



Reforming Technical and Professional Education

Why should it work this time?

Mick Fletcher

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Foreword

Esme Winch, Managing Director of NCFE

We welcome this paper from independent consultant Mick Fletcher, published by NCFE and the Campaign for Learning. It raises some important questions for the roll out of the Post-16 Skills Plan and for the reforms to technical education more broadly.

At NCFE, we believe that the principles behind the reforms outlined in the Post-16 Skills Plan are admirable; aligning the skills system to the needs of employers, eliminating 'low value' qualifications that are of little use to learners, and ensuring financial sustainability of the system. The promise to develop 'a high quality technical option' that would have equal status with the academic route, and increase the numbers engaged with technical education, is very attractive and we are hopeful that the new T-Levels will help to deliver on this promise.

However, it is in the implementation of these policies that we have serious concerns about the potentially negative impacts on learners, educators and employers, as well as whether the government will in fact be successful, as these types of promises have been made before.

In writing this paper, Mick has set out 9 recommendations that would broaden and strengthen the currency of technical and professional education, and would ultimately help learners to achieve their career goals.

Contributing to the success of learners and enabling them to reach their full potential is extremely important to us here at NCFE. It is in the interest of all parties that reforming technical and professional education works this time around, so we hope that the government considers the recommendations included in this paper, and really listens to our sector. This will ensure that its actions are aligned to the needs of learners, educators and employers.

If you would like to comment on the content of this paper or discuss this topic further, please get in touch by emailing policy@ncfe.org.uk.

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Author acknowledgements

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About the publishers: NCFE and the Campaign for Learning

NCFE is an awarding organisation which designs, develops and certifies nationally recognised qualifications and awards. (www.ncfe.org.uk) The Campaign for Learning is an independent not-for-profit organisation which works for social and economic inclusion through learning. (www.campaignforlearning.org.uk)

NCFE and the Campaign for Learning have commissioned this paper as the third in a series that will examine current and emerging policy from a learning and skills perspective. In 2015 we published 'Earn or Learn for 18-21 year olds: New Age Group, New Policies' and in 2016 'University or Apprenticeships at 18: Context, Challenges and Concerns'. The content of this paper is the work of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of NCFE or the Campaign for Learning.

SUMMARY

- 1.** In July 2016, the Government published its Post-16 Skills Plan for England. The essential details of the Skills Plan were repeated in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper published in January 2017. They both promise to develop 'a dynamic, high quality technical option' that would sit alongside the academic route, have equal status with it and increase the numbers engaged with technical and professional education (TPE). Such promises have been made several times in recent years: this paper explores whether the chances of success on this occasion are any higher than in the past and makes 9 recommendations to enhance the prospects of a positive outcome.
- 2.** There is much to welcome in the Skills Plan and the Sainsbury Report on Technical Education. The recognition for example that apprenticeships are not the only way to develop technical skills is long overdue and in confirming the importance of a college based route for TPE the plan may represent a watershed. The plan and report both highlight the substantially lower level of resource available to teach students in England compared with overseas competitors. There are however also several serious shortcomings.
- 3.** The Skills Plan fails to put the Sainsbury Report on TPE in a wider context, linking it with preparation for what have formerly been called craft level occupations on the one hand and higher education (HE) on the other. This, combined with a failure to provide a satisfactory definition of TPE leaves whole sectors of the economy and whole groups of potential students out of consideration.
- 4.** There is no clarity concerning where the additional students expected to undertake TPE will come from. Around 10% of those aged 16 and 17 are not engaged in full-time education or apprenticeships and many of them will not be ready to join level 2 let alone level 3 technical education programmes. Growth in technical education will need to come from other pathways, including the academic pathway and the existing vocational education pathway. The implications for A level enrolment, especially at schools with sixth forms, have yet to be spelled out.
- 5.** The centrepiece of the proposals is (yet again) a reform of vocational qualifications (VQs). On this occasion however, reform of content is also allied to a proposal to remove a competitive market for VQs by awarding exclusive licences to develop qualifications for each of the 15 routes. This is a high risk strategy which has already been considered and rejected for academic qualifications.
- 6.** The proposals emerge at the same time as plans for devolution of the Adult Education Budget. There is insufficient consideration of the interaction between these sets of proposals, nor recognition of the highly confusing pattern of accountability and responsibility that this will entail to the funding of technical education at levels 2-3 for adult learners.
- 7.** A key role in the reforms will be played by the newly established Institute for Apprenticeships, shortly to have its remit expanded to cover technical education and become the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). There is a lack of clarity about the role of the IfATE in relation to other agencies including the future Office for Students (OfS).
- 8.** The Skills Plan fails to give adequate consideration to provision at level 2 and below, merely describing plans for a 'transition year' during which it is assumed young people aged 16 will either acquire the basic skills necessary to undertake a level 3 programme or move directly to work. There are many occupations, for example in the construction sector, that recruit those with skills at level 2. There are adults in and out of the workforce for whom a level 3 programme is, at least initially, inappropriate.

9. The Skills Plan is perhaps most confused around the relationship between TPE and prescribed higher education i.e. that which currently falls within the remit of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the future Office for Students. If the plan is intended to raise the status of TPE then it is not clear why such programmes at level 4 and above should not be seen as part of HE with the attendant entitlements to loan support for fees and maintenance. There needs to be greater clarity over whether the expansion of TPE is expected to come at the expense of recruitment to existing HE programmes or to grow alongside it.

10. The Skills Plan offered no developed thinking about the role of maintenance support for adults either undertaking TPE programmes at levels 4 and above or preparing for it at levels 3 and below; the gap was only partly filled by proposals in Budget 2017. This in part reflects the ambiguous status of TPE compared with HE where loans are an entitlement, but also reflects a neglect of those seeking to return to work and those seeking to progress in work but without the support of an employer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To help promote technical education as a strong and prestigious alternative to the academic route, and to succeed where earlier attempts have failed, government should:

1. develop a more convincing definition of technical and professional education and set it in the context of a plan that relates to all types of occupation. In addition it should define and use more carefully the terms STEM, technical education and further education
2. be clearer about where new recruits to technical education - aged 16-17 and 18 and over - are to come from but not seek to achieve such an increase by abolishing applied general qualifications
3. not proceed with the proposals to remove competition from the market for vocational qualifications
4. set out clear proposals on how plans for the devolution of skills in terms of planning and funding, revenue and capital will operate in respect of technical and professional education. More specifically, the government should ask itself whether technical and professional education up to level 3 can thrive in a system where some is funded via the Adult Education budget and devolved while other aspects are funded via fee loans and not
5. urgently review the proposed powers of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, with a view to removing potential duplication with the role of other agencies with respect to apprenticeships and also in relation to higher level technical education and especially with the future Office for Students
6. develop proposals for substantial vocational college based routes not defined as technical education at levels 1 and 2, especially for 16-18 year olds
7. develop a single integrated approach to provision at level 4 and above that sees higher level technical and professional education as part of the higher education system and regulated by the Office for Students
8. introduce maintenance loans for all those aged 18+ who wish to enter full-time and part-time level 4+ programmes but are unable to access support from an employer; not just those at Institutes of Technology and National Colleges
9. offer maintenance loans to 19-23 year olds seeking a first level 3 through a technical education programme at level 3 who are unable to access support from an employer

INTRODUCTION

11. In July 2016, the Government published its Post-16 Skills Plan¹ for *England* the key features of which were repeated in the relevant section of the Industrial Strategy Green Paper² in January 2017. It promised, not for the first time, to develop ‘a dynamic, high quality technical option’ that would sit alongside the academic route and have equal status with it. This paper examines the proposals in the plan, considers whether the prospects for success this time are greater than those of similar proposals in the past and makes recommendations as to how the chances of success might be improved.

