



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 9120, 28 January 2021

FE White Paper: Skills for Jobs Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth

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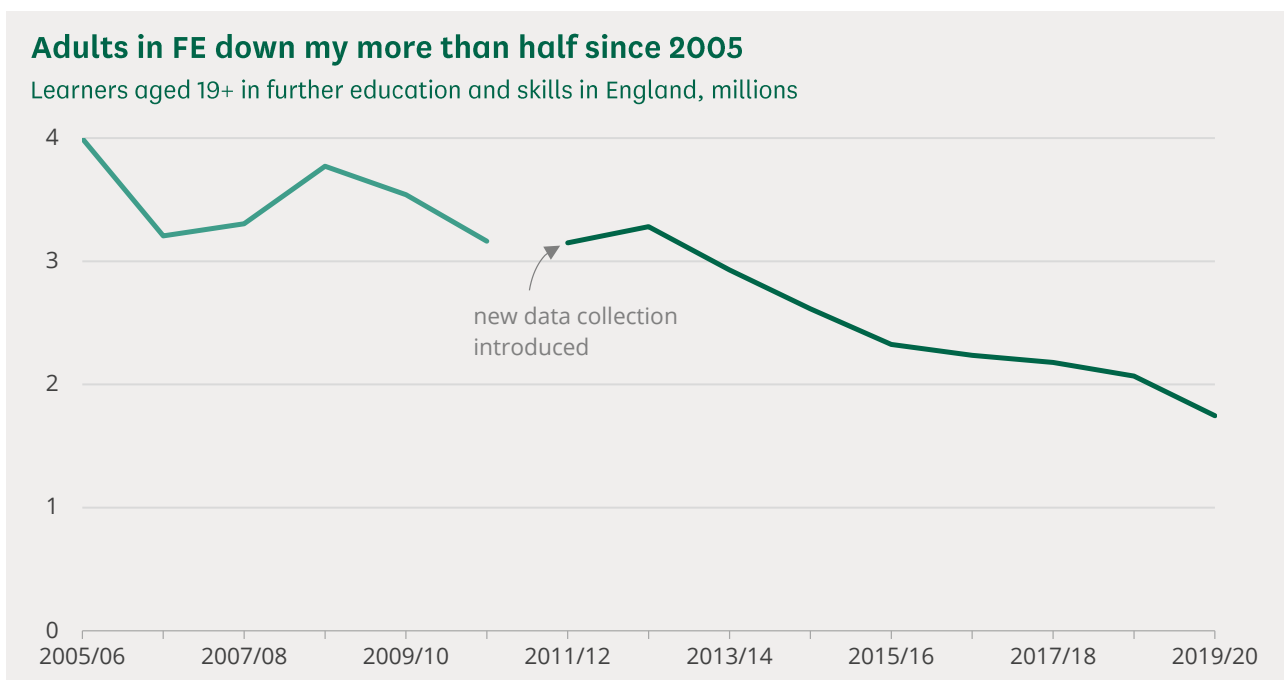
Summary

The **further education (FE) and skills sector is large and complex** with a wide range of public and private providers and **significant numbers of students**. It has frequently been said that the sector is overlooked and undervalued compared to the higher profile schools and higher education sectors. The FE sector has for many years suffer from **underfunding and decreasing student numbers** and this has become more acute in recent years.

Furthermore England has for a number of years suffered from **skills gaps** in some vocational areas. The Government has sought to **raise technical skill levels and increase productivity** through a number of strategies and initiatives but persistent issues remain.

In 2019/20 **1.75 million adult learners took part in some form of funded further education and skills in England**. 0.88 million were on (classroom-based) education and training courses, 0.58 million on adult apprenticeships and 0.36 million on (non-formal) community learning courses. These courses cover a very wide range of academic levels.

The majority (61%) of learners in this sector were female, 24% were from Black, Asian or minority ethnic groups, 56% were aged 25-49 and 18% were 50 or older.



There are a **wide range of factors behind the decline** in further education students including: **cuts in funding for some courses, increased complexity in funding rules** and the **ongoing increased 'competition' from the higher education sector**.

Spending on adult education has fallen by nearly two-thirds in real terms since 2003–04 and about half since 2009–10. In 2018/19, colleges' income totalled £6.5 billion, of which £5.1 billion (78%) was public funding.

In May 2019 the **Independent Review of post-18 education (the [Augar Review](#))** published its report. The review analysed the whole of the tertiary education system and made recommendations on structures and funding to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning.

4 FE White Paper: Skills for Jobs Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth

On 29 April 2020 Gavin Williamson the education secretary told the Education Committee that the Government intended to publish a **'revolutionary' FE and skills white paper**. Further information on the white paper was given on 29 July 2020 when Mr Williamson said at the Social Market Foundation that he planned to **"build a world-class, German-style further education system in Britain, and level up skills and opportunities"**.

The impact of the **Covid pandemic and the UK's withdrawal from the EU on jobs** has created further impetus to increase skills and boost employment. The Government has announced a number of schemes to achieve this such as the **National Skills Fund, the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, Kickstart and digital boot camps**.

On 21 January 2021 the Government published its further education white paper - [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#). The white paper aims to increase momentum in the delivery of skills by: **increasing employer involvement** in skills courses and better **tailoring provision to local needs, improving higher technical qualifications**, introducing a **Lifelong Loan Entitlement, reforming accountability and funding systems** and **supporting FE teachers**.

This briefing paper gives an overview of the white paper proposals and outlines some of the issues that it aims to address.

1. Background

On 29 April 2020 Gavin Williamson the education secretary told the Education Committee that the Government intended to publish a **'revolutionary' FE and skills white paper**.

Following this on 9 July 2020 Gavin Williamson gave a [speech](#)¹ at the Social Market Foundation in which he set out his plans for the further education (FE) sector and announced that the Government would publish a FE white paper in the autumn:

That's why this autumn I will be publishing a White Paper that will set out our plans to build a world-class, German-style further education system in Britain, and level up skills and opportunities.

This will not be about incremental change, but a comprehensive plan to change the fundamentals of England's further education

It will be centred upon two things.

Firstly, high quality qualifications based on employer-led standards. All apprenticeships starts will be based on those standards from August this year and we will be looking to place such standards at the heart of our whole technical education system.

Secondly, colleges playing a leading role in developing skills in their areas, driving an ambitious agenda that responds to local economic need and acting as centres for businesses and their development.

"The FE white paper is an area of the department's work that I think could be really revolutionary to drive reform in this vital sector."

Gavin Williamson,
[Education Committee Oral Evidence 29 April 2020](#)

On 21 January 2021 the Government published the FE white paper, [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#).² A Department for Education (DfE) press release, [Pioneering reforms to boost skills and jobs 21 January 2021](#), gives an overview of the white paper and includes comments from the British Chambers of Commerce, the Association of Colleges and the chief executives of various companies.

