



Reforms for a 'Revolutionary' Post-16 White Paper

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Campaign for Learning

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Michael Lemin and Julia Wright
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in the 2020s, March 2020, Editors Michael Lemin and Julia Wright
- Revolutionary Forces – Shaping the Post-16 White Paper, July 2020,
Editor Julia Wright

Past Discussion Papers

- Covid-19 and Post-16 Education: Planning for a Different September, April
2020, Contributors Susan Pember and Mark Corney

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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, Secretary of State for Education, 29th April 2020

Across our entire post-16 sector, we need a much stronger alignment with the economic and societal needs of the nation.

My personal commitment is to put further and technical education at the heart of our post-16 education system.

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.

Our mantra must be Further Education, Further Education, Further Education.

The tragedy is that for decades, we've forgotten about half of our education system.

We need fundamental change, not just tinkering at the edges.

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, 9th July 2020

[Universities] are a crucial part of the post-16 education landscape, that includes further education and apprenticeships, all of which give young people a real opportunity to enhance their career pathways and options after they leave school.

We have already announced that, over the next few years, we will be establishing a system of higher technical education where learners and employers can have confidence in high-quality courses that provide the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, whether they are taught in a further education college, a university or an independent training provider.

Of course, a large proportion of this will be delivered in our great further education colleges, but what I also want to see is for universities to end their preoccupation with three-year bachelors' degrees and offer far more higher technical qualifications and apprenticeships. These would be more occupation focused and provide a better targeted route for some students, and benefit employers and the economy.

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, 10th September 2020

Introduction

Revolutionary Forces

In July, the Campaign for Learning published a pamphlet identifying and examining a series of revolutionary forces which would shape post-16 education and training in England and in turn provide the context for DfE ministers and officials in preparing the post-16 white paper (Revolutionary Forces – Shaping the Post-16 White Paper).

The pamphlet discussed the implications of Covid-19 and Brexit on the economy, the public finances, employment and unemployment, and the future industrial structure of the economy. And it examined the consequences of the flexible labour market, low pay, a skills-based immigration system, increasing automation and a rising population of 16-24 year olds for post-16 education and training policy.

Revolutionary Reforms

We now publish our follow-up pamphlet with the aim of identifying a series of reforms which would make the post-16 white paper truly revolutionary. We are delighted that so many stakeholders and policy experts were willing to prepare contributions during a stressful summer for them, their families and friends.

Some authors were asked to write an article on any aspect of post-16 education. Others were asked to prepare pieces on specific issues. All were asked to conclude their contributions with three reforms which must feature in the post-16 white paper.

The Pamphlet

Our aim at the Campaign for Learning during this most difficult time is to assist stakeholders in the post-16 sector to share ideas and debate proposals to improve and increase opportunities for learners, employers and communities. We trust that this pamphlet brings together different – and indeed competing - perspectives on the post-16 system and what the post-16 white paper must achieve. In so doing, the Campaign for Learning would like to express our thanks to:

David Hughes (Chief Executive, AoC); John Widdowson (Former Principal of New College Durham); Professor Ewart Keep (University of Oxford); Adrian Anderson (Chief Executive, University Awards Council); James Kewin (Deputy Chief Executive, Sixth Form Colleges Association); Becci Newton (Deputy Director, Institute for Employment Studies); Jane Hickie (Managing Director, Association of Employment and Learning Providers); Kathleen Henehan, (Senior Analyst, Resolution Foundation); Julie Tam (Deputy Director, Universities UK); Dr Fiona Aldridge (Director for Policy and Research, Learning and Work Institute); Alissa Dhaliwal (Head of Education and Skills Policy, CBI); Iain Murray (Senior Policy Officer, TUC); Matt Waddup (National Head of Policy and Campaigns, UCU); David Russell (Chief Executive, Education and Training Foundation); Dr Susan Pember (Director of Policy, HOLEX); and Professor Andy Westwood (University of Manchester).

As always, the Campaign for Learning invites everyone to read each of the articles and consider the three reforms they consider necessary for a truly revolutionary post-16 white paper. At the end is an assessment of the key themes to emerge from this insightful collection of articles by our policy consultant Mark Corney.

Julia Wright, Campaign for Learning

David Hughes, Association of Colleges

A New National Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy

AoC always likes a challenge, but we don't really envy the civil servants working on the white paper. After a decade of neglect, the expectations on what the white paper will deliver for colleges is high – from us, from college leaders, from employers and perhaps most importantly from the very heart of the Government itself.

It's not just the expectations that are high because there is a lot to cover and to change. The range of issues which the white paper needs to address is enormous and well signposted in a number of high profile reports. The first was last year when the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, launched by then Prime Minister Theresa May and led by Philip Augar, reported its findings. This summer saw the publication of the Independent Review of College Financial Oversight, led by Dame Mary Ney and the Independent Commission on the College of the Future setting out a compelling vision for colleges across the four nations ahead of its final report this autumn.

Five Points of Consensus

AoC is optimistic that our hopes will not be dashed, though, because there is such a strong consensus around a number of critical points.

First and foremost, there is agreement about the vital role colleges play, as anchor institutions. We have said for years that every place needs a flourishing and thriving college, able to reach out to engage people from every community, to support students and employers to improve their prospects, to help level up, to develop community cohesion and for all sorts of other reasons. We seem to have reached a point where this is now a more widely accepted and supported view, admittedly for a whole host of reasons.

The second area of consensus is that colleges are vital to support local and national labour markets to operate smoothly. More and more employers had started to recognise, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, that in a post-Brexit Britain, finding skilled people to fill vacancies was going to become increasingly challenging. The pandemic might have delayed that in some sectors (retail, hospitality) and heightened it in others (health, social care) but it has not changed the basics. We will need more people who live here to get higher level skills if we are to have a thriving economy.

The third area of agreement is around the need to move on from a highly competitive environment in which schools, colleges, universities, and training providers are all fighting to recruit students. Competition has not resulted in higher quality and better choice. It has not delivered the education and skills system which we want or need. We need much more clarity on the mission and purpose of every organisation and collaboration to ensure that investment can be made in the specialist and higher level skills that are needed. So many of our skills gaps and shortages are at Levels 3 to 5 and yet the system we have encourages or perhaps pushes most people to jump from Level 3 onto Level 6 courses. Internationally we do well in numbers of people with

higher level skills but poorly for technical and professional skills.