12. The Skills Plan is in large part based on a report by Lord Sainsbury³ also published in July 2016. A summary of the recommendations of the Sainsbury Report is set out in Appendix 1. In introducing the Skills Plan the Minister of State, Nick Boles, agreed to ‘accept and ... implement all of the Sainsbury panel’s proposals unequivocally’ but significantly he added ‘where that is possible within current budget constraints’. The current government has also accepted the Sainsbury panel’s proposals. It announced £170 million capital funding to help develop Institutes of Technology in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper and extra revenue funding for technical education in the 2017 Budget.

13. The review and plan introduce a new vocabulary. They refer to “Technical and Professional Education” (TPE) rather than applied learning, vocational education, or the language of vocational education and training (VET) used across Europe and elsewhere. They offer no clear definition of TPE. Instead they simply say that technical education is preparation for skilled employment in occupations that require “a substantial body of technical knowledge”.

14. The Skills Plan, like proposals for skills devolution, largely excludes universities without seeking to explain why. It does however include aspects of non-prescribed higher education – technical provision at levels 4 and 5 and in some instances level 6. The vision seems to be that the take up of technical routes at level 3 will be encouraged by the prospect of high quality options for progression.

15. The Skills Plan is also largely about full time provision for students aged 16-18⁴. It recognises the need to align with provision for adults seeking to enter technical occupations but focuses on initial rather than continuing vocational education. It does not significantly develop proposals for those occupations and sectors that fall outside its definition of technical and professional, e.g. retail.

16. The Sainsbury Report is concerned only with technical education and focuses on qualifications reform. The Skills Plan has, in theory, a wider brief though it says little about skills beyond the Sainsbury definition of technical education and focuses heavily on qualifications reform. Other aspects of skills and other levers for reform receive less attention than they perhaps warrant.

17. To explore the implications of these proposals requires separate consideration of their potential impact on three groups of students:

- 16 -18 year olds - i.e. those aged 16 and 17
- Adults aged 18 and over studying at levels 4, 5 and 6
- Adults aged 18 and over studying at level 3 and below

18. For the adult groups, in particular there is a need to think about both full and part time students and support with both tuition costs and maintenance.

1. Post-16 Skills Plan, Department for Education, July 2016

2. Building our Industrial Strategy, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, January 2017

3. The Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education, April 2016 – see Appendix 1 for recommendations

4. In this report, 16-18 means those aged 16 and 17

19. The main body of this paper devotes a separate section to each of the above groups. Before that however it examines five general issues that potentially affect each of them.

- What is technical and professional education and who is it for?
- Is there a 'third way' between academic study and apprenticeships?
- What might be the impact of ending a competitive market for qualifications?
- How do the proposals sit with the devolution agenda?
- What is the role of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education?

GENERAL ISSUES

What is Technical and Professional Education?

20. There is no clear definition of 'technical and professional' in either the Sainsbury Report or the Skills Plan other than the somewhat circular formulation mentioned in the introduction. Lord Sainsbury himself attracted criticism for declining to offer a definition at the conference held by the Association of Colleges saying that "we all know what it is". While that may be true in a general sense it is unlikely, on its own, to be a sound basis for policy.

21. Some insight into what Sainsbury and the government consider to be TPE can be gleaned from the description of the 15 'routes' into which it is proposed all such learning should be brigaded. They are set out in box 1. Some sectors, most notably retail, appear to be totally excluded, Lord Sainsbury later justifying the omission on the grounds that such jobs do not require the equivalent of one day per week off-the-job training in addition to practising skills in the workplace. Four routes are 'expected to primarily be delivered via apprenticeships' though no rationale is offered for their identification. In any event it is employers that will determine where apprenticeships are offered, not officials responsible for technical education.

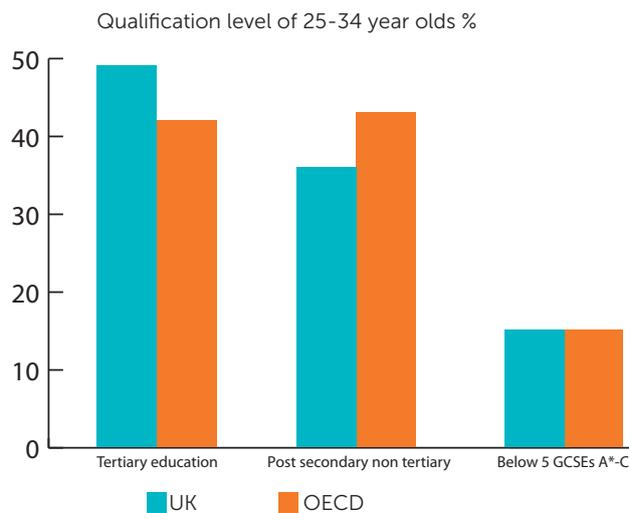
Box 1: The 15 Technical Routes

Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care	Hair and Beauty
Business and Administration	Health and Science
Catering and Hospitality	Legal, Finance and Accounting
Childcare and Education	Protective Services*
Construction	Sales, Marketing and Procurement*
Creative and Design	Social Care*
Digital	Transport and Logistics*
Engineering and Manufacturing	*expected to be delivered primarily via apprenticeships

22. The issue of status is further complicated by the treatment of Higher Education (HE) in the Skills Plan. Although the intention is that there should be high quality TPE beyond level 3 it is also clear that it is seen as limited to sub-degree (level 4-5). A BSc in Engineering (level 6) for example is seen as HE rather than TPE; and is something to be progressed to, whether as part of a degree apprenticeship or a freestanding HE programme, rather than part of the TPE offer.

23. This question of status is important because it is linked closely with the issue of who TPE is for. England differs from other countries in the OECD, not in having fewer people with post-secondary qualifications but in having more of that group qualified at the level of a full degree. Although the Skills Plan rhetoric therefore is about raising aspirations and qualification levels, the ambition to increase the numbers with sub-degree level qualifications would most readily be achieved by reducing the qualification level of many young adults. Fig 1 below shows how the UK compares with other nations.

Fig 1. Qualification levels of young people: quoted by IFS⁵



24. The Skills Plan and Lord Sainsbury do not use the concept of ‘craft skills’ or what is known in Australia and Canada as ‘Trade Skills Training’ – occupations such as plastering which require extensive practice but not a substantial body of theoretical knowledge. To do so would provide rather more convincing examples of skilled occupations that are not technical than those deployed by Lord Sainsbury (he spoke of retail occupations as skilled but not requiring off-the-job training). It would also indicate the need to plan for them effectively. Some aspects of the proposed technician route, such as hairdressing, might more appropriately be designated as a skilled craft.

25. Greater care is also needed to make the distinction between STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Education and Mathematics), technical education and further education. Maths at A level for example is clearly STEM but not technical education nor always in in further education. Accountancy can be part of FE but not STEM; it is not strictly within technical education but within the wider definition of TPE.

Recommendation 1.