The white paper outlines proposals to **raise the esteem of FE** and to **increase skills in areas that are most needed by employers**. The plans aim to rebalance the FE and skills sector to **help the country recover from the Covid pandemic** and to **respond to skills gaps and new opportunities arising from leaving the European Union**.

The white paper also set out proposals on lifelong learning which aim to ensure that people can learn the skills they need to get jobs and have fulfilling lives.

¹ Department for Education, [Education Secretary FE speech with Social Market Foundation](#), 9 July 2020

² Department for Education, [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#), January 2021, CP338

Also on 21 January the Government published, its response to the Augar Review - [Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post18 Education and Funding](#).³ The [Augar Review](#)⁴ analysed the tertiary education system as a whole and aimed to create a structure and funding system where students could easily move between education sectors. A number of the Augar Review's recommendations have been taken up by the Government and are included in the Interim Response and in the white paper. Library briefing paper, [The Post-18 Education Review \(the Augar Review\) recommendations 30 May 2019](#), set out the conclusions of the Augar review.

The FE white paper "will be one of the key elements and key planks of our response to the Augar review".

Gavin Williamson,
Education

1.1 The FE sector

The post-16 education sector has long been considered to be an **overlooked sector**; it is large and complex and straddles the space between the higher profile schools and higher education sectors. The FE sector has for many years been said to suffer from **underfunding and decreasing student numbers**. These have become more acute in recent years.

Box 1: Further education and skills sector

The further education (FE) sector is large and diverse with a wide range of public and private providers and significant numbers of students. In 2018/19, the Association of Colleges' publication [College Key Facts 2018/19](#) stated that there were **257 general, tertiary and specialist further education colleges in England**. These colleges teach all levels of education from basic life skills courses up to higher technical and degree level courses. **1.4 million adults train or study in colleges. 685,000 young people aged 16-18 study in colleges and a further 76,000 undertake apprenticeships**. Total college income is around **£7 billion** and they employ **116,000 full-time equivalent staff**, 57,000 of whom are teaching staff.

The Augar Review [report](#) (May 2019) contains an overview of the FE sector and issues around funding and student support.

The [annex](#) to this paper looks in detail at further education funding.

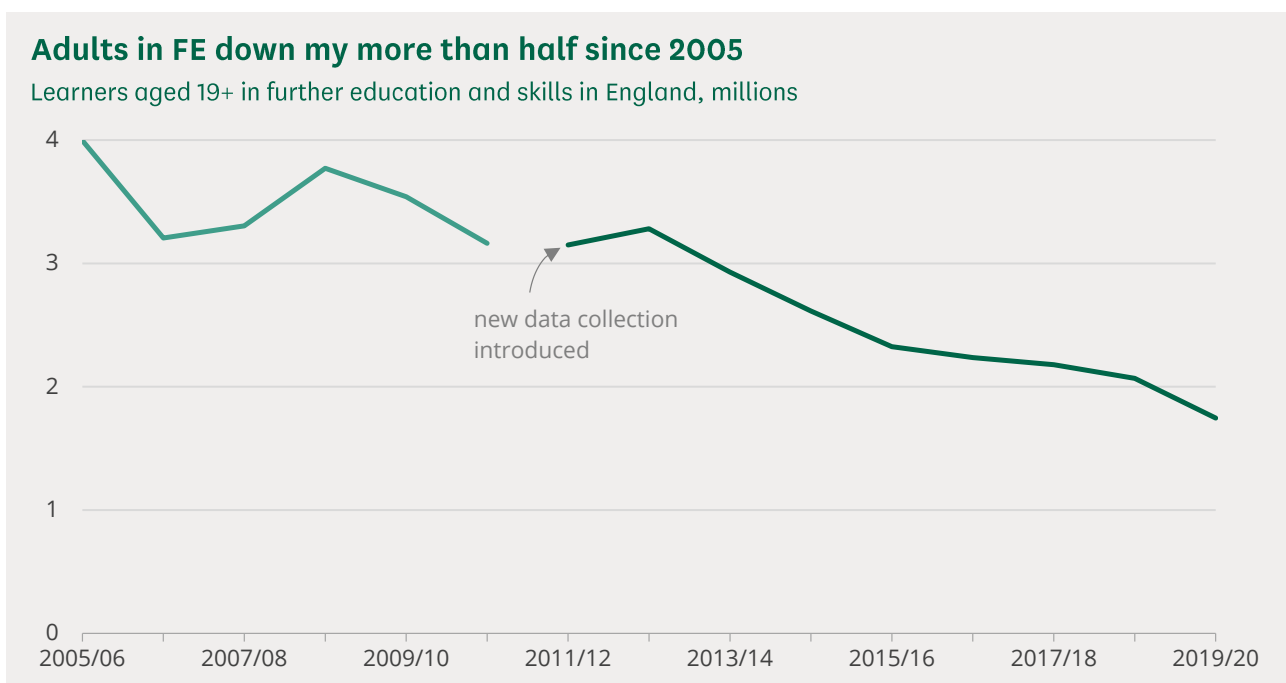
1.2 Adult learners in the FE sector

In 2019/20 **1.75 million adult learners age 19+ took part in some form of funded further education and skills in England**. Within this figure 0.88 million were on (classroom-based) education and training courses, 0.58 million on adult apprenticeships and 0.36 million on (non-formal) community learning courses. These courses cover a **very wide range of (academic) levels**; around **35% were on courses below level 2** (equivalent to a GCSE) or with no level, **33% at level 2**, **23% level 3** (equivalent to an A-level) and **10% level 4** (such as a HNC) or higher.

³ Department for Education, [Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post18 Education and Funding, January 2021](#), CP 358

⁴ Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, May 2019

Trends in the total number of adult learners is shown in the chart below. There is a break in this series,⁵ but even with these it is clear that **numbers have fallen over time from just below 4 million in 2005/06 to below 3 million from 2013/14 and below 2 million in the latest figures.**



Source: [Further education and skills: November 2020](#), DfE

Since 2011/12 the number of learners on classroom-based education and training has fallen by 42%, community learning by 48% and adult apprenticeships by 5%. **The largest fall in numbers by level of course was in those studying at 'full level 2'⁶ (equivalent to 5+ GCSEs) where numbers fell by 82% or around 850,000 between 2011/12 and 2019/20.**

There are likely to be a **wide range of factors behind this decline** in further education students including: **cuts in funding for some courses, increased complexity in funding rules** (including loans for further education) and the **ongoing increased 'competition' from the higher education sector**. According to the **IFS spending on adult education has fallen by nearly two-thirds in real terms since 2003–04 and about half since 2009–10**. This fall was said to be mainly driven by the removal of public funding from some courses and a resultant drop in learner numbers. The [annex](#) to this paper includes more background on changes to funding.