Fourthly, the pandemic has confirmed that we need colleges to collaborate nationally and locally to meet the skills needs of key sectors. A great emerging example is the collaboration between the Commission on the College of the Future and the NHS Confederation to set out how a stronger infrastructure nationally could bring together health and social care employers with colleges to help establish hubs across the country which can offer trusted skills advice, high quality education and training and help develop pathways which will ensure workforce needs are met over the long term. Similar approaches are needed in other sectors.

Finally, there is a growing agreement that to achieve more, colleges need a simpler, mission-focussed regulatory and funding system and a new strategic relationship with government which Dame Mary Ney said should be 'nurturing'. Achieving this will involve sweeping away a lot of micro-accountability measures and bureaucracy and replacing it with measures which look to longer term outcomes.

A New Post-16 System

A new system which supports, funds and holds to account colleges for the strategic missions and purposes can be delivered through the white paper. But for the system to flourish it will need college leaders as well as government officials to work together. It will need a new level of trust and respect, a culture of partnership and shared destiny.

This new system will have to be based on co-design, transparency and clarity of purpose in ways we have not seen in FE before. College leaders are ready for that and my work with officials suggests that they are too. That's an exciting prospect for all of us who believe in the purpose and the potential of colleges; for those of us who have seen the brilliant things colleges do and the impact they have.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should set out a new national post-16 education and skills strategy in partnership with colleges which will provide the framework for place-based plans to be developed by colleges and their partners locally.

Second, the white paper should outline a new mission-focussed regulation and funding system, designed to nurture and support colleges through three-year outcome agreements, with single line budgets.

And third, the white paper should signal a commitment to fund colleges to develop sector-specific employer hubs which aim to improve productivity, help employers get the skills they need and develop education and training pathways and support for people to enter work and progress in work.

John Widdowson, Former College Principal

Higher Technical Education: An Alternative to Full-Time Three-Year Level 6 Degrees

The forthcoming white paper presents a once in a generation opportunity to introduce a world class technical education and training system, supporting both young people and adults to build successful careers, whilst at the same time providing the higher technical skills demanded by industry and business.

A Post-16 System Dominated by Full-Time Level 6 Bachelor's Degrees by age 25

For too long, too many young people have made the wrong choices at 16 and 18, deciding to study for qualifications which do not open the doors to the jobs and careers they want. This can lead to disappointment, disillusion and debt.

For too many young people, higher education presents a one size fits all approach in which the only valued and acceptable form is a full-time three-year bachelor's degree in an academic discipline, preferably studied away from home. In many cases these courses do not have a clear line of sight to employment and fail to develop the skills and knowledge needed in a modern economy.

The stranglehold of the three-year full-time degree has resulted in a steep decline in the take up of short cycle HE. Usually those courses take up to two years to complete, including Higher Nationals and Foundation degrees. Both are aimed specifically at developing higher level skills, especially in STEM and other vocational disciplines and yet numbers studying for such awards have dropped significantly over the last decade.

It cannot be a coincidence that most students studying for higher skills qualifications at Level 5 do so in Further Education colleges, whilst even universities with an apparent vocational or technical focus only offer traditional Honours degrees. The response to the Corona virus crisis has shown the ability of some institutions to respond. That experience should not be lost, but embedded at the heart of the reformed system.

An Alternative Level 4-5 Higher Technical Education Pathway

The highly anticipated reforms must provide a launchpad for a more diverse, well-structured system of Higher Technical Education, ending the tyranny of the bachelor's degree and restoring the confidence of students and employers that higher technical qualifications are an investment, not a cost.

Such a system must have a number of defining characteristics.

Employers (and the professional bodies whose qualifications often provide a much sought-after licence to practice) must be closely involved in determining the content of the new curriculum. The employer voice in setting standards should be equally strong, balancing traditional academic skills with those needed in business, industry and the professions.

Imaginative curriculum design can produce a modular or unitised model which allows

learning to take place when the learner needs it, unconstrained by the restrictions of outdated concepts of the academic year and making full use of digital learning.

Given the current uncertainty about jobs, including apprenticeships, the boundaries between full and part time forms of study must be reduced, allowing movement between different modes as the economy recovers and opportunities grow.

Level 4-5 higher technical education courses should be based on a truly modular design which allows credit accumulation and transfer and a pattern of delivery which reflects employer demand to upskill current employees.

The reform of technical qualifications at Level 3 exemplified by the introduction of T levels gives an opportunity to young people to make career driven choices at 16 and will signpost high quality progression routes, valued by employers and chosen by more students.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should commit resources for a sustained programme of careers advice and guidance, promoting the value of technical qualifications at Level 4-5 to young people, parents, teachers and employers. Without this, it is likely that the continued marketing efforts of three-year degrees by Higher Education Institutes – primarily universities – will continue to distort the market and perpetuate the poor decisions made by many young people.

Second, the white paper should set in train a process for every university and FE college to review their role and mission. The aim must be to continue the direction of travel set out for Institutes of Technology, but with greater ambition, using Higher Technical Education as the catalyst to transform existing institutions and where this proves impossible, create new ones.

And third, the white paper must outline a comprehensive system of financial incentives to support the development of large-scale Level 4-5 higher technical education system in England. Providers need adequate capital investment and preferential funding for the delivery of targeted Level 4-5 vocational courses. And employers should receive financial support to release professional staff to work with delivery partners.

Rediscovering the 'Employment and Part-Time Higher Technical Education' Model

Secretaries of State always like to claim that their reform is the 'big one' – often using the 1944 Education Act as their historical benchmark. For once, this might be true. The forthcoming white paper does represent make or break time for vocational education in England.

Under-funded, with falling post-19 student numbers, squeezed by the royal route of A levels, largely crowded out of higher level and higher status qualifications by an obsession with university-based bachelor's degrees, facing declining employer training effort, and desperately trying to make the T level pilots work, we are at a critical juncture.