The government should develop a more convincing definition of technical and professional education and set it in the context of a plan that relates to all types of occupation. In addition it should define and use more carefully the terms STEM, technical education and further education.

5. Reforms to Apprenticeship Funding, Chapter 8, IFS Green Budget, February 2017

See https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R124_Green%20Budget_%208.%20Apprenticeships.pdf

A third way?

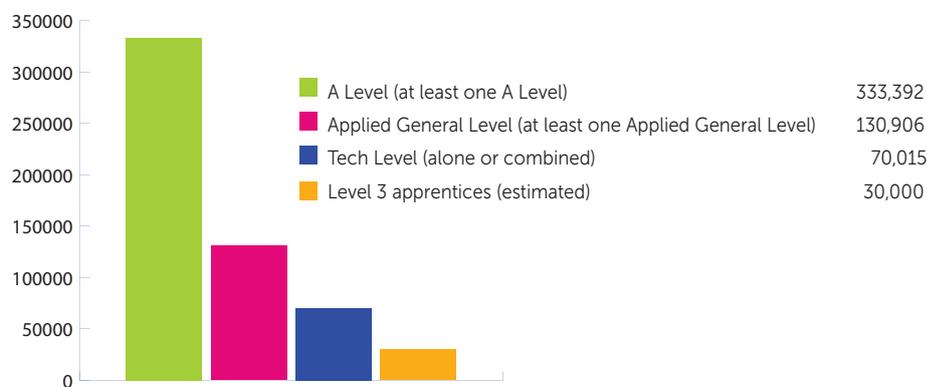
26. For many years government policy has championed a binary approach to the development of young people - either an academic education leading to higher education at 18 or an apprenticeship leading to skilled employment. It has ignored the inconvenient truth that a very large group of young people do neither. For many 16-17 year olds there is no realistic chance of a local apprenticeship in their chosen field⁶. Others may be clear about the occupational area in which they want to work without wishing to commit to a specific specialism with an employer. Many young people, therefore, choose the vocational education pathway.

27. The Post-16 Skills Plan recognises that for many young people wanting to follow the technical route, a college-based programme is the most practical option. The term college-based programme is symbolically important. It appears that, unlike previous reforms, it is FE colleges and not 'schools and FE colleges' that should deliver technical education. Schools with sixth forms seem not to be expected to deliver post-16 technical education although many currently do, and the role of UTCs and Sixth Form Colleges with strong traditions of delivering vocational level 3 qualifications remains uncertain. Colleges should welcome this confirmation of their central role in delivering TPE - especially at levels 2 and 3 - as higher technical programmes may be mainly delivered by specialist institutions.

28. The college based level 3 programmes currently offered in schools and colleges fall into three categories - academic, technical and 'applied general'. This latter term, bafflingly obscure to anyone outside the education establishment (and many in it), refers to programmes that have a broad occupational focus but the primary aim of preparing young people for progression to further learning rather than employment. The Skills Plan is unclear about the future of these programmes; it promised an announcement before Christmas 2016 which is yet to appear.

29. Provisional figures for 2016 show 333,392 young people completing a programme with at least one A level, 130,906 one with an applied general qualification at level 3 and 70,015 a 'tech level' - the nearest current equivalent to level 3 TPE (see Fig 2). Those undertaking a mixture of qualifications are counted more than once so the overall total is overstated (it is actually 454,116). Nevertheless the figures illustrate the dominance of the A level route and, when A levels and applied general qualifications are combined, emphasise the focus on higher education rather than direct entry to work. Those taking a technical qualification, whether alone or in combination with other types, constitute no more than 15% of 16-18 year olds studying at level 3.

Figure 2: 16-18 Year Olds - level 3 participation (Year 2015/2016 Provisional)



Sources: Stastical First Release 49/2016, Oct 2016 and Apprenticeship Statistics for England, House of Commons, Nov 2016

6. A point made by Lord Sainsbury in TES 15th January, 2017

7. Statistical First Release 49/2016 October 2016

8. Apprenticeship Statistics for England, House of Commons, November 2016

30. Comparisons with apprenticeship numbers are difficult. To give an indication of relative scale however in 2015/16 there were 74,000 starts on apprenticeship programmes by young people aged 16 or 17.⁹ Some 40% of apprenticeships were at level 3 so perhaps 30,000 level 3 apprentices could be added to the 70,000 tech levels, suggesting that the current equivalent of TPE attracts at most around a fifth of the level 3 16-18 cohort.

31. It is nowhere stated where the increased numbers expected to follow the TPE routes at ages 16 and 17 will come from. It can reasonably be assumed that the 100,000 or so currently following the apprenticeship and college based equivalents will transfer to one of the 15 new routes. Some of the 50,000 or so 17 year olds on level 2 programmes might in future choose a TPE option at level 3 but the numbers would be very low. About 90% of 16 and 17 year olds are already in full-time further education or approved training and meeting the duty to participate until their 18th birthday. Unless the ambition is to encourage the 10% not meeting the duty to enrol on TPE at level 3 - which is unlikely as many will not have a Level 2 qualification - any significant increase in participation would have to come at the expense of academic or applied general education.

32. A significant reduction in the numbers entering school sixth forms, many of whom drop out after one year, might make sense but the implications for institutions need to be spelled out. If the numbers of apprentices aged 16 and 17 reduce because of changes to apprenticeship funding as many have warned, the existence of an FE 'safety net' is welcome, but by itself does nothing to increase the uptake of TPE.

33. A temptation for policymakers might be to sharpen the academic – technical divide by abolishing the applied general category and forcing young people to choose between A levels and tech levels. This would be a mistake. Applied general qualifications encourage social mobility by offering a different approach to learning from traditional A levels and by using interest in a broad vocational area such as business studies to sustain motivation. If more students turned back to A levels as a consequence of their removal, it could just as easily lead to increased failure rates on the academic route as promote positive engagement in TPE.

34. Thinking about TPE is often focussed on provision for 16 and 17 year olds but the need for a 'third way' is equally important for adults. The emphasis on developing TPE at levels 4+ as an alternative to HE and apprenticeships may also be welcome news for FE colleges, although as indicated later issues of maintenance support for students aged 19+ at all levels need to be resolved if it is to succeed.

35. As with the 16-18 phase there needs to be greater clarity about where the new adult recruits to TPE will come from. As indicated later in this report the implications for some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) might be substantial were it to come from traditional 3 year undergraduate degree programmes. If on the other hand growth were to come at the expense of Foundation Degrees or Higher National Diplomas, disruption to institutions would be less but any benefits similarly reduced.

Recommendation 2.

The government should be clearer about where new recruits to technical education - aged 16-17 and 18 and over - are to come from but not seek to achieve such an increase by abolishing applied general qualifications.

9. ibid

Limiting competition in the market for vocational qualifications

36. The Skills Plan envisages a radical streamlining of vocational qualifications so that there will be 'only one approved tech level qualification for each occupation or cluster of occupations' (page 24, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016). The justification presented in the Sainsbury Report is that the market based approach to qualifications development, which is unique to the UK, 'has led to huge numbers of competing qualifications'. This, it is asserted 'is a serious issue because it makes the system very confusing for individuals and employers' (page 48, Sainsbury Report, April 2016).