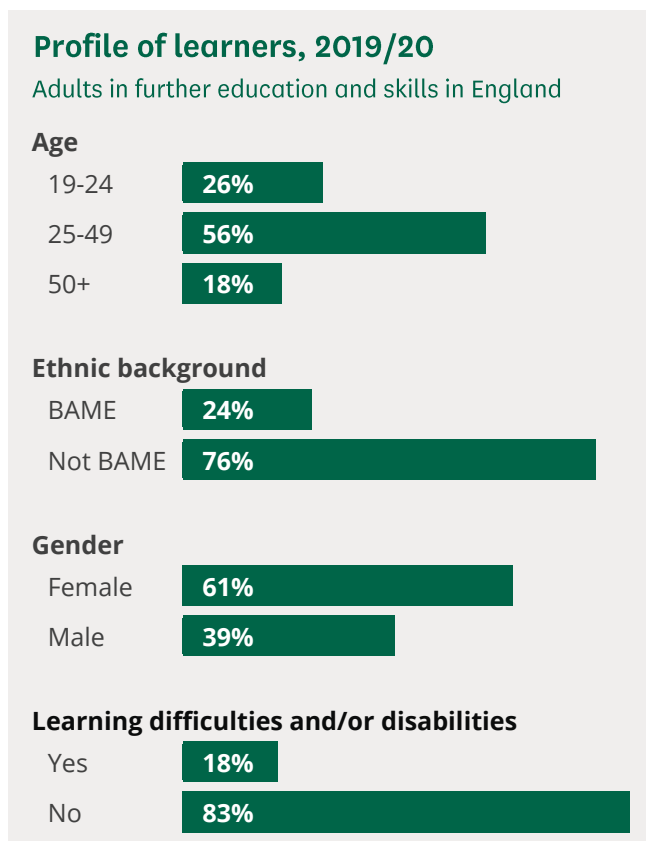
Analysis of adult participation in further education and training shows that before the first national lockdown on 23 March numbers were already down by 14% on the same period in 2018/19. From lockdown to the end of the academic year participation was down by 44%.⁷

⁵ This is thought to have reduced counts of learner numbers by around 2%.

⁶ When the full range or 'width' of course aims a learner is taking are summed they are equivalent to five or more GCSEs.

⁷ [Further education and skills: November 2020](#), (additional analysis), DfE

The following chart looks at the characteristics of learners across the whole education and skills sector.



Source: [Further education and skills: November 2020](#), DfE

Those on classroom-based education and training courses were somewhat **more likely to be female** (64% of all learners) than learners from the whole sector. They were also **more likely to be from BAME backgrounds** (32%). Nearly three-quarters of learners on community learning courses were female.

1.3 Apprenticeships and traineeships

Incentives to encourage employers to take on apprentices and trainees were announced as part of the [Plan for Jobs](#) document that the Government published in July 2020. Library briefing [Coronavirus: Getting people back into work](#), 11 December 2020, has more information on the initiatives announced in the Plan for Jobs.

In the *Plan for Jobs*, the Government has announced that it will pay employers in England **£2,000 for every new apprentice** they hire who is **aged under 25**, and **£1,500 for every apprentice they hire who is aged 25 and over**.⁸

These payments will be provided for any apprenticed employed from the start of August 2020 to the end of March 2021.⁹

⁸ HM Treasury, [Plan for Jobs](#), 8 July 2020, p8

⁹ ESFA/DWP, ['Plan for Jobs' skills and employment programmes: information for employers](#), 10 December 2020

The Government currently provides £1,000 to employers for every apprentice they take on who is either aged between 16 and 18, or aged between 19 and 24 and has previously been in care or who have a Local Authority Education, Health and Care plan. The new payment will be in addition to this.

The Government has announced that it will make **£2.5 billion available to support apprenticeships in 2021-22**.¹⁰

A **traineeship** is an education and training programme with work experience whose focus is on **helping young people become ready for work or for an apprenticeship**. They can last from 6 weeks up to 6 months.¹¹

They were previously only available to people **aged 16-24** who were qualified below level three level, but eligibility is going to be expanded to also include those with level three qualifications.¹²

The **maximum duration of traineeships has also been increased to 12 months**, rather than 6 months. They can be as short as 6 weeks.¹³

The Government has announced that it will **pay employers £1,000 for every new trainee they take on** from the start of September 2020 to the end of July 2021.¹⁴

An **additional £111 million will be provided to fund this**, which will provide funding to triple the number of trainees.

¹⁰ DfE, [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#), 21 January 2021, p21

¹¹ Gov.uk, [Find a traineeship](#)

¹² HM Treasury, [Plan for Jobs](#), 8 July 2020, p9

¹³ DfE, [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#), 21 January 2021, p24

¹⁴ ESFA/DWP, ['Plan for Jobs' skills and employment programmes: information for employers](#), 10 December 2020

2. The white paper: overview

The white paper aims to “realign” the post-16 system around the needs of employers.

The key measures in the white paper include:

- Business groups, including Chambers of Commerce, working alongside colleges to develop tailored skills plans to meet local training needs; supported by a **£65 million Strategic Development Fund** to put the plans into action and establish new **College Business Centres** to drive innovation and enhanced collaboration with employers.
- **Giving employers a central role in designing almost all technical courses by 2030**, to ensure that the education and training people receive is directly linked to the skills needed for real jobs.
- Boosting the quality and uptake of **Higher Technical Qualifications** – that provide the skills that many employers say they need and that can lead to higher wages – by introducing newly approved qualifications from September 2022 supported by a government-backed brand and quality mark.
- Changing the law so that from 2025 people can access **flexible student finance so they can train and retrain throughout their lives**, supported by funding in 21/22 to test ways to boost access to more modular and flexible learning.
- Overhauling the **funding and accountability** rules, so funding is better **targeted at supporting high quality education and training** that meets the needs of employers; and introducing **new powers to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes** for the communities they serve
- Launching a nationwide recruitment campaign to get more talented individuals to **teach in further education** and investing in high quality professional development including a new **Workforce Industry Exchange Programme**.¹⁵

A number of the white paper proposals, such as the Lifetime Skills Guarantee have previously been trailed in announcements or consultation documents.

The white paper is set out in five chapters: Putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills, Providing the advanced technical and higher technical skills the nation need, A flexible Lifetime Skills Guarantee, Responsive providers, supported by more effective accountability and funding and Supporting outstanding teaching. This briefing follows the structure of the white paper.