Moreover, with the looming recession and mass unemployment engendered by the pandemic, the backdrop is even more uncertainty. Getting policy right really matters.

16-19 Vocational Education

T levels have been officially declared a gold standard 'success' before a single student started on one, never mind graduated into the labour market. Currently, the future of 16-19 vocational provision is heavily dependent on this projected success becoming a reality.

The pilots will be taking place against the backdrop of recession and high youth unemployment. A slow, measured and well-supported rollout will be critical. So too will be designing and delivering a meaningful and effective 'transition year' curriculum as without this, the 'feedstock' for a large and successful Level 3 vocational route simply will not exist.

It remains an open question how many young people and employers in some sectors really want Level 3 qualifications, and policy needs to decide what the size, role and shape of supposedly 'residual' Level 2 vocational provision should be in a T and A level dominated upper secondary phase.

Augar and a New Sub-Degree Route

As the Augar Review demonstrated, we have a yawning gap in provision between Levels 3 and 6 which in other developed countries is filled by 'short cycle' tertiary education. We need to rediscover a model of technician and associate professional training based around part-time study while in employment, using block or day release, and move back to a situation where HNDs and HNCs are seen as an end in their own right, not just as a staging post to a bachelor's degree. If this means more students follow Level 4-5 sub-degrees and fewer follow 3-year Level 6 bachelor degrees, so be it.

Crucially, this strand of activity needs to be seen as college not university territory. This would provide prestige for vocational provision in FE that will help shift ambitions and perceptions. It would allow FE to develop higher status routes and in-depth expertise in subject pedagogy – networked provision. The days of the vast bulk of FE provision being pitched at Levels 1 to 3 ought to be drawing to a close.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are by far the hardest area of vocational policy to know what to do with. The levy – a short-term ‘wheeze’ to fill a gap in government funding opened up by austerity – has had complex consequences that were wholly unintended, but which have proved utterly disastrous.

The current absurdities of managerial employees of 10 years standing being put through an MBA ‘apprenticeship’ may make sense to their providers’ accountants, but are catastrophic for almost everyone else. Deadweight and re-badging are high, additionality low, and apprenticeship as a coherent brand and route for young people to enter the labour market in serious danger of being submerged.

Apprenticeships are turning into an empty box - any qualification-related piece of training that an employer offers their employees.

Given the backdrop of recession, pressures on employer investment in skills, and mass unemployment, perhaps the best plan would be to commit to a thorough, long-term and potentially very painful review of what apprenticeships are, who they are for, and how best they should be funded and developed.

In undertaking this, there is no point looking enviously at Germany or Switzerland, as their apprenticeship systems are underpinned by cultural and institutional arrangements we cannot replicate. Perhaps Scotland, which has successfully grown provision, largely for young people and mainly at Level 3, might have more to tell us about a way forward?

Collective Organisation of Employers

Very few countries with successful vocational systems have achieved this without a major input to policy formation and delivery from employers. We currently lack any effective mechanisms for securing this input on a collective basis, whether at national, local or sectoral level. Rectifying this institutional vacuum should now be a very urgent priority. Without this, T levels, apprenticeship policy and sub-degree policies are liable to fail.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should outline a long-term strategy to revive college-based Level 4-5 sub-degrees even at the expense of Level 6 bachelor’s degrees.

Second, the white paper must set out the purpose of apprenticeships and their importance as an option for young people in light of employer digital accounts in England funded through the UK-wide apprenticeship levy.

And third, government as a whole must re-think from scratch how best to involve employers and other stakeholders in the policy design and delivery of post-16 vocational education and training in England.

Adrian Anderson, UVAC

Just More Level 4-7 Apprenticeships, Technical Education and First Degrees

To misquote Tony Blair the post-16 white paper should have three priorities; skills, skills and skills. To deliver on the productivity and levelling up agenda, the focus of the post-16 white paper must be on the current and future skills needs of the UK economy. An obvious observation perhaps, but one often ignored.

Indeed, the post-16 white paper must focus on what Chancellor Sunak has called 'high productivity' jobs. We would expect to see less emphasis on Level 2 vocational programmes if the Government are focused on developing a high skill, high productivity economy.

Level 6 as well as Level 4 and 5

This means that the white paper needs to be about far more than just further education or skills provision at Levels 4 and 5. Arguably the most prominent skills shortage in the UK is registered nursing, a Level 6 degree programme. Here we need substantially more Level 6 provision. Indeed, in August 2020, the Department of Health and Social Care announced funding to support NHS Trusts use their Apprenticeship Levy to train 8,000 Nurses over the next four years.

For other key public sector roles, police constable or social worker, a degree is required. Look at both the public and private sectors, and management skills are the most pronounced skills gaps. Elsewhere, the green economy will call for a range of new occupational skills at technical and professional levels. Similar observations could be made in respect of the engineering and digital sectors.

Humanity Level 6 Degrees

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan MP has of course, said that young people have been taken advantage of and sold courses with no real demand in the labour market. Higher Education should take this criticism on the chin, but it should be seen as an attack on 'traditional academic programmes'. Many humanities programmes, such as history degrees, are highly valued in the employment market. While an unfashionable point, critical thinking skills are of substantial value in the jobs market, just talk to employers who recruit history graduates. Humanities degrees, in this sense, are a key part of the skills agenda as well as making a vital contribution to the liberal society in which we live.

Upskilling and Reskilling at Levels 4-7

At higher levels, Minister Donelan has emphasised the importance of upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce, the use of part-time and flexible provision and called on universities to deliver more degree apprenticeships. Two key points can be drawn from such comments, the first is the importance of developing the skills of the existing adult workforce. Too often skills are seen as just an issue for young people. The second is the importance of degree apprenticeships, a Level 6 and 7 programme, to the skills agenda and the Government's desire to expand provision.

From Level 3 T Levels to Level 4-5 Higher Technical Qualifications

The development of a new technical route involving T levels and Higher Technical Qualifications is to be welcomed, but as UVAC has argued on many occasions in the past, must be based on the skills needs of the UK economy. In this regard the initial focus of Higher Technical Qualifications, announced recently by DfE on the digital sector makes sense. Level 4 and 5 provision is, however, just one part of the solution to the skills gaps and shortages evident in the UK economy, we would expect to see some, but not massive growth here with a focus on quality not numbers.