37. Since rationalisation of vocational qualifications has been a feature of *English* skills policy for decades one would expect some significant evidence to be quoted to justify dramatic change. Surprisingly there seems to be little beyond assertion. The Sainsbury Report quotes the fact that there were 21,000 qualifications on the Ofqual register in 2015 and the fact that there are 33 plumbing qualifications potentially available to those aged 16-18, as if it were self-evident that this is problematic. In other walks of life however people cope happily with such complexity - a large Sainsbury's supermarket for example typically contains 30,000 different products!

38. The Sainsbury Report breaks new ground for vocational education in arguing for a licensing approach to the provision of the limited number of vocational qualifications that will be approved for public funding. An open competition, it states, should be held for the right to offer the only approved qualification for an occupation for a fixed period of time. The justification for this is that competition can lead to a 'race to the bottom' in terms of rigour, and competition on price at the expense of quality. Once again the argument appears to be based on assertion rather than evidence.

39. While the Sainsbury Report provided little evidence concerning the alleged perverse impacts of competition, the Education Select Committee¹⁰ had looked at analogous concerns in relation to qualifications for the academic route in 2012. Although it concluded that it was difficult to get beyond anecdote it seemed there was some loss of confidence in the system by important stakeholders, and action was needed to address the perception that competition posed a threat to standards. Significantly however it rejected a proposal for a licensing system for A levels that was substantially similar to that now advocated for tech levels.

40. There were several reasons for rejecting the licensing approach. One was that any benefits from the competition for a license would be short term as it could prove very difficult to mount a challenge to an incumbent in future rounds. Potential competitors would be unlikely to maintain the staff and other resources needed for an effective bid with nothing to do. A secure monopolist would have no incentive to be either efficient or deliver high quality.

41. The Select Committee also noted the advantages of competition in encouraging innovation and responsiveness to users. It proposed therefore that the function of determining the syllabus content be taken away from awarding bodies, but that they should continue to compete on administration and marking of examinations and support for examination centres. Since content would be determined centrally, it is asserted, boards could not compete (or be suspected of cheating) by leaving out the harder bits of the subject but could still innovate, for example in terms of delivery models.

10. 'The administration of examinations for 15-19 year olds in England', Education Select Committee 2012-13

42. A similar arrangement might be the eventual solution for technical and professional qualifications since the arguments against monopoly apply with the same force to this sector. The Sainsbury Report proposed that the content of each route should be developed by panels of ‘professionals working in, or with expert knowledge of, the relevant occupations, supported by experienced education professionals’ (page 39, Sainsbury Report, April 2016). In January 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that industry professionals would lead technical education panels.¹¹

Recommendation 3.

The government should not proceed with the proposals to remove competition from the market for vocational qualifications.

English Devolution

43. Power over adult skills provision is included in each of the 30 or so devolution deals that are at various stages of development across England. It is not clear though how the agreement to devolve the ‘commissioning’ of adult skills sits with the proposals in the Skills Plan. Provision of TPE at levels 4 and above is of great interest to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities seeking to promote economic development but almost all will be funded by loans so will not be devolved.¹²

44. In respect of provision at level 4 and above it will be the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education which will identify gaps and commission National Colleges to fill them. National Colleges and Institutes of Technology look set to play a major part in the redefined skills system but it is not at all clear what role local authorities or LEPs will have in relation to them.

45. On the other hand, the Skills Plan states that ‘as the 15 routes are introduced it will be for local areas to decide which routes they should focus on in order to meet the demands of the local economy’ (page 33, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016). Since this paragraph seems primarily concerned with 16-18 provision, the funding for which is not being devolved it is not at all clear what role localities can play. Furthermore as the Skills Plan reminds its readers ‘Colleges and other providers will remain autonomous’ (page 33, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016).

46. In respect of provision for adults wishing to study technical education courses at level 2 and 3 the picture is even more confusing. Fee-loans for adult further education fall outside of devolution. By contrast, the grant-based Adult Education Budget (AEB) is subject to devolution. The AEB funds entitlements to free provision for 19-23 year olds seeking a first level 2 and a first level 3 including those seeking to do so via technical education programmes. A problem could arise, however, where 19-23 year olds in a local area wish to study certain technical education programmes to achieve a first level 2 or level 3, but the relevant devolved authority decides to limit funding to routes that young adults might not wish to follow or not fund technical education at all. In addition, 19-23 year olds seeking a second level 3 technical education qualification will have to take out a fee-loan to fund it rather than be entitled to free provision.

47. Meanwhile decisions about which apprenticeships will be available in an area will be made by employers, not by local authorities or LEPs. Some localities have had marginal influence over

11. Industry professionals to lead technical education panels, Press Release 17th January 2017, Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/industry-professionals-to-lead-technical-education-panels>

12. For a consideration of wider issues around skills devolution see <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/blog/2017/1/10/is-skills-devolution-destined-for-the-very-long-grass/>

apprenticeships by managing the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE) programme¹³ which gave a financial incentive to small employers taking on apprentices aged 16-24. AGE however is planned to cease in July 2017. It is not clear whether incentives of this nature will be available to localities in the future.

Recommendation 4.

The government should set out clear proposals on how plans for the devolution of skills in terms of planning and funding, revenue and capital will operate in respect of technical and professional education. More specifically, the government should ask itself whether technical and professional education up to level 3 can thrive in a system where some is funded via the Adult Education Budget and devolved while other aspects are funded via fee loans and not.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

48. According to a government consultation document issued at the beginning of January 2017 'the Institute for Apprenticeships will be established as an independent body to act as the guarantor of the integrity of the apprenticeships system, with a mandate to assure quality and provide objective advice on future funding for apprenticeship training'¹⁴. The role of the Institute in the area of technical education was fleshed out a little more in Chapter 5 of its Operational Plan published at the end of January 2017.¹⁵ In 2018 it is envisaged that the Institute for Apprenticeships will also take on responsibility for technical education, becoming the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) so that college based and work based routes to technical occupations are aligned. These are fine aspirations; but as many in the sector have noted¹⁶ the role is substantial and complex with respect to apprenticeship reform, let alone technical education where the potential for confusion and conflict with other bodies especially in higher education remains a real possibility.

49. A major role for the IfATE will be to take over from DfE responsibility for the approval of new apprenticeship standards and keeping them under review. This is welcome since, as the Sainsbury Report makes clear, there is a need to ensure that apprenticeships provide the foundation for a career in a skilled occupation, not just preparation for a job. It seems however that many existing standards do not meet the wider definition envisaged by the Sainsbury Report, leading to a potential clash between the IfATE and the 'trailblazer' groups that have invested considerable time and energy in developing standards to date.

50. The IfATE is tasked with providing advice on future funding for apprenticeship training; this risks conflict or confusion with the role of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) which currently fulfils this role and will presumably continue to manage apprenticeship funding arrangements. There may also be confusion over responsibility for determining which training and assessment organisation are approved for entry to the registers currently maintained by SFA.

51. It is not clear how the role of the IfATE in terms of quality assurance sits alongside the established roles of Ofsted in relation to delivery of programmes or Ofqual in terms of the regulation of qualifications. In higher education there will need to be careful negotiation with the Office for Students in areas where there is a clear overlap such as degree apprenticeships. The consultation indicates that the IfATE will be expected to take a leading role in partnerships with other bodies such as these but concedes that it "does not have an explicit statutory role which gives it any precedence over any of these partner organisations".