¹⁵ [“Skills for Jobs White Paper is launched - Sector Response”](#), FE news, 21 January 2021

3. Putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills

The white paper states that **employers do not have enough input into skills provision** and that the **system is complicated for employers to navigate**:

At the moment, employers do not have enough influence over the skills provision offered in their local area or enough say in how all technical training and qualifications are developed. Employers tell us they struggle to find staff to fill their skills gaps at all levels, and whilst our apprenticeships programme has been extremely successful, smaller employers are not always able to access the level of provision they need. Finally, our complex skills system means it can be challenging for many employers to engage with colleges and training providers effectively and make use of their facilities and expertise. (para 2)

The white paper reforms aim to ensure that the provision of technical education and training is **better aligned to employers' needs**. To achieve this the paper proposes increasing employer involvement in the skills system in the following ways:

- Give employers a central role working with further education colleges, other providers and local stakeholders to develop new **Local Skills Improvement Plans** which shape technical skills provision so that it meets local labour market skills needs.
- Pilot Local Skills Improvement Plans in **Trailblazer local areas**, exploring an approach where they are led by accredited **Chambers of Commerce** and other business representative organisations in collaboration with local providers; and engage employer and provider groups to ensure we create the most effective models of employer representation before wider rollout.
- Make **Strategic Development Funding** available in 2021/22 in a number of pilot areas to support colleges to reshape their provision to address local priorities that have been agreed with local employers.
- Ensure government has up-to-date and expert advice on the labour market and national skills gaps from the **Skills and Productivity Board**.
- Align the substantial majority of post-16 technical and higher technical education and training to **employer-led standards** set by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, so skills provision meets skills need.
- Continue to improve and grow **apprenticeships**, so more employers and individuals can benefit from them as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
- Improve the quality of **traineeships**, to better support young people to transition to apprenticeships and other occupations.

- Continue to support participation in **English, maths, and digital** training to meet employers' needs and support people to progress in employment or further study.
- Invite proposals through the Strategic Development Fund to establish **College Business Centres** within further education colleges to work with employers in a designated sector on business development and innovation.

Box 2: Local Skills Improvement Plans

Local Skills Improvement Plans will provide a framework to help colleges and other providers reshape provision and ensure that they are responding to labour market skills needs.

In **early 2021 a group of Trailblazer areas** will be announced and Chambers of Commerce and other business representative organisations in those areas will work with local providers to develop Local Skills Improvement Plans.

Local Skills Improvement Plans will build on the work that Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships have done through their establishment of Skills Advisory Panels.

The Government **will legislate** to put the employer leadership of Local Skills Improvement Plans on a statutory footing

To support these changes, Government will set up a new **Strategic Development Fund** to facilitate changes to provision that have been endorsed by local employers. The Fund will offer capital and revenue funding to help colleges respond to locally agreed priorities

Evidence from the new **Skills and Productivity Board** will be made available to local areas when they are developing their Local Skills Improvement Plans

3.1 A 'German-style' system – a role for Chambers of Commerce in provision of FE courses

The white paper proposes improving engagement with employers by **using established local business membership organisations such as Chambers of Commerce**. The greater use of Chambers of Commerce in FE provision was discussed by Baroness Alison Wolf In a 2015 report, [Fixing a Broken Training System](#). The Government has previously discussed adopting a more '**German -style' system** of technical education and **Chambers of Commerce are central to Germany's dual system** of apprenticeship training, acting as a "one-stop-shop" for employer engagement. -

The precise role of Chambers of Commerce in the FE sector was discussed in an article in *FE news*: [Will England take inspiration from Germany's chambers of commerce?](#), 2 October 2020:

Sources close to policy development say a gap has been created with the demise of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2017, and that local enterprise partnerships have failed to impress.

Utilising the national and 53 accredited local chambers would be similar to the much lauded system in Germany.

The chambers' strong business links are understood to be particularly desired by government as ministers look to align courses on offer closer to those "[valued by employers](#)", as prime

minister Boris Johnson said during a major speech on the future of further education on Tuesday.

[...]

the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) would want to work “collaboratively” with FE colleges and providers, employers and communities if they are given a greater role in provision, but already have “long had a role in the skills systems, shaping local strategies”. This has included, for example, organising local skills forums, contributing to the local Skills Advisory Panels, submitting evidence to parliamentary select committees, overseeing links between businesses and education providers, helping develop university technical colleges, and supporting young people with careers activities.

The BCC is also itself involved [in the new Kickstart scheme](#), getting young people on to work placements that can then lead on to apprenticeships or other training, as a gateway provider, which allows employers who have fewer than 30 placements to take part.

The chambers are groups of local businesses, with varying levels of staff, which can offer their members opportunities at networking as well as advice on legal matters, health and safety, and tax.

Some commentators have however **questioned the capacity of Chambers of Commerce for increased involvement** in the FE sector:

Federation of Awarding Bodies chief executive Tom Bewick who has worked and written extensively on international apprenticeship systems, said adopting a similar approach here would come down to the capacity of England’s chambers.

Germany’s are built upon decades of prestige, Bewick says, and as businesses have to pay into the chambers, they are much more focused on its outcomes: “You always feel a little more anxious when it’s your money going out the door.”

English chambers, meanwhile, suffer from vast gaps in capability, Bewick said: “When you talk about the London chamber of commerce, it’s quite a substantial organisation, got quite a lot of staff, quite a bit of money coming through the door.

“But in other parts of the country, the chambers are no more than one man and a dog, with retired Colonel Blimp who used to run a corner shop.

“We just haven’t got the level of capacity in our chamber movement. If it’s just a series of talking shops, why would active employers, other than out of the goodness of the heart, get involved?”

Whereas German chambers see themselves as the “paymasters for the apprenticeships system”, in England, people look to government as the paymasters, even though the apprenticeship system is funded by employers.

Professor Ewart Keep from the Centre on Skills, Knowledge & Organisational Performance at Oxford University said the compulsory membership element of German chambers renders them “fundamentally different”, as they are “embedded” in the local business structure, and the structure of apprenticeships.

“When people talk about copying the German system, I always laugh a bit because it’s not really that easy. It’s deeply embedded

in the structure of their country and the cultural expectations of parents, young people, employers and so on.”

But neither Bewick nor Keep believe chambers taking a beefed-up role in FE and skills is impossible.¹⁶

3.2 College Business Centres

The proposal to set up College Business Centres was included in the Association of Colleges (AOC) submission to the November 2020 Spending Review:

DfE should work with the Department for Business to set up priority-sector-specific college business centres which support employers through expert advice and delivery on skills, innovation, business change and technology adaptation.¹⁷

The submission called for **£40 million to set up pilots of “hubs”**.

The establishment of college business centres was discussed in an *FE news* article in November 2020¹⁸:

The AoC says the core aims of the centres should be to: “Enhance the capabilities of FE colleges to deliver knowledge-based collaboration with SMEs; generate and disseminate new information about the practical benefits to business; and contribute to stimulating demand to engage in innovation activity.”

There is a “significant opportunity” for new business centres to capitalise on existing links between FE colleges and SMEs to “deliver economic impact quickly”, as the association says the average college already works with around 600 businesses.

¹⁶ “[Will England take inspiration from Germany’s chambers of commerce?](#)”, *FE news*, 2 October 2020

¹⁷ Association of Colleges, [Comprehensive Spending Review Submission](#), September 2020 p5

¹⁸ “[Government set to create ‘college business centres’](#)”, *FE news* 16 November 2020

4. Providing advanced technical and higher skills

The UK has a **longstanding problem with the take up of higher level technical qualifications** (level 4 and 5 courses) and has **skills gaps** in these areas.