Level 2 by age 16

At lower levels, while some Level 2 apprenticeships are of considerable value and 'craft' and 'trade' occupations should be valued, fewer and fewer occupations will define occupational competence at Level 2. Level 2 job roles which have, until recent years dominated Apprenticeship provision, have been most adversely affected by the economic consequences of Covid 19 and are frequently the roles most at risk from automation, think business administration, customer service and retail.

Of course, ensuring individuals can function at Level 2 is critical and the number of people without Level 2 skills is a national scandal. But surely the role of schools and Ofsted should be to guarantee that every young person, after 11 years of compulsory education, gains a full Level 2 qualification? Delivering Level 2 provision to those without a Level 2 should not be a mainstream post-16 policy objective, it should be seen as an activity needed to rectify historic and current poor school performance. And the long-term remedy for poor school performance, is to improve school performance.

Other Lessons

Elsewhere, we should learn from the experiences of delivering during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a greater and more effective use (and growth) of online and distance learning, part-time, blended and work-based programmes. More innovative delivery partnerships, focused on particular localities and regions involving HE, FE, LEPs and metro mayors.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should ensure that skills provision and funding are prioritised to deliver high-quality public sector services, the government's industrial strategy and the broader skills needs of the UK economy. This will mean an increasing focus on high level skills and high productivity roles and far less focus on Level 2 job roles.

Second, the white paper should focus on the upskilling and reskilling of the adult workforce to meet the needs of the economy and our public services.

And third, the white paper should set out a strategy for innovative learning based on on-line delivery, blended and work-based programmes studied part-time as the key way of meeting employer and adult learner needs.

James Kewin, Sixth Form Colleges Association

Level 4-5 Technical Education and the 16-18 System

In early July, the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson delivered a [speech](#) that provides a good indication of what to expect from the forthcoming post-16 white paper. The focus on skills was unsurprising and so too was the inevitable call for a “German-style” skills system.

But some of the language used in the speech was striking. While many would disagree with the Secretary of State’s assertion that “the purpose of education is to give people the skills they need to get a good and meaningful job” it certainly provides the authors of the white paper with a crystal-clear objective.

Too Many Full-Time Level 6 Degrees Chosen by 18-19 Year Olds

In order to meet this objective, it is equally clear that the government wants more young people to pursue further - rather than higher - education from age 18. Fundamentally, policymakers believe that too many 18-19 year olds progress to university (shorthand for three-year, full-time, first degree courses at Level 6) and not enough progress to further education (shorthand for technical education at Level 4 and 5).

Uneven Rate of Progression from Level 3 to Level 6

One problem with this argument is that it overlooks the uneven rate of progression from Level 3 to Level 6 first degree courses. We know that 42% of young people in England progress to higher education by the age of 19. But this national average masks wide local variations – from 25% in Knowsley to 64% in Westminster. We also know that just 19% of students from the state sector progress to the most selective universities compared to 56% of students from the independent sector.

It is worth remembering these figures when university-educated policymakers tell us that too many students are receiving a university education. And we should presumably expect take up of the government’s high status, technical alternatives to university to be just as high in Westminster (the London borough, but perhaps also the independent school) as it is in Knowsley.

Level 4-5 Technical Education

So what are these alternatives? The government has already set out plans to boost the take-up and quality of technical education at Level 4 and 5. This is likely to be a key feature of the white paper and expanding the number of high quality, technical courses is quite rightly an important policy priority. But it remains to be seen if creating a gleaming new suite of technical qualifications will be enough to increase the number of young people taking this path at the age of 18, rather than opting for a more traditional university experience.

The government is increasingly fond of highlighting the number of graduates in non-graduate jobs, or contrasting the average salary of graduates with those that pursued a technical path. But young people have voted with their feet in recent years and

continue to progress to university in ever increasing numbers. Is this because they have been let down by careers advisers, hoodwinked by slick HE marketing, or simply sleepwalked into university in the absence of a more appealing alternative?

For some students, one or more of these explanations will of course be accurate. But we really ought to give young people more credit. Could it be that they looked at the university experience, saw that the graduate premium remains (albeit lower than it was) and made a rational choice to apply? Could it be that they looked at the alternative options and decided that a Level 6 course at a university was preferable to a Level 4 or 5 course somewhere else? Or could it be they believe that the purpose of education is far broader than getting a job, and decided to immerse themselves in education for three years to enjoy the many other non-financial benefits that a university experience provides?

Progression to What Type of Level 4-5 Technical Education?

There is little discussion about whether 18-19 year olds will be expected to progress to full-time or part-time Level 4-5 technical education courses. With the latter, 18-19 year olds would need to be in employment - to earn a living - whilst studying part-time. Many employers, particularly in the current climate, may not be able to offer appropriate job opportunities that are compatible with part time study at Level 4-5.

Disconnect with 11-18 Education

The government's ambitions for post-18 education are also largely disconnected from the wider education system. For example, the English Baccalaureate has led to a reduction in non-Ebacc enrolments at GCSE, including a sharp fall in Design and Technology. Sixth form is a pivotal stage of education where young people can be set on the track to a higher level technical qualification. But only a small minority of students currently pursue a Level 3 technical qualification and the introduction of T levels is unlikely to see a significant increase any time soon (it is possible that the work placement requirement of T levels could even lead to a reduction in numbers). A levels and applied general qualifications will continue to be the right choice for many aspiring technicians, and it is important that T levels complement, rather than replace, these well established qualifications.

The reality of revolutionary rebalancing

To secure the sort of revolutionary rebalancing from HE to FE that is likely to be a major feature of the white paper, policymakers would need to reduce the number of 18-19 year olds enrolling on three-year, full-time, Level 6 first degrees and increase the number of places on Level 4-5 higher technical courses. The scale of this rebalancing would need to be very large, and it would have an enormous impact on the shape of 16-18 education and the balance between enrolment on A levels relative to T levels.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the post-16 white paper should restate the benefits of a traditional full-time undergraduate university education to achieve Level 6 first degrees and allow enrolment to be determined by the choice of young people.