52. The IfATE is described as an 'employer driven' organisation but it is equally clear that it will be

13. See for example Nick Linford writing for NCFE, 16 January 2017, 'The IfA needs rewiring' <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/blog>

14. Draft Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships: Government Consultation. Department for Education, 4th January 2017

15. Institute for Apprenticeships: Driving the Quality of Apprenticeships in England, Department for Education, January 2017

expected to operate within a framework tightly drawn by government. This will be reinforced by the issuing of a 'statutory notice' each year giving 'strategic guidance' with which the IfATE will need to comply. If as a consequence the IfATE appears unable to act with independence and on occasion challenge the direction of policy, it seems unlikely that many employers will continue to commit time and effort to its operation.

53. The relationship between the IfATE and the future Office for Students (OfS) will be important with respect to the development of Degree Apprenticeships (level 6) where it seems responsibility will be shared. Responsibility for other higher technical and professional education provision will be split; some - those courses seen by the OfS as part of a full degree programme will be regulated by that body. Other programmes accepted by the IfATE as meeting its criteria for higher technical education, will fall to the IfATE to regulate. Only courses regulated by the IfATE or OfS will be eligible for loan support. The resulting binary divide may not follow exactly the same lines as the current distinction between prescribed and non-prescribed HE. The place of HND programmes is for example unclear.

54. From the perspective of technical education funding, the IfATE will need to work closely with the Education Funding Agency which is responsible for all 16-18 education up to level 3 including technical. It will need to have strong local links with devolved authorities responsible for the Adult Education Budget and the Skills Funding Agency where the AEB is not devolved. It will need to work closely with the Student Loans Company and the SFA with respect to fee-loans for 19+ technical education at level 3 and 18+ technical education at levels 4-5.

Recommendation 5.

The government should urgently review the proposed powers of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, with a view to removing potential duplication with the role of other agencies with respect to apprenticeships and also in relation to higher level technical education and especially with the future Office for Students.

TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION BY AGE

Technical and Professional Education for 16-18 year olds

55. The TPE strategy for young people is a 16-18 strategy not a 14-18 strategy. To that extent, it differs from the Diploma programme of the former Labour government with which it otherwise has a number of obvious similarities. Both proposals for example identify a number of broad vocational routes that seek to encourage participation by simplifying the qualification landscape. Both concentrated reforming energies on the vocational sector, leaving the more politically sensitive academic route effectively intact.

56. While a 16-18 strategy is simpler than tackling the whole 14-18 phase it does leave a number of problems. It leaves no special place for example for the struggling University Technical College (UTC) movement which in a 14-18 model might have provided an accelerated and high quality access to the technical track. It limits the potential of vocational education to provide motivation for those disaffected by the academic curriculum well before the age of 16.

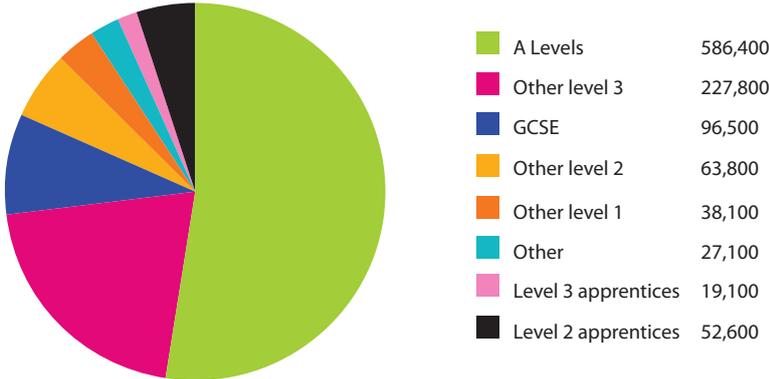
57. Although the strategy for young people is based around the age range 16-18 it is not a strategy for all 16-18 year olds. Several important sectors of the economy are left outside the 15 routes, on the grounds that the occupations on offer do not require sufficient training to count as

technical or professional. The omission of these sectors from the Skills Plan is the fault of DfE not Lord Sainsbury. Asked to write a report on technical education it is not unreasonable for him to have focussed on that part of the occupational spectrum that might be defined as technical. The authors of a Post-16 Skills Plan however might reasonably be expected to have dealt with the full range of skills required post-16 rather than just some.

58. The Skills Plan notes that a full time programme of TPE at level 3 is not appropriate for everyone so introduces the notion of a ‘transition year’. The aim of the transition year however seems to be to improve performance in basic skills so that young people are ready to access a TPE route, or alternatively enter employment. There is no consideration of systematic vocational training at level 2; nor of the capacity of college based vocational programmes at levels 1 and 2 to engage young people and provide the motivation to continue learning.

59. Chart 1 below summarises the current participation of young people aged 16 and 17 at the end of 2015. It shows that over 212,000 young people were following level 2 programmes with a further 65,000 studying at level 1 or below. It is not clear how a ‘transition year’ will make any significant proportion of this total ready for a TPE programme at level 3; and even less clear how the labour market will be encouraged to accept them.

Chart 1 : Participation of 16 and 17 year olds, taken from SFR 22/2016



60. Under RPA legislation young people are required to participate in full time learning or work with continuing part time study until the age of 18. Whether or not they enter the workforce therefore, there is a need for the Skills Plan to spell out the nature of the continuing education that they can expect to be offered.

61. Chart 1 also highlights the very limited role that apprenticeships currently play in level 3 provision for 16 and 17 year olds. Just over 2% of those participating in level 3 programmes are doing so through an apprenticeship and the Skills Plan does not explain why this figure should be expected to change. Changes to funding rates introduced alongside the move to an apprenticeship levy are felt by many in the sector to make 16-18 year olds relatively less attractive to employers¹⁶ with several leaders forecasting a serious fall in numbers.¹⁷ Age 18 is the peak year for starts at level 2 and 3. A more nuanced assessment may be that the new apprenticeship funding system including the levy could see a reduction in the number of 16-17 year olds taken on whilst the number of 18 year old apprentices could rise.

62. Although the apprenticeship and college based programmes for each route are intended to be closely aligned there are unexplained divergences in the approaches adopted. College based

16. Including the IFS Green Budget, February 2017

17. See for example this article in FE Week <http://feweek.co.uk/2017/01/05/16-18-apprenticeships-are-set-to-plummet/>

programmes seem to be tightly specified in terms of format and very general - 'every college-based route should begin with a two-year programme suitable for 16-18 year olds[and] begin with a common core which applies to all individuals studying that route and is aligned to apprenticeships' (Page 15, Sainsbury Report, April 2016). The starting point for planning is the idea of 15 routes though the diversity within each route suggests that this initial aspiration will rapidly be modified. Indeed an example given in the Skills Plan itself refers to a tech level in stonemasonry.¹⁸

63. Apprenticeship standards on the other hand are developed by groups of employers and seem to be increasingly job focussed. An SFA update of December 2016 lists around 500 apprenticeship standards in development, many of which are highly specific, e.g. nuclear safety welding inspection technician. It is for the employer groups developing standards to specify which, if any, qualifications are required as part of the apprenticeship: the Skills Plan states 'tech levels could play a role within the relevant apprenticeships, but only if employers decide that should be the case' (Page 24, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016).