Level 4 and 5 qualifications **sit in between A Levels and an undergraduate degree**- examples include, foundation degrees, Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE), Diplomas in Higher Education (DipHEs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs).

Library briefing, [Level 4 and 5 education](#), 4 November 2019, discusses the issues:

Take-up and skills gaps

Evidence suggests that the take-up of Level 4 and 5 qualifications is low in England compared to other countries. Around 10% of all adults aged 18-65 hold a level 4-5 qualification as their highest, compared to around 20% in Germany and 34% in Canada. **Take-up of Level 4 and 5 qualifications is also low compared to other levels of education.** Around 4% of 25 year olds in England hold a Level 4 or 5 qualification as their highest qualification, compared to nearly 30% for both Level 3 (e.g. A Levels) and Level 6 (e.g. undergraduate degree). **The numbers enrolling on Level 4 and 5 qualifications is also in decline** and fell by 63% between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (from around 510,000 to approximately 190,000).

There is evidence, however, of un-met demand for higher level technical skills and it is suggested that **skills gaps at the higher technical level may be contributing the UK's "productivity gap"**.

The Augar Review analysed technical and vocational education and stated that:

England needs a stronger technical and vocational education system at sub-degree levels to meet the structural skills shortages that are in all probability contributing to the UK's weak productivity performance.¹⁹

The review report concluded that:

Improved funding, a better maintenance offer, and a more coherent suite of higher technical and professional qualifications would help level the playing field with degrees and drive up both the supply of and demand for such courses.

The Review recommended **access to student finance for tuition fee and maintenance support for modules of credit-based Level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications.**

¹⁹ Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding May 2019, p9

On 14 July 2020 Gavin Williamson announced a “[major overhaul of higher technical education](#)”:

A major review last year revealed that higher technical education – technical qualifications like Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas that sit between A Level and degrees – can unlock the skills employers need and lead to highly skilled, well paid jobs. Despite this, not enough people are studying them which is leading to skills shortages in sectors like construction, manufacturing and digital.

The package of measures announced today marks the next step in establishing a system of higher technical education where students and employers can have confidence in high-quality courses that provide the skills they need to succeed. The package includes:

- Introducing newly approved higher technical qualifications from September 2022 supported by a government-backed brand and quality mark – qualifications will only be approved where they provide the skills employers need, providing much needed clarity for students and employers.
- Working with Ofsted and the Office for Students to make sure the quality of courses is consistently high across HE and FE institutions – building on our Institutes of Technology so students and employers can be confident courses will be high quality.
- Launching a new public awareness campaign – working in partnership with employers and careers advisers to showcase the benefits and the wide range of opportunities that studying a higher technical qualification can open up and making sure students get the right information, advice and guidance to make informed choices.

The white paper makes the following proposals in the area of advanced technical and higher technical skills:

- Use the new £2.5 billion **National Skills Fund** to enhance the funding to support adults to upskill and reskill. This will include an offer, backed by £95 million in 2021-22, for all adults to achieve their first full **advanced (level 3) qualification** as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
- Expand our flagship **Institutes of Technology** programme to every part of the country by the end of this Parliament, to spearhead the increase in higher-level technical skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.
- Continue to roll out **T Levels**²⁰ to prepare students for entry into skilled employment or higher levels of technical study, including apprenticeships.
- **Reform higher technical education** (levels 4 and 5) with a new approval system based on employer-led standards.
- Create clear **progression** routes for students towards the higher-level technical qualifications that employers need.

²⁰ House of Commons briefing paper, [T levels: Reforms to Technical Education, 16 December 2019](#) sets out policy on T levels, information is also available on the Gov.UK website at Introduction of T levels:

The proposals aim to **improve and increase provision of higher technical qualifications and to offer progression routes:**

We will increase the number of people with higher technical skills by improving and increasing provision at this level and offering progression routes so more people can access these opportunities. Alongside this, we will reform funding and accountability so providers have an incentive to offer higher-level technical provision (Chapter 4). We will increase flexibility and loan provision so individuals can access this learning in a way that suits them (Chapter 3) and recruit more staff with the expertise to teach higher-level qualifications (Chapter 5).²¹

Box 3: National Skills Fund

The Conservative [Election Manifesto 2019](#) contained a commitment to “**establish a new National Skills Fund as the first step towards a “Right to Retrain”**”. It said that the Government would invest £600 million a year, £3 billion over the Parliament, into the Fund and that this would be new funding on top of existing skills funding. A proportion of the Fund would be reserved for further strategic investment in skills and it comes on top of existing skills and training programmes.

The commitment was restated in [Budget 2020](#) in March which **allocated £2.5 billion** to the Fund in England and **£3.0 billion including indicative Barnett consequentials** for the rest of the UK. It added that the Government would “...consult widely in the spring on how to use the new National Skills Fund”.

In November 2020 the Spending Review set out how £375 million from the National Skills Fund would be allocated in 2021-22:

- £138 million for **level 3 courses**

- £127 million to continue the summer **Plan for Jobs** including traineeships, sector-based work academy placements and the National Careers Service

- £110 million for **higher technical qualifications** including funding for capital and loans.

The National Skills Fund will build on existing reforms, including the **National Retraining Scheme**..

²¹ White paper para 52

5. Lifetime Skills Guarantee

On 29 September 2020 the Prime Minister gave a [speech at Exeter College](#) in which he announced the **Lifetime Skills Guarantee**:

Through our Lifetime Skills Guarantee,

we'll upgrade Further Education colleges across the country with huge capital investment;

we'll expand apprenticeships, making it easier to get a high quality apprenticeship, and connect them better to local employers who know where the jobs of the future are going to emerge;

we'll fund free technical courses for adults equivalent to A level, and extend our digital boot camps;

we'll expand and transform the funding system so it's as easy to get a loan for a higher technical course as for a university degree, and we'll enable FE colleges to access funding on the same terms as our most famous universities;

and we'll give everyone a flexible lifelong loan entitlement to four years of post-18 education — so adults will be able to retrain with high level technical courses, instead of being trapped in unemployment.²²

The white paper sets out proposals to implement the Lifetime Skills Guarantee:

- Implementing a flexible **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** equivalent of four years of post-18 education from 2025.
- As a pathway towards the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, we will stimulate the provision of high-quality higher technical education (levels 4 and 5), as we work towards making it as easy to get a **student finance** loan for an approved Higher Technical Qualification as it is for a full-length degree.
- Introduce pilots to stimulate higher technical education and incentivise more flexible and modular provision.
- Determine how we can best stimulate credit transfer between institutions and courses.
- Consult on the detail and scope of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement in 2021.
- Improve how teaching is delivered so that it is more accessible, with the use of **digital and blended learning**.
- Provide **clear information about career outcomes** through occupational maps, wage returns data and ensuring providers give pupils information about all options.