Second, the white paper should prioritise the creation of higher technical education at Level 4-5. However, policymakers should note that 18-19 year-olds could well place a premium on two-year full-time degrees at Level 6 instead. These courses are at a higher level, are easier to find and access, and a job with an employer is not essential as it would be for 18-19 year-olds studying a technical course at Level 4-5 on a part time basis.

And third, the white paper cannot propose a large-scale revolutionary reform of 18-24 Level 4-6 education without describing the type of 11-18 system that will feed it. There is little point in revolutionising post-18 education if the paths to the promised land either do not exist or point in a different direction.

Becci Newton, Institute for Employment Studies

Assisting 16-24 Year Olds without a Level 3

Given the impacts of Covid-19 on young people, their education, and employment, the post-16 white paper has some heavy lifting to do. It was to presage the development of new technical Level 4 and 5 qualifications. However, it now feels urgent that it drives forward a skills-centred recovery and supports preventative measures against youth scarring. It is time to be ambitious: investment in skills can be returned through improved productivity and importantly, a healthier, more inclusive society

Rising Participation by 16-18 Year olds

We are seeing continued high participation as young people make the post-16 transition. The [latest estimates](#) show that 16-18 participation is at a record high (81.6%). Supporting this is the funding arrangement: up to the age of 19, education and training costs are fully-funded and households can continue to receive child benefit and universal credit for 16-19 year olds in full-time further education.

Too Many 19 Year Olds do not have a Level 3 or a Level 2

However, we also need this funding to result in improved levels of attainment. In 2019, only [59.7% of young people attained Level 3](#) by 19, and while by the same age, 83.4% had achieved Level 2 – the level expected following compulsory schooling - this means some 16.6% still had not. While achievement of GCSE maths and English has risen by age 19, many young people leave the 16-19 phase with low skills.

Too Few Gain Level 3 or Level 2 by age 25

Between age 19 and 25, the proportion with at least a Level 3 rises from 60% to 66% and the proportion with at least a Level 2 rises from 83% to 89%. This means a third of 25 year olds do not have a Level 3 and more than a tenth do not have a Level 2.

The Needs of NEETs

The needs of those who get lost in transition also require consideration; being NEET at 16, with low qualifications, increases risks of being NEET at 17 and of becoming long-term unemployed/inactive from 18. However, it can take time for young people to realise that their low qualifications are a drag on obtaining good quality employment.

Plan for Jobs

Skills are emphasised within the employment policy response to the Covid-19 recession. Under the Plan for Jobs, the government is offering financial incentives to employers to create apprenticeships (£2,000), traineeships (£1,000) and six-month Kickstart jobs (no qualification component; average £6,500 per job). Young people aged 18-19 can continue in full-time learning for an extra year. But whether employer incentives will be sufficient to drive forward on the longstanding skills agenda remains in question. Employers have supported [less off-the-job and more short-duration training over many years](#), and the jobs they offer young people have become increasingly [precarious](#).

The £2,000 incentive for apprenticeships sits alongside low expectations for employers' contribution to training costs, minimum wage rates and incentives to recruit younger age groups and those with higher needs. These have not halted the declining trend in

apprenticeship vacancies for the young. We need a mechanism to influence employer behaviour; to help them to offer good quality jobs that progress young people's skills.

More Support for Young People in the Post-16 White Paper

We need, however, more support and funding, financial support and improvements to guidance and provision can improve outcomes for low-skilled young people during the transition to full labour market participation and before outcomes become fixed. In 2020, making full-time further education a more attractive option to vulnerable groups by providing targeted financial support alongside courses with a clear relationship to the labour market provides a way forward

The skills funding framework has a measure to support full-time learning for low-skilled young people who may not get the apprenticeships that are created. It must also be noted that these training options are not suitable for some young parents and carers, who need to work part-time, or to cover care costs. Up to the age of 23, full funding for a first Level 3 qualification is available.

Nevertheless, whether 18-19 or older, the ability to continue in full-time education is contingent upon household finances. If young people are claiming benefits (which could amount to £200 per week) these would be at risk if they enter full-time education.

Full-Time Learning v Labour Market Participation

Thinking about the arguments for and against full-time further education rather than labour market participation, while active labour market programme evidence demonstrates full-time learning can create lock-in effects, for [vulnerable groups, there is a case for supporting it](#). If such full-time education provision encompasses substantial work-related learning, negative effects can be countered.

The national-level economic and social returns that would be achieved from qualifying to a higher level provide the rationale for an education maintenance support package, alongside ensuring young people can access high-quality vocational/technical provision with value in the labour market.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the post-16 white paper should announce the introduction of an FE learner maintenance scheme targeted at vulnerable groups aged 16-24 to enable participation in full-time education, traineeships and apprenticeships.

Second, the white paper should introduce an employer brokerage system to enable employers to access advice to select the best of the 'Plan for Jobs' youth options for their business which also maximises training opportunities for young people.

And third, the white paper should announce the type of Level 3 and below qualifications eligible for public funding, with a suite of high-quality technical/vocational qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 suitable for young adults (19-24), with flexibility for movement between training modes and full and part-time study.

Jane Hickie, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Achieving Social Justice through Apprenticeships and Adult Education

We should start on a very positive note.

Not since Gordon Brown asked Lord Leitch in 2004 to undertake a review of skills have we seen government at the most senior levels embrace the importance of skills to the economy in the way that Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have done in the last few months.

Before Covid-19

It is important to remind ourselves of the circumstances in which the white paper is being published. The paper's scope is expected to be much broader than the role of colleges and this is being driven from the top.

Even before Covid-19 arrived, senior ministers had made it clear that they wanted an education system which was more responsive to the skills needs of the economy. We are now seeing this thinking applied to the debate about universities as well as FE colleges. Official data shows that only 41% of university graduates were securing full-time jobs before the pandemic and so a holistic approach to HE and FE reform is required.

