Skills Plan, the Industrial Strategy and the 2017 Budget, and added that the work placements for student on technical routes will be three months long. It additionally announced plans to:

- create a new national programme “to attract experienced industry professionals to work in FE colleges”; and
- launch a “major review of funding across tertiary education as a whole”, looking look at the support available to students across different routes.⁷³

The manifesto also set out some further detail on the plans for Institutes of Technology, stating that they will have the same freedoms of universities and will, among other things, be able to gain royal charter status:

We will establish new institutes of technology, backed by leading employers and linked to leading universities, in every major city in England. They will provide courses at degree level and above, specialising in technical disciplines, such as STEM, whilst also providing higher-level apprenticeships and bespoke courses for employers. They will enjoy the freedoms that make our universities great, including eligibility for public funding for productivity and skills research, and access to loans and grants for their students. They will be able to gain royal charter status and regius professorships in technical education. Above all, they will become anchor institutions for local, regional and national industry, providing sought-after skills to support the economy,

⁷⁰ Department for Education, [Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships](#), April 2017, p5.

⁷¹ [Institute for Apprenticeships announced new appointments](#), Institute for Apprenticeships, 21 April 2017.

⁷² PBC 29 November 2016 (afternoon), [cc145-6](#).

⁷³ As above.

and developing their own local identity to make sure they can meet the skills needs of local employers.⁷⁴

Labour Party

The Labour Party manifesto stated that the party “share[d] the broad aims of the Sainsbury Review but would ensure vocational routes incorporate the service sector as well as traditional manufacturing...”. It additionally stated that Labour would abandon plans to build new technical colleges and would instead use the money to increase FE teacher numbers.

The manifesto also set out additional investment in the FE sector in order to implement the Sainsbury recommendations, including:

- Bringing 16-18 funding in line with Key Stage 4 baselines;
- Replacing Advanced Learner Loans with direct funding, making FE courses free at the point of use;
- Setting a target, backed by funding, for all FE teaching staff to have a teaching qualification within five years; and
- Increase capital investment “to equip colleges to deliver T-levels.”⁷⁵

Other parties

None of the other party manifestos explicitly referred to the Sainsbury Review or the reforms to technical education proposed in the Post-16 Skills Plan. All, however, contained proposals for the FE/skills sector more broadly.⁷⁶

5.5 Queen’s Speech 2017

The 2017 Queen’s Speech delivered on 21 June 2017 stated that the Government would “work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education.” The background notes to the speech provided an outline of the reforms to technical education and noted that each of the 15 technical routes will allow progression from Level 2 to Level 5 for college based courses, and to level 7 for apprenticeships. The notes also reaffirmed the commitment to establish Institutes of Technology.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ [Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2017](#), p52.

⁷⁵ [For the Many Not the Few: Labour Party Manifesto 2017](#), pp39-40.

⁷⁶ For example, see [Change Britain’s Future: Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2017](#), pp52-3; [The Green Party for a Confident and Caring Britain](#), p12; and [Britain together: UKIP 2017 Manifesto](#), pp25-6.

⁷⁷ Cabinet Office, [Queen’s Speech 2017: background briefing notes](#), 21 June 2017.

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