²² Prime Minister's Office, [PM's skills speech: 29 September 2020](#)

The **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** was recommended by the Augar Review and endorsed by a House of Lord’s Report that recommended **‘funding for modules or credit** where a full degree is not required’.²³

The white paper states that the Government will **consult on the scope and detail of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement in early 2021:**

including seeking views on objectives and coverage, together with aspects such as the level of modularity (i.e. the minimum number of credits a course will need to bear), how to incentivise and enable effective credit transfer, and whether Equivalent and Lower Qualifications (ELQ) restrictions should be amended to facilitate retraining and stimulate provision²⁴

The Government intends that the Lifelong Loan Entitlement will **ultimately be the primary route of funding for advanced technical and degree level qualifications** (levels 4-6), including modular provision. In 2021/22 the Government intends to fund trials of modular high-quality technical provision.

5.1 Current skill levels among adults

Part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee includes a funded offer for all adults to achieve their **first full advanced (level 3) qualification**.

In 2019 an estimated 14.4 million adults of working age did not have a level 3 (equivalent to A level) or higher qualification. This was 41% of those aged 16-64. The highest rates were in the 16-19 age group where many would still be studying. Rates were around 35% for those in their 20s and 30s, rising to just under 40% for those in their 40s and almost 50% for those aged 50-64. The following table gives a full breakdown of estimated qualification levels.

Qualification levels in England 2019		
Highest qualification of 16-64 year olds by NVQ level		
	Number (millions)	Percentage
Level 4+	13.9	40.0
Level 3	5.9	17.1
Trade apprenticeships	0.9	2.7
Level 2	5.5	15.9
Level 1	3.5	10.1
Other	2.3	6.7
No qualifications	2.6	7.5

Source: Annual population survey, ONS (via www.nomisweb.co.uk)

London had the smallest proportion of adults who were not qualified to level 3 (or higher) at 33%, followed by the South East at

²³ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, Treating students fairly: the economics of post-school education , 2018.

²⁴ White paper p41 para 84

38%. The highest rates were in the North East at 48% and the West Midlands at 47%.²⁵

5.2 Take-up of loans for further education

A key element of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is **the Lifelong Loan Entitlement**. This would support the equivalent of four years of post-18 education from 2025. So far the **uptake of existing loans for further education has been modest**, especially compared with higher education, and has fallen in recent years.

Advanced Learner Loans were introduced in 2013/14 for learners aged 24 and older on full level 3 and level 4 courses. They were extended to learners aged 19-23 on courses at these levels and all those aged 19 and older on level 5 and 6 courses. The table below gives trends in take-up. **This has fallen in recent years with fewer loans for level 3 courses. The value of loans awarded fell by 23% in cash terms between 2016/17 and 2019/20.**

Advanced learner loan take-up, England						
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<i>Number of learners with loans</i>						
Level 3	70,700	89,000	110,200	99,500	97,600	86,400
Level 4+	4,800	6,300	9,100	9,900	10,300	9,900
Total	75,400	95,000	119,000	109,000	107,300	95,800
<i>Value of loans awarded (£ million)</i>						
	148.8	195.2	236.2	208.0	200.3	182.4

Source: [Further education and skills: November 2020](#), DfE

To put these figures in context more than 1 million home higher education students took out a student loans in 2019/20 with a total value of almost £17 billion.²⁶

²⁵ Annual population survey, ONS (via www.nomisweb.co.uk)

²⁶ [Student Support for Higher Education in England 2020](#), SLC

6. Effective accountability, governance, and intervention

The white paper proposes to **consult** on reforms to the FE funding and accountability system including:

- **Simplification** and streamlining of funding for further education to support high-value provision relevant to the labour market, with elements of simplified and streamlined funding to be tested ahead of consultation.
- Give more certainty to providers over their funding, including considering how we could move to a **multi-year funding** regime.
- Reform our accountability approach, relaxing ringfences and reporting; instead focusing on **outcomes**.
- Introduce new accountability structures to underpin the **delivery of Local Skills Improvement Plans**.
- We will continue to invest in the college estate, to transform facilities and enable high-quality provision.
- Introduce **new powers for the Secretary of State for Education**, so the government can intervene quickly and decisively in cases where there are persistent problems that cannot otherwise be addressed, either with colleges not delivering effectively or where local providers are unable to deliver the skills priorities for that area.
- Strengthen the **governance** of colleges, by taking a clearer position on what good governance and leadership looks like and placing specific requirements on colleges and other provider types.
- Ensure that **subcontracting** practices improve educational outcomes

7. Supporting outstanding teaching

The white paper states that the FE and skills sector must recruit and retain excellent teaching staff and ensure that they have **access to high-quality training and professional development**. It also proposes that there should be clear routes for industry professionals to move into teaching, and for existing staff to access secondments in industry so that the latest expertise informs high-quality teaching.

The paper makes the following proposals:

- Launch a **national recruitment campaign** for teachers in further education settings.
- Base **Initial Teacher Education** on employer-led standards.
- Improve the provision of high-quality **professional development** and support progression for teachers.
- Facilitate a strong relationship between **industry** and providers.
- Support **apprenticeships** teachers and lecturers with a tailored professional development offer.
- Introduce comprehensive **workforce data collection**.

7.1 FE teaching workforce

On 5 February 2020 Gavin Williamson [announced](#) a **£24 million support package to strengthen the FE workforce**.²⁷ The package will include:

- £11 million to provide bursaries and grants worth up to £26,000 to attract talented people to train to teach in FE, in priority subject areas such as STEM, English and SEND teaching.
- A £10 million boost to expand the government's successful [Taking Teaching Further programme, delivered in partnership with sector body the Education and Training Foundation \(ETF\)](#), which sees industry professionals working in sectors such as engineering and computing to retrain as further education teachers. The scheme has already supported over 100 people to work in FE across the country so far. This additional funding will support up to 550 more people to train to teach a range of technical subjects in 2020.
- £3 million for high-quality mentor training programmes, designed and delivered by the ETF to support FE teachers – including those in the important early years of their careers – to develop and progress.²⁸

²⁷ Department for Education, "[Multi-million pound support package to boost the FE workforce](#)", 5 February 2020

²⁸ *ibid*

The DfE is changing the way it collects **FE workforce data**. Up until 2018-19 the [Education and Training Foundation](#) published annual reports on the FE workforce - their report, [Further Education Workforce Data for England \(March 2020\)](#) gives the latest analysis of FE staff numbers:

We estimate that there are around 159,000 staff at colleges, 26,000 at independent providers, 15,500 at local authority providers, and 16,000 at other providers. This implies an **estimated total of around 216,500 staff in the FE sector**.²⁹

In March 2019 the DfE and the ESFA launched a [consultation](#) on FE workforce data collection. The Government response to the consultation was published in February 2020, [FE Workforce Data Collection Government consultation response](#), in it said that the DfE would “**introduce a single DfE led data collection of the FE workforce**”.