The Covid-19 Response

Of course, Covid-19 has had a dramatic impact on our economy, employment and unemployment. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has been encouraged by the employment and skills response to the pandemic, with the £111m boost for traineeships and the financial incentives for employers to take on new apprentices. We also expect the Kickstart Jobs Scheme for 16-24 year olds to make a difference in helping young people keep in contact with the labour market. Even so, because of the continuing rise in unemployment, including apprentices made redundant following the end of furlough, more short-term action is needed.

The White Paper and Longer-Term Reform

A significant challenge, however, is the link between the employment and skills response to Covid-19 and the longer-term reform for further education to be announced in the white paper. We do not know how long the pandemic will last and the short term can very quickly become the long term.

The government, however, will be on track if it is producing a white paper that is looking well beyond the role and financial sustainability of colleges. Whether it is for young people or adults, we need a vision and plan for work-based learning and technical education which really does create a ladder of opportunity that embraces diversity and is inclusive. Funding should follow the choice of either the employer or the learner.

With a digital account operating for each employer accessing apprenticeship funding, the biggest step which ministers should take is reintroducing individual skills accounts for adults.

Apprenticeship Funding Reform

Further reforms to apprenticeships are likely to feature strongly in the white paper. AELP will be interested to see whether they are the culmination of a review of the apprenticeship levy which was originally announced by the former chancellor Philip Hammond in October 2018.

Policymakers should be resisting siren voices about unused levy. Instead the white paper must address the budget overspend issues which were obvious before the virus struck. The pressure on levy funding with the spending on higher level apprenticeships has only gone away temporarily. As soon as the economy recovers, it will be back.

AELP wants to retain the principle that employers should be able to choose how they spend their levy and a separate SME apprenticeship budget (of at least £1bn a year) should solve the problem. Otherwise we need to find a way to rebalance the system to stop the huge falls in apprenticeship opportunities for young people and at the lower levels since April 2017 (House of Commons Library Briefing, Jan 2020). Just like other forms of education for under 19s, apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds should be funded from the 16-19 education participation budget and not from the levy.

Bringing back individual skills accounts

The sector needs to generate better value for money from the Adult Education Budget (AEB). The impact of Covid-19 and rising unemployment make more effective use of the £1.5bn budget absolutely essential whether it is for upskilling adults in work or giving new skills to those who have sadly lost their jobs. AELP has supported the devolving of half of the budget to the combined authorities but how the money is allocated nationally and in the regions needs to be reviewed.

In the shorter term, we certainly believe a great deal more and open procurement is required instead of many of the current ineffectual grant allocations which have led to years of annual budget underspends. The recession might require a big increase in the AEB because of the rise in unemployment but it needs to be procured to the colleges and providers who can fully utilise it directly without the need for wholesale subcontracting and unjustifiable management fees.

In the longer-term, the solution should be the return of properly regulated Adult Individual Skills Accounts to access all AEB funding instead of relying on grants and procurements. Just like employers have a choice of provider with apprenticeships, each adult learner should be allowed to take their entitlement to where they like as long as quality assurance is in place.

The government should also integrate the National Retraining Scheme, the National Skills Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund into the Adult Education Budget to ensure a more responsive system to support learner demand. In turn, they should be routed through Adult Individual Skills Accounts.

More Recognition for Level 2 Provision

Over 40% of the school population at 16 has not achieved a full Level 2. For a large proportion of young people, a single leap to Level 3 is impossible and recognition of achievement at Level 2 is vital for motivation and progression.

We need to see this acknowledged in the white paper, especially in the context of apprenticeships and technical education with the government having chosen to start T levels at Level 3.

If we are serious about social justice, the current IfATE review of apprenticeship funding bands should produce a set of outcomes that make some Level 2 apprenticeships more viable – the adult care worker standards being a very pertinent example in present circumstances. Similarly, ministers should finally be doing something about the poor funding of English and maths functional skills teaching when delivered as part of an apprenticeship.

And we must not forget that the AEB also has a key role to play here for adults. The focus has been often been on improving literacy and numeracy but increasingly it is on teaching basic digital skills as well.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, 16-18 apprenticeships should be funded out of the 16-18 education participation budget, thus releasing more funding for 18+ apprenticeships at all levels.

Second, the white paper should signal significant extra resources for the Adult Education Budget which is brigaded together with funding from the National Retraining Scheme, the National Skills Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund. The long-term aim should be routing of all adult funding through Individual Skills Accounts.

And third, the white paper should restate the importance of Level 2 for 16-18 year olds, 19-24 year olds and 25 year olds and over to achieve social justice and retraining for others.

Kathleen Henehan, Resolution Foundation

Rethinking Adult Training and Retraining

In the run-up to the current crisis, nearly one-in-five UK workers were in a sector that would be temporarily shut, a large proportion of whom were low-paid and had lower-level qualifications. It's unclear how many of these have come back to work (as of early August four-in-ten workers in hospitality and leisure remained furloughed). The number that could lose their jobs permanently next month, when the furlough scheme draws to a close is even less clear still.

Participation Benefits

But no matter how, and when, job losses occur, it's safe to say that policy makers will look adult education and training as a way to help unemployed adults find their way back into work. There is some good news on this front: [research](#) recently published the Resolution Foundation finds that even after controlling for several personal and work-related factors, adult education and training can make a substantive difference to the odds of a person who has moved out of work being able to move back into it within two years (see Table 1).

Table 1

Selected predictive proportions of 25-59-year-olds returning to stable work, by type of training and subgroup: UK, 2012-18



	No training	Any training	Longer-than-median training	Training w/qualification	Longer training w/qualification
All	53%	68%	67%	71%	70%
High-level qualifications	68%	82%			
Mid-level qualifications	55%	74%	76%	78%	78%
Lower-level qualifications	47%	56%		65%	63%
25-44 women, non-graduates	39%	55%		62%	
45-59 men, non-graduates	55%			85%	85%
25-44 men, graduates	73%			96%	
25-44 women, graduates	52%	78%			
45-59 men, graduates	66%			97%	

NOTES: Training undertaken one year prior. Blank cells indicate results that were not statistically significant; cells are shaded according to the percentage difference in the predicted proportions of returning to work without training and with that particular form of training. See report for details on control variables. Respondents classed as frequent trainers are removed, as are those who said their training purpose was 'hobbies' or 'health and safety'. The association between returning to work after a workless spell and having been in full-time education over the previous two years was not statistically significant, and so is not shown here. Longer-than-median refers to training that lasted for more than 24 hours in total.