64. Of the 15 proposed routes four are identified as being 'primarily delivered through apprenticeships'. There is no explanation given for this expectation, nor why it is applied to Protective Services; Sales, Marketing and Procurement; Social Care; and Transport and Logistics but not to areas with strong apprenticeship traditions such as engineering and hairdressing. Nor is there any indication as to how government might bring about this outcome since, in the world of the apprenticeship levy, decisions about whether and how to engage with apprentices are matters for individual employers.

Recommendation 6.

The government should develop proposals for substantial vocational college based routes not defined as technical education at levels 1 and 2, especially for 16-18 year olds.

Technical and Professional Education for adults at level 4 and above

65. The Sainsbury Review and the Skills Plan are both concerned to increase the provision and take up of TPE at levels 4 and 5 where it is strongly argued England falls behind its international competitors. Judging by the proposals the authors seem to believe that the main impediment to such growth is the nature of the qualifications on offer. This has been a consistent strand in public policy in England - the FE sector has seen a series of attempts to reform vocational qualifications, all with the plausible aim of increasing take up through increasing confidence in them. All, as the Skills Plan acknowledges, have failed.

66. There are good grounds for believing that the heavy emphasis on the role of qualifications reform is misplaced. Someone wishing to undertake a degree in history for example is faced with a far wider choice than the 33 options a prospective plumber has to consider, yet university applications have boomed. No two degrees in chemistry are exactly the same yet undergraduate and postgraduate numbers are healthy. The answer perhaps lies elsewhere.

67. One key factor in sustaining full time HE recruitment is a strong and predictable system of maintenance support. Although over the past decade maintenance support in HE has moved from grants to loans, it is possible for full time students to access help with the costs of both fees and maintenance from the age of 18. From 2018/19, part time HE students will be eligible for maintenance loans. If, as appears to be intended, government wants more young people to progress from full time study of TPE at level 3 (or even below) to levels 4 and 5 it would do far better to concentrate on student support rather than tinkering with the qualification offer. The government has completed a consultation on FE maintenance loans and Budget 2017 announced their extension to approved technical education programmes at a limited set of institutions.

18. Though rather oddly the examples of content seem to relate to brickwork

68. Although the clear intention of the government is to promote the growth of TPE at levels 4 and 5 it seems that it will continue to be designated as different from HE developed by universities. It is not clear what advantages there are in retaining such distinction. It risks TPE being seen as less prestigious than degrees or perhaps HND provision, reinforcing the unfortunate connotations of its being referred to as 'sub-degree level work'. It is at odds with the strongly stated desire to simplify arrangements and makes data collection more complex.

Recommendation 7.

The government should develop a single integrated approach to provision at level 4 and above that sees higher level TPE as part of the higher education system and regulated by the Office for Students.

69. As indicated earlier, the Skills Plan is not clear where new recruits to TPE at levels 4 and 5 will come from. It seems unlikely that many will come from the 15% of 25-34 year olds who currently lack five good GCSEs (see Fig 1) particularly if support with living costs is not available for adults at levels 2 and 3. The only alternative for full time TPE is that they come at the expense of traditional undergraduate HE.

70. It would not appear to be in the interests of either the individual or the economy for someone undertaking technical or professional subjects at degree level to downgrade to sub-degree level qualifications. Any growth of full time TPE at levels 4 and 5 seems therefore to be predicated on those currently undertaking Arts and Humanities at degree level opting instead for new TPE provision. This might be plausible for routes such as business studies; but in respect of STEM provision they are likely to lack both the interest and the requisite entry qualifications.

71. This perhaps leaves the part time route as the main option for the growth of TPE at level 4+. Yet part time sub-degree provision, is precisely the area where there has been the most dramatic and sustained fall in HE enrolments in recent years. Qualification reform and the involvement of employers through the development of Foundation Degrees has done little to stem the fall in such provision in HEIs and, despite increasing policy support, the delivery of such work in FE colleges has failed to increase. It is not clear how nominating certain FE colleges as Institutes of Technology¹⁹ with a modest amount of capital funding will alter the picture.

72. For each of the 15 routes the 'Institute for Apprenticeships will maintain a register of technical qualifications' (Page 26, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016) approved for public funding at levels 4 and 5. The Institute 'will normally wish to recognise only a single qualification in a particular area' (Page 26, Post-16 Skills Plan, July 2016). It is not clear whether this means an extension of the idea of licencing and a competition or whether the Institute will simply nominate existing qualifications. In either case concerns about the negative effects of monopoly provision need to be addressed.

73. It also seems to be envisaged that National Colleges will act both as developers of TPE qualifications and deliverers of programmes giving rise to a potential conflict of interest that will need to be managed. If a National College does not exist for an area an existing FE college with a strong specialisation could be allowed to issue awards. There is no mention in this section of the role of awarding bodies - a situation that needs to be clarified urgently.

74. Surprisingly the Skills Plan makes little mention of higher apprenticeships as a means of boosting participation in TPE at higher levels yet the apprenticeship levy may prove to be the most effective means of encouraging it. Some large employers who will be making major contributions to the levy are expected to change their training practices to make the most of their levy funds. This

19. As announced in the Industrial Strategy, January 2017

could include changing in-company training schemes into full apprenticeships at levels 4, 5 and 6. From the government's point of view this solves the problem of student support since the cost is borne by the employer's wage bill but as IFS²⁰ point out risks high levels of deadweight.

75. The assumption in the Skills Plan seems to be that the advanced learning loan scheme is sufficient to support such people who wish to undertake part time higher TPE with the cost of fees. If that is the case the figures on take up to date are disappointing. In 2015/16 out of a total of 71,190 loans approved just 4,220 or 6% were at level 4 or above. Only 60 were identified as vocational qualifications though not all were properly identified.

76. In 2016/17 eligibility for fee-loans was extended from the 24+ to the wider 19+ age range. This seems to have produced a small increase in take up – the figure for the part year up to the end of October 2016²¹ was 66,000 - but the proportion of loans for courses at level 4+ remained at just over 6% (4,410). A more accurate count of which courses were vocational suggested 1,320 fell in that category or 2% of the overall figure.

77. This is consistent with the figures on overall adult participation in FE and Skills²² which are shown in Figure 3 below. The proportion of learning on programmes at level 4, 5 and above has remained negligible, fluctuating around 1% of the total. Furthermore not all of the 47,000 recorded for 14/15 would count as technical or professional. If, as seems intended, eligibility for FE loans are restricted to a limited set of technical qualifications approved by the IfATE the consequence could be a serious underspend of the proposed £480 million loans budget for 2019/20.

78. Initial higher TPE for young people might then be met by either apprenticeships or a loan system comparable to that in HE. The latter might also help unemployed or unwaged people access higher TPE while some employer driven updating of those in work might be addressed through organising it as apprenticeships. This leaves the question of support for individually driven updating or change of career direction for those in employment.

Fig 3: Adult participation in FE and Skills – Learner Aims ²³



Recommendation 8.