Further education teaching qualifications

In 2007 the government passed the [Further Education Teachers' Qualifications \(England\) Regulations 2007 SI 2264](#) which introduced a requirement that all FE teachers appointed from 1 September 2007 held or acquired a teaching qualification. In 2012 the Government established an independent review of the FE and skills workforce and a review of qualifications in response to a growing dissatisfaction with the new system. In 2013, as a result of the consultation, the 2007 regulations were revoked and the requirement for teachers in the FE sector to have a teaching qualification was removed. **Teachers in FE institutions are not therefore required to have teaching qualifications.**

However, most FE teachers have FE teaching qualifications. The DfE [College staff survey 2018](#)³⁰ found that “almost all teachers (93%) held a teaching qualification”.³¹ The full teaching qualification for the sector is the level 5 Diploma in Education and Training (DET) but if this is taken at a university (or even some FE colleges) it may be called a PGCE or a Cert Ed. Information on teaching qualifications in the FE sector is set out on the Education and Training Foundation website at, [Teaching qualifications for the FE & Skills sector](#).

The white paper sets out **plans to improve initial teacher education** for FE teachers and states that:

However, we are clear that substantial change is needed, and we will consider introducing new statutory powers for the Secretary of State to take a more active role in regulating the provision of initial teacher education, if the improvement we need to see is not achieved.³²

²⁹ Education and Training Foundation, [Further Education Workforce Data for England \(March 2020\)](#) p10

³⁰ Department for Education, [College staff survey 2018](#), November 2018

³¹ *Ibid* p10

³² White paper para 63

8. Next steps

The white paper says on p 9 that “subject to parliamentary approval, it is the Government’s intention that **many of these reforms will be implemented through future primary legislation**. We will also consult on proposals where appropriate and where that is the case the final policy will be subject to taking consultation responses into account”

Areas where the Government intends to legislate include: putting the employer leadership of Local Skills Improvement Plans on a statutory footing, (para 9).

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9. Reaction to the white paper

Association of Colleges

“This is an ambitious package of measures which can deliver a significant shift in how we support the lifelong education and skills needs of more than half the population and ensure that employers have the skilled people they need. With funding over the coming years to match the welcome policy shifts, this should rebalance the education and skills system to make it work for everyone.

I’m delighted that this puts skills at the heart of the pandemic build back, and recognises the vital role that colleges and further education will play in levelling up for people and places whilst tackling long standing concerns about stagnating productivity. Colleges have shown throughout the pandemic an unerring focus on the students, employers and communities they serve – this package shows that the government trusts them to deliver an ambitious and much-needed boost to skills which are vital for our changing economy and labour markets.

These are concrete plans which can deliver the government’s levelling up commitments. Colleges have been calling for this, after years of being overlooked and underutilised, but government has to not only recognise the vital college role, it also needs to increase funding. Colleges have shown during the pandemic that they are the vehicle to transforming lives, and supporting communities and employers, and we need the spending review this year to invest more in them. Today’s white paper will stimulate demand from people and employers and unshackle colleges from unhelpful policy and bureaucracy, ready for Treasury to show that it recognises that spending on skills is an investment with a strong return.

The reforms build on what colleges already do well so it’s not about taking a wrecking ball to existing infrastructure or making colleges start from scratch, but investing in them to play a bigger part in supporting local businesses and local communities. Colleges share the ambition of a skills system which helps people on their journey to good work and supports their progression to higher-paid jobs. Achieving that will require stronger collaboration with more employers including through Chambers of Commerce and business groups but also directly through new College Business Centres. This has the potential to engage thousands more SMEs to help them build their businesses, whilst supporting more people in a shifting economy and labour market.”

The new lifelong loan entitlement, offering flexible student finance, will make it easier for more adults to retrain as the labour market and jobs change. This drive to widen access to skills for all is exciting, but it is vital that students have personal financial support while training and studying to ensure that everybody can participate at all levels of learning.

The white paper sets out a big and positive agenda for colleges to help co-design with government and with employers and there are many details to fill in. As we successfully build a better post-18 system, we will urge the government to work with us on similar co-design of the 14 to 19 education phase and on how higher education needs to change to work more collaboratively with colleges.

As a sector, colleges recognise the need to step into this challenge so it is heartening to see the commitment to streamline the accountability and funding systems that currently constrain them. With more local autonomy and funding, colleges will be central to the rebuild and to the government's ambitions for levelling up people and places and improving productivity. Ultimately our test on this will be whether the reforms deliver for the people, places and employers who all want the same things – more inclusive economic growth, stronger communities and opportunities for all adults to realise their talents and ambitions."³³

Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Jane Hickie , Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director:

The government has adopted the right approach to reform bearing in mind that we are in an economic recession. The emphasis should be on learners finding jobs or retraining.

"Independent training providers have led the way in the growth of apprenticeships and they are also major drivers of provision in traineeships, study programmes, ESF projects and adult education. Therefore the proposals for chamber-led Local Skills Improvement Plans for programmes other than apprenticeships need careful unpicking and piloting, involving all the key stakeholders.

"The reforms for careers advice, especially in relation to the Baker Clause, receive an unreserved welcome from AELP. The extension of the Baker Clause's scope to year 7 pupils is fantastic because this will help raise awareness about apprenticeships further and address issues such gender stereotyping in certain professions.

"Strengthened accountability for provider performance is supported but we have been here a few times before. We have always supported provider accountability for performance and this remains an important part of sector management to ensure that good performance is rewarded. We hope that real teeth are evident from now in tackling poor quality and that a good track record of delivery is properly recognised in future contract awards, whether the funding system is local or national.

"AELP and its members looks forward to playing a full part in taking the proposed reforms forward."³⁴

University and College Union

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said:

'Sadly, this white paper is likely to be remembered as a sorely missed opportunity to create a world class further education system. The government says it will launch a new economic dawn for the country, and that outstanding college teachers will be recruited to give young people the best possible education. But any new recruitment drives are doomed to fail without an increase in staff pay and improvements to working conditions. If the government really wants to attract new industry talent to work in colleges, its priority must be to close the £9000 gap between college and school teachers.

'The white paper does nothing to address the failed experiment of incorporation, where a combination of needless competition,

³³ Association of Colleges, [FE White Paper - AoC's response](#)

³⁴ "[Skills for Jobs White Paper: The FE sector reacts](#)", *TES*, 21 January 2021

fragmentation and drastic underfunding has left colleges and communities poorer. Colleges must be back brought back into national ownership so we can ensure a more accountable and strategic approach which focuses resources towards staff and students.

'Although the white paper does recognise the need for more stable long-term funding in the sector, it is concerning that the government is planning to load students with even more debt by extending loans in further education. Education is a public good and should be publicly funded.