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In fact, the effects are largest for non-graduates and in particular non-graduate women. Without any training, we would expect 39% of 25-44-year old non-graduate women who had recently moved out of work to return with two years, as compared against 62% of those who had undertaken training resulting in a qualification.

Participation Barriers

Unfortunately, this same group of adults are less likely to access education and training: figures from Understanding Society, a longitudinal survey, show that while more than

one-in-three (35%) of 25-59-year old graduates report having had any form of training or education outside of full-time study, only about one-in-five 25-59-year-olds with GCSE-equivalent or lower qualifications report the same. There's a laundry list of reasons for this, but we'd be safe in assuming that two stand out: time and money.

Most non employer-provided courses (outside of statutory English and Maths) incur fees, which can put off risk-averse adults who have no way of knowing whether study will indeed pay off. Then there's time: finding the time to study on top of family responsibilities, working and/or looking for work is difficult.

Earning before Learning

It can be even more difficult for those on flexible or zero-hours contracts (ZHCs) – who could be forced to make a choice between earning and learning at short notice. The proportion of workers on ZHCs rose sharply in the wake of the financial crisis, and there's little to suggest that won't be on the cards this time around – particularly in hard-hit sectors like hospitality.

Career Change Challenges

That brings us onto career changes: given the sectoral impacts of this crisis, some adults will want – or need – to change the sector in which they work, and hopefully change sector while obtaining a pay boost. This is a difficult task: we find that although most forms of education are significantly linked to 'positive career changes' (i.e. changing job and receiving a 10% rise in monthly pay), only full-time education appears to have a particularly large effect.

While we would expect just 5% of workers who have not experienced training to have both changed industry and received a minimum 10% pay rise compared to three years ago, our findings indicate that 11% of those who had completed some full-time education in the interim would have done so. Results for other forms of education are smaller (see Table 2).

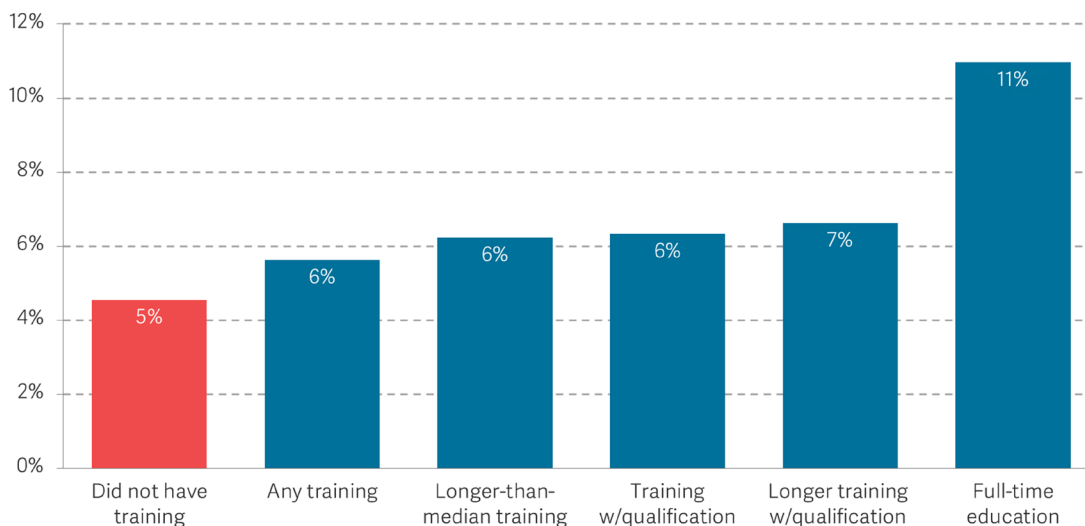
We shouldn't infer from these findings that shorter or part-time courses are unlikely to help a person make a positive career change. Instead, we should see these findings as a reflection of just how difficult each stage of the career change process is. For instance, understanding how a person's skills translate into a new field, how they should set about finding a new role, and whether that move will financially pay off. Even then, there's the question of training for it: can they afford to balance study, work and family responsibilities – let alone the nerves that can come with re-entering the classroom after a long time away.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, policy makers should of course look to learning as one way to tackle the high levels of unemployment coming down the track. Even despite a difficult job market, there is strong evidence to suggest that training can play a substantial role in helping

Table 2

Predictive proportion of 25-59-year-olds working in a different industry and being paid at least 10 per cent more now as compared to three years ago, by type of training: UK, 2012-18



NOTES: Training undertaken two years prior. Regression analysis tests for the likelihood of returning to work, and being in work for one of the following three waves conditioned on the type of training undertaken. See report for details on control variables. Respondents classed as frequent trainers are removed, as are those who said their training purpose was 'hobbies' or 'health and safety.' Longer-than-median refers to training that lasted for more than 24 hours in total. SOURCE: RF analysis of ISEI, Understanding Society. © Resolution Foundation 2020 resolutionfoundation.org

lower-qualified workers re-enter a job after a spell of worklessness.

Second, over the short-to-medium term, government should consider policies that would help adults re-enter work and/or change career by adopting more sector-focused job creation initiatives that have training built into them – green jobs like retrofitting and social care could be good candidates.

And third, policy makers should develop plans to help adults retrain over the longer-term. Allowing adults to access maintenance support while studying in further education, allowing student finance on a modular basis so that learners build up credits over time, and removing 'equivalent or lower qualification' restrictions would make a world of difference. There's no panacea – policy will have to fire on all fronts.

Julie Tam, Universities UK

Upskilling and Reskilling through Modularised Higher Education

Covid-19 has affected every aspect of our lives and its effect will continue to be felt in the years to come. The global pandemic has changed how we work, the availability of work, and who works. The skillsets we now need for work have changed, and so must the way we learn new skills.