The government should introduce maintenance loans for all those aged 18+ who wish to enter full-time and part-time level 4+ programmes but are unable to access support from an employer; not just those at Institutes of Technology and National Colleges

20. IFS Green Budget, February 2017

21. Department for Education, Further education and training, Collection, Statistics: advanced learner loans, November 2015

22. Department for Education and Skills Funding Agency, FE data library, further education and skills, FE and Skills – adult participation by level – 2010/11 – 2014/15 Note that this is a count of learning aims studied, not learners

23. *ibid*

Technical and Professional Education for adults at level 3 and below

79. The Skills Plan recognises the need for adults to be supported to develop new or higher skills throughout their working lives but says very little about how that task will be approached. A further announcement was promised by the end of 2016 but had not appeared by that date. The Industrial Strategy adds little beyond saying government will 'explore ambitious new approaches' (Page 48, Building our Industrial Strategy, Jan 2017). The Budget 2017, though identifying £40 million for this purpose, is similarly vague.

80. The provision of TPE at level 4 and above is, by definition, concerned almost exclusively with the education of adults though it does not appear under that heading. Adult provision in the Skills Strategy seems to be conceptualised as provision for the unemployed and marginalised. Important as that is, an exclusive focus on 'back to work' skills risks ignoring fundamental differences between provision for those under and over the age of 18.

81. For adults in work seeking to upgrade or change skills the need is likely to be for short and specific programmes. Adults usually neither need, nor are able to afford, the broad introduction to an occupational area that is appropriate for young people. The provision of short focussed courses to meet these demands seems best addressed by the market rather than the centralised planning envisaged for tech levels; yet it appears that a similar mechanism will be applied to both.

82. In the foreword to the Sainsbury Report reference is made to the potential employment opportunities as technicians for those currently unemployed. It states 'we have today a serious shortage of technicians in industry at a time when over 400,000 16-24 year olds are unemployed. It is hard to believe that none of these young people have the ability and motivation to train as technicians if given good opportunities to do so'. The report seems to have a curiously limited view of what constitute 'opportunities' however.

83. Out of 34 recommendations in the report all but three are essentially concerned with reforming the qualifications system. The three others concern a transition year for 16 year olds; bridging courses for those who wish to change between the academic and technical routes and the provision of work experience. While these are worthy proposals, and the reform of qualifications may have a part to play in promoting TPE, far too much weight is placed upon its potential to transform attitudes and actions, particularly when the same approach has failed so often in the past.

84. In the previous section it was noted that the low take up of full time TPE at levels 4, 5 and 6 compared with undergraduate HE was probably associated with the more favourable arrangements for maintenance loans in the latter sector. The low take up of full time level 3 provision after the age of 19 can probably be explained in the same way. For those who are unemployed the ability to follow a substantial programme of TPE is seriously limited by the rules of the benefit system.

85. Studying technical education on a full-time basis should be viewed as a positive alternative to youth unemployment. Latest figures suggest that there are 300,000 18-24 year olds who are unemployed and not in full-time education in England and of these 100,000 are claiming Jobseekers Allowance/Universal Credit. The introduction of maintenance loans for full-time students on TPE programmes - at Level 3 as well as Level 4-5 - could encourage a proportion of unemployed 18-24 year olds to move out of unemployment and off benefit into full-time education. The government should positively market full-time maintenance loans to unemployed 18-24 year olds seeking a first Level 3.

86. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is in the process of rolling out Universal Credit. A key element of the reforms is in-work progression in Universal Credit. Low paid workers eligible for Universal Credit will be expected to gain extra earnings to reach a minimum income level determined by DWP. The minimum level of earnings a low-paid claimant is expected to achieve is calculated in terms of the normal hours to be worked - typically 35 hours per week - multiplied by the relevant national minimum wage (NMW) for the age group. This can be done by low-paid claimants trying to increase hours with their current employer, take extra jobs or find a new jobs with higher earnings. For DWP, the route to earning more is for low paid claimants to work more hours rather than investing in skills.

87. There is however a potential conflict between technical education and in-work progression in Universal Credit. Adults might need time to study part-time to acquire technical education qualifications rather than work longer hours and yet if they or their partner are expected to increase earnings study might be problematic. There is also an issue for apprentices who are on Universal Credit: the NMW rates for apprentices are lower than for employed workers and the number of hours is 30 per week rather than 35 under DWP rules.

88. It is critical that technical education and in-work progression in Universal Credit support each other. Increasing earnings whilst on benefit must also encompass investing in human capital and not just working longer hours. DfE and DWP need to work together to ensure that low-paid workers are able to enrol on technical education programmes to boost their earnings rather than increasing hours on low pay.

89. TPE provision for adults at level 3 and below is funded by a complex mix of grants and loans. Whether adult provision be grant or loan funded depends upon age, economic status, the level of qualification, whether it is a full qualification and if a full qualification whether it is a first at that level. Similarly, whether grant funded adult provision is fully funded or co-funded (with resources from adults or employers) depends upon age, economic status and whether the qualification is seen as 'full'.

90. Whilst 19-23 year olds seeking a first level 3 in TPE would be fully-funded via grant funding, those seeking a second level 3 would have to take out a fee-loan alongside all those aged 19 and over on Level 4-6 TPE programmes. Employers and adults aged 19+ would have to make a financial contribution to the cost of a second level 2 TPE programme. In neither case would maintenance support be available other than limited assistance from FE bursary funds.

91. Fee loans for full-time and part-time higher education start at 18. 16-18 year olds on technical education courses up to Level 3 will remain fully funded via grants to providers. Fee loans should not apply to 19-23 year olds seeking a first Level 3. Maintenance loans are available to full-time students aged 18 and over in higher education and will be extended to part-time students shortly. Maintenance support for 16-18 year olds in full-time education on courses up to level 3 is grant based, taking the form of means-tested child benefit and Universal Credit paid to parents and means-tested bursaries. This should not change. The gap, however, is the availability of maintenance loans for those aged 19-23 seeking to achieve a first Level 3.

92. Part of a solution might be for authorities with devolved powers over adult skills to have some role in student support. They might be able to prioritise provision that meets local employment needs and tailor support to local costs. The difficulty however is that devolution deals only currently cover around half of England.

Recommendation 9.

The government should offer maintenance loans to 19-23 year olds seeking a first level 3 through a technical education programme at level 3 who are unable to access support from an employer.

FINAL THOUGHTS

93. The fundamental issue underpinning these difficulties is that the Skills Plan continues to focus on a 16-18 phase defined by the academic route. The assumption is that young people complete an academic level 2 qualification at school and acquire a level 3 qualification through full time study at age 16 and 17. They then proceed to HE.

94. Seeking to plan TPE, or indeed other elements of a Skills Plan for young people, in the light of this academic paradigm is problematic. It leads directly to the idea in the Sainsbury Report of a transition year which is in effect a last chance to get back on track or be abandoned to unskilled employment. It neglects the potential of level 2 vocational programmes to help prepare young people for subsequent occupational training.

95. The academic paradigm also leads the Sainsbury Report and Skills Plan to ignore the need to fund provision for 18 year olds fully. If after a transition year at 16 a young person is qualified to enter a course they will need two further years' study. Perversely the funding for the final year for these students is not only lower than that for 16 and 17 year olds but lower than that for 14 and 15 year olds.

96. If more of the unemployed 16-24 year olds quoted by Lord Sainsbury are to take up technician roles, resources need to be directed towards those who are likely to take longer than two years post school to achieve level 3. Those who make a false start need support with maintenance and fully funded programmes – not the 'short, flexible' bridging courses' which might, for example, be delivered in the evenings or at summer schools'.

Appendix 1: Recommendations from the Sainsbury Review

Recommendation 1: We recommend the Government develops a coherent technical education option which develops the technical knowledge and skills required to enter skilled employment, which leads from levels 2/3 to levels 4/5 and beyond, and which is highly valued because it works in the marketplace.