'The focus throughout the white paper is on employers rather than staff and students, but the value of education is not just whether it fills skill gaps and improves productivity. Indeed, as the government seeks to deal with the long-term fallout from the current public health crisis it is disappointing to see such little focus on the wider benefits of lifelong learning for mental health, wellbeing and community cohesion. The government must take a much wider view of the purposes of teaching and learning. That expansive understanding - not simply the demands of employers - should be what informs teacher education for the sector.³⁵

Labour

Kate Green MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, commenting on the Government's Skills for Jobs white paper, said:

"After a decade of reducing opportunities, the Conservatives have finally acknowledged the importance of further education to individuals, employers, and our economy, but these measures will not reverse the damage of a decade of their incompetence.

"Labour has repeatedly said that giving people the ability to retrain and upskill is essential for securing our economy and rebuilding our country.

"But the reality is that millions of people need training opportunities now, not in a matter of months or years, and the Government must act urgently to get them the support they need."³⁶

Reaction to the white paper is also given in the following articles:

["Skills for Jobs White Paper: The FE sector reacts"](#), *TES*, 21 January 2021.

["Skills for Jobs White Paper is launched - Sector Response"](#), *FE news*,

9.1 Comment

The white paper was discussed in the following articles:

["Overhaul of skills and vocational education to focus on employability"](#), *The Guardian*, 21 January 2021

["University tuition fees frozen at £9,250 for a year"](#), *BBC News*, 21 January 2021

³⁵ University and College Union, ["UCU response to further education white paper"](#), 21 January 2021

³⁶ Labour, [Kate Green comments on the Government's Skills for Jobs white paper](#), 21 January 2021

[“FE white paper sets out ‘ambitious’ reforms”](#), *Fe news*, 21 July 2021

[“Never in 37 years have I seen colleges in the limelight like this White Paper”](#), *Fe News*, 21 January 2021

[“I fear today’s FE White Paper is the worst of both worlds”](#), *FE news*, 21 January 2021

[“What do the interim Augar response and Skills for Jobs white paper mean for HE?”](#), *Wonkhe*, 21 July 2021

[“The Skills for Jobs white paper is what happens when policy is made in a vacuum”](#), *Wonkhe*, 25 July 2021

Annex: FE funding

The two briefing papers [16-19 education funding in England since 2010](#) and [Adult further education funding in England since 2010](#) give details of changes in funding and policy up to 2019.

The **FE funding system is complex. FE providers are allocated funds from different sources depending on the type of courses provided and on the age of student.** Funds can be allocated through various funding streams including: the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) **Adult Education Budget, 16-19 Funding** and **Community Learning**, and through **apprenticeship funding** routes. Some learners can also take out **Advanced Learner Loans** to pay for courses that do not attract direct public funding.

In 2018/19, **colleges' income totalled £6.5 billion**, of which £5.1 billion (78%) was public funding.

According to the **IFS total funding for classroom based adult education fell by 66% in real terms between 2003-04 and 2019-20.** There has been little change in this spending in recent years. **Spending on work-based learning and apprenticeships has increased by 71% in real terms over the same period**, but taken together total funding for **adult education and skills has fallen by 37% or £2.0 billion (2020-21 prices) since 2003-04.** As **numbers of learners have also fallen** over this time funding per student in FE colleges only fell by around 6% in real terms between 2013-14 and 2019-20.³⁷

[Budget 2020](#) committed **£1.5 billion over five years** for capital spending across all of further education in England and a new **£2.5 billion National Skills Fund** to improve adult skills in England. In June the Government announced that **£200 million of the capital funding would be brought forward to 2020-21.** Allocations of this funding [Allocations of this funding](#) were announced in August.

The [Spending Review 2020](#) provided an additional **£291 million for young people in FE** in 2021-22 "...to ensure that core funding for 16 to 19-year-olds is maintained in real terms per learner". **It also allocated £375 million from the National Skills Fund** in 2021-22 which consisted of £138 million for level 3 courses, £127 million to continue the summer Plan for Jobs and £110 million for higher technical qualifications including funding for capital and loans.

The IFS published its most recent [Annual report on education spending in England](#) in November 2020. Its key findings on further education were:

- **Further education colleges and sixth forms have seen the largest falls in funding of any sector of the education system since 2010–11.** Funding per student in further education and sixth-form colleges fell by 12% in real terms

³⁷ [2020 annual report on education spending in England](#), IFS

between 2010–11 and 2019–20, while funding per student in school sixth forms fell by 23%.

- **There could be a sharp increase in student numbers in colleges and sixth forms in 2020.** Population projections imply a 3% growth in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds in 2020 and growth of 13% between 2019 and 2023. As in previous recessions, the economic downturn could lead to an increase in participation in full-time education, particularly with large reductions in apprenticeship and training opportunities.
- **Responding to these changes in participation will be challenging given that providers' funding is based on previous student numbers.** The government has already provided an extra £400 million for 16–18 education in 2020–21. This allows for a real-terms growth in spending per pupil of about 2% based on population forecasts. However, exceptional growth in student numbers could erode much, if not all, of this planned real-terms increase in spending per student.
- **Spending on adult education is nearly two-thirds lower in real terms than in 2003–04** and about 50% lower than in 2009–10. This fall was mainly driven by the removal of public funding from some courses and a resultant drop in learner numbers. Responding to proposals in last year's Augar Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, the government plans to restore public funding for adults taking their first Level 3 course from April 2021.

A September 2020 report from the National Audit Office on the [Financial Sustainability of Colleges in England](#) concluded that the **financial health of the college sector remained fragile:**

...the combination of funding constraints and uncertainty, along with cost and competitive pressures, present significant challenges to colleges' financial sustainability...

Overall, the financial health of the college sector remains fragile. Ofsted inspection ratings suggest that colleges are generally maintaining educational quality, but other evidence shows that financial pressures are affecting wider aspects of provision such as the breadth of the curriculum and levels of student support.

On 15 June 2020 the Association of Colleges published, [Rebuild: A skills led recovery plan](#), the report called for **an extra £3.6 billion** to upskill the 764,000 people most at risk economically post Covid 19:

The Association of Colleges warns of increased demand for college places as high unemployment crowds young people out of the labour market; large numbers of young people needing support to catch up as a result of lost learning in lockdown; reductions in apprenticeship places, a large number of apprentice redundancies and a shortage of new places for apprentices; and large numbers of adults requiring training to help them move from struggling sectors into those that recover more quickly, or ³⁸even grow.

³⁸ *Ibid* p12

A £3.6 billion package of incentives for business, support for students and investment in colleges would help the 760,000 people most at risk of suffering economically in this recession. It would: guarantee a high quality, education or training place for every 16 to 18 year old, funded to meet their needs and the learning lost; offer a suite of work focussed training programmes, including expanded traineeships and apprenticeships designed to get young people into jobs as soon as they become available; provide support for adults who lose their jobs to train or retrain flexibly up to higher level technical / professional level, aimed at getting them back into the workforce as quickly as possible, with additional training to manage their transition once back in work³⁹

³⁹ Association of Colleges, [REBUILD: A Skills Led Recovery Plan](#)

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