Recommendation 2: The technical education option should be recognised as having two modes of learning: employment-based (typically an apprenticeship) and college-based.

Recommendation 3: While it is necessary for government to design the overall national system of technical education, employer-designed standards must be put at its heart to ensure it works in the marketplace. A single, common framework of standards should cover both apprenticeships and college-based provision. These standards must be designed to deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform successfully in specific occupations, not the narrower job role-focused needs of individual employers.

Recommendation 4: We recommend the Government incentivises the development of short, flexible bridging provision to enable individuals to move, in either direction, between the academic and technical education options and to support adults returning to study.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that a common framework of 15 routes is established which encompasses all employment-based and college-based technical education at levels 2 to 5.

Recommendation 6: The 15 technical education routes should provide training for skilled occupations where there is a substantial requirement for technical knowledge and practical skills. We are clear that occupations which require little or no technical knowledge and skill fall outside the scope of technical education.

Recommendation 7: The remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships should be developed and expanded to encompass all of technical education at levels 2 to 5. The Institute should be responsible for assuring standards and bringing relevant experts together to agree the technical knowledge, practical skills and behaviours to be acquired in each route for both apprenticeships and college-based provision. This will allow the Institute to maintain a single, common framework of technical education standards, qualifications and quality assurance.

Recommendation 8: While it is right for the Institute for Apprenticeships to be delegated wide-ranging autonomy across its operational brief, responsibility for key strategic decisions must be reserved for the Secretary of State. Crucially these decisions include those relating to the shape of the overall national system of technical education (such as adding new or removing existing routes, or changing the title of a route) if we are to ensure the new system remains coherent and stable over time.

Recommendation 9: We recommend the Institute for Apprenticeships convenes panels of professionals to advise on the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be acquired for the standards in each route and on suitable assessment strategies. These professionals should be appointed in an individual capacity, not as representatives of their employers.

Recommendation 10: Institute for Apprenticeships panel members should be remunerated from the public purse.

Recommendation 11: At the earliest opportunity, the Institute for Apprenticeships reviews all existing apprenticeship standards to satisfy itself that there is no substantial overlap between standards, and that

every standard is occupation - rather than firm-specific and contains sufficient technical content to warrant at least 20% off-the-job training. Standards found to be overlapping or wanting in terms of breadth or technical content should be revised, consolidated or withdrawn.

Recommendation 12: We recommend the Government moves away from the current awarding organisation market model, where qualifications which deliver similar but different outcomes compete with one another, and instead adopts a licensing approach. Any technical education qualification at levels 2 and 3 should be offered and awarded by a single body or consortium, under a licence covering a fixed period of time following an open competition.

Recommendation 13: The Institute for Apprenticeships should maintain a register of approved technical education qualifications at levels 4 and 5 that meet the standards set by its panels of professionals. Only qualifications on this register should be eligible for public subsidy.

Recommendation 14: The Government should undertake further work to examine how to ensure clear progression routes develop from levels 4 and 5 to degree apprenticeships and other higher education at levels 6 and 7. This work should be carried out in the context of existing and proposed structures and funding rules for higher education provision in England.

Recommendation 15: Every college-based route should begin with a two-year programme suitable for 16-18 year olds (although some individuals may take more or less time to complete it). Each of these two-year programmes should begin with a 'common core' which applies to all individuals studying that route and is aligned to apprenticeships.

Recommendation 16: After the common core, individuals should specialise to prepare for entry into an occupation or set of occupations.

Recommendation 17: We recommend that, in addition to any separate requirements as a result of the English and maths funding condition, there is a single set of maths and English 'exit' requirements governing college-based technical education and apprenticeships. These should be seen as the minimum level of maths or English which all individuals must achieve ahead of securing technical education certification, as is already the case for apprentices.

Recommendation 18: In the longer term, as the quality of pre-and post-16 maths and English teaching and associated learner outcomes improve, government should raise maths and English requirements to reflect those of higher-performing international technical education systems.

Recommendation 19: We recommend the Institute for Apprenticeships encourages its panels of professionals to incorporate additional, occupation-specific maths and English requirements into the standards for each route.

Recommendation 20: In addition to work taster or short-duration work experience opportunities, every 16-18 year old student following a two-year college-based technical education programme should be entitled to a high-quality, structured work placement. Successful completion of this work placement should be a requirement for full certification at the end of the study programme. As part of the work placement, the student, college and employer should complete a log book – ideally online – that evidences the key tasks the student has undertaken and what they have learnt.

Recommendation 21: We recommend the Government makes additional funding available to colleges to support work placements for technical education students on college-based study programmes. We suggest the most straightforward way of doing this is to increase the base rate per student for each 16-18 year old technical education student who successfully completes a work placement. Initial evidence suggests that such an uplift might need to be around £500 per placement, but further work will be required to set the precise figure.

Recommendation 22: For both employment-based and college-based technical education at levels 2 and 3, there should be a single, nationally recognised certificate for each technical education route.

Recommendation 23: For college-based technical education at levels 2 and 3, we recommend that the system of qualifications is simplified dramatically, with only one tech level qualification approved for each occupation or cluster of occupations.

Recommendation 24: We recommend the Government restricts public subsidy for college-based technical education to that leading to qualifications approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships. This includes funding for 16-18 year olds and advanced learner loans available for adults aged 19 and older.

Recommendation 25: For college-based technical education we recommend the Institute for Apprenticeships publishes guidance on the use of a range of common assessment strategies, makes assessment expertise available to the panels of professionals, and sets overarching quality criteria to apply to all tech levels.

Recommendation 26: Regardless of the forms of assessment used, all qualifications in college-based technical education should assess both the common core for the relevant route and the specialist / occupation-specific knowledge and skills. The assessment of every technical education qualification should include realistic tasks as well as synoptic assessment which, together, should be designed to test a student's ability to integrate and apply their knowledge and skills. All qualifications should include external assessment to ensure comparability and reliability.

Recommendation 27: Individuals who are not ready to access a technical education route aged 16 (or older if their education has been delayed) should be offered a 'transition year' to help them prepare for further study or employment. The transition year should be flexible and tailored to the student's prior attainment and aspirations.

Recommendation 28: We recommend the Government commissions additional work into the design and content of a transition year, while ensuring the key objective for the year is offering tailored provision with a sharp focus on basic skills and progression. Such work should be undertaken in good time to ensure the new transition year is available to students alongside first teaching of the technical education routes.

Recommendation 29: We recommend the Government adopts the Gatsby benchmarks as the basis of a common national approach for careers education and guidance, and sets an expectation for schools and colleges to use the benchmarks when developing their careers provision.

Recommendation 30: Government should support schools and colleges to embed into careers education and guidance, from an early age, details of the new 15 technical education routes, so that young people and their parents understand the range of different occupations available and how to reach them.

Recommendation 31: The National Careers Service should review how it presents its career information and guidance in the light of our recommendations for reform of the technical education system.

Recommendation 32: We recommend that the ONS examines how to make the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) more relevant for stakeholders –including expanding it to 5-digits. We further recommend that the Government explores how to make more occupational information available to the Institute for Apprenticeships, colleges and individuals by supplementing the nationally collected datasets with information from the American O*NET system and other sources.

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