Combining Higher Education with other life commitments

There have been long standing problems on the flexibility of options available to post-16 individuals. [Research](#) commissioned by Universities UK in 2018 showed that the most common reason, after financial reasons, for not taking up part-time higher education was a lack of flexibility in fitting study alongside other life commitments. Two thirds had wished to change or develop their careers through part-time study, and nearly two thirds were aged under 45. Around half had Level 2 or 3 as their highest qualification held.

The lack of flexibility to study alongside work or other life commitments has held back not only these individuals – 76% reporting no subsequent progression in their careers – but also employers, who are reporting growing demand for higher-level skills ([CBI-Pearson, 2019](#)). The World Economic Forum has estimated that – pre-pandemic – 1.37 million workers in the US have jobs at risk due to technological change ([WEF, 2019](#)). A lack of flexibility is therefore not only restricting the life-chances of individuals, but also the country's economic growth – growth that will be essential to the UK as we seek to recover from the global pandemic.

Meeting the needs of learners

What should more flexible options in higher education look like? [Research](#) commissioned by the Department for Education showed that learners wanted to be able to study at their own pace, at a place of their choosing, and have the necessary support to do so. The pandemic has meant that universities have, through necessity, delivered their provision and support remotely and a blended approach between in-person teaching and online delivery will be taken over the forthcoming academic year. This more flexible approach will, no doubt, help many of those who found attending face-to-face teaching impossible alongside their existing commitments. However, the barrier of studying at one's own pace remains.

Current barriers to modular study

This barrier comes in the form of a learner's ability to access finance for their study. Unless a learner commits to studying at least 25% of a full-time equivalent course and to a specific qualification, they are not eligible for student finance. Both these commitments are significant, whether you are juggling working alongside study or considering a return to study after a long period out. This lack of finance has led to a lack of student demand for more bite sized learning, which is a primary driver behind a lack of modules on offer at universities at the undergraduate level. A further barrier to increased supply is the way the current regulatory framework disincentivises modular learning.

Fee and Maintenance Support for modular study

The pivotal role of finance was highlighted in the [post-18 review of education and funding](#), which recommended learners being able to access student finance for modules of credit-based Level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications. Both higher and further education providers play a crucial role in the delivery of Levels 4 and 5. Therefore any modification to student finance to support learners needs to be introduced alongside closer collaboration between higher and further education to best meet the needs of learners.

Covid-19 and modular study

A consequence of the pandemic will mean the set of potential learners who wish to study flexibly – be it in further or higher education – will rise markedly. There will be those who are out of work, and for whom a return to their former sector of work looks difficult or impossible. Different parts of the country will be disproportionately affected. Some individuals may wish to study to increase their likelihood of finding a new role. There may be uncertainty over how long they will be unemployed for – therefore committing to a full qualification and 25% of full-time to access finance for their studies may be a step too far. A stark trade-off faces these individuals – between looking for work and studying. It should not have to be this way.

Today's Graduates

We must also not forget recent graduates, who will face considerable challenges and competition in finding work. Increased skill sets through paid internships, and studying a module, say on technical or digital skills, could give a recent graduate the edge in a highly competitive market ([Universities UK, 2020](#)). Bite-sized learning, alongside a job search, should be made financially possible for all, and not be reserved for those who have the family means to self-fund.

College and University Collaboration

The education landscape can be complex to navigate and learners may not always know of the route through that may best serve their needs. As a consequence, collaborations across higher and further education to better sign-post and support learners are crucial.

The Commission on the College of the Future has set out in [its vision](#) that colleges will work collaboratively across the wider education and skills system in new ways. 2018 [research](#) commissioned by Universities UK showed that there is growing collaboration between higher and further education and employers, and a wealth of diversity in the approaches taken. However, collaborations require time and resource to develop, and must overcome competitive drivers between higher and further education.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper must make modular study accessible to all from Level 4 and above so that learners can accumulate qualifications over time. Learners should be

able to access fee and maintenance support to study modules as those currently studying full and part-time can. Support should cover those with no prior experience of higher education, those seeking to return to study after a long period away, and recent graduates.

Second, the reforms in the white paper should ensure universities are recognised - and not penalised – for helping learners to study at their own pace. This would involve looking at current performance metrics to appropriately recognise learning by module.

And third, the white paper should actively encourage through incentives collaboration between higher and further education, to enhance decision making by learners. Support could be provided through the National Skills Fund or through supporting the transformation of universities, which [Universities UK has been calling for](#) to ensure long-term financial sustainability of the sector.

Fiona Aldridge, Learning and Work Institute

Revolutionising Access to Adult Upskilling and Reskilling

Earlier in the year, Gavin Williamson described the forthcoming white paper as revolutionary – and a revolution is certainly what is needed in adult upskilling and reskilling. Even before the pandemic, there was a growing recognition of the need for more support for adults to upskill and retrain throughout their working lives, and to develop resilience to ongoing economic and technological change.

Mass Unemployment

This has only been exacerbated by the current recession, in which many more adults will need to upskill and reskill for new careers. Unemployment has already reached 3.4 million and looks to rise further as the furlough scheme unwinds. Furthermore, the sectoral nature of this recession means that many workers will struggle to find similar roles, and instead will need to consider retraining to change careers.

Participation and Funding: A Decade of Decline

Yet, while the need for adults to upskill and reskill is evident, increasingly the means to do so are not. Instead, we have seen a decade of decline in both investment and participation in adult skills. Government funding for adult learning and training (excluding apprenticeships) fell by almost half between 2009/10 and 2018/19. Employer investment has fallen too, with UK employers now investing just half the EU average in continuing vocational training.

It should come as no surprise therefore that Learning and Work Institute's latest survey of adult participation in learning shows that just one in three UK adults have taken part in any form of learning or training in the past 3 years – the lowest figure in the survey's 20+ year history. In fact, since 2010, participation in adult learning has fallen by a staggering 10 percentage points – with an estimated 3.8 million fewer adult learners at the close of the decade than at its start.

A revolution is much needed and long overdue. So, what do we want to see from the white paper?

A Universal Support Offer

In our recent report, [When Furlough has to Stop](#), we called for the urgent introduction of a universal support offer to help adults develop their skills throughout their working lives. As well as committing to investment in high quality online support and one-to-one careers advice for adults, the white paper should introduce a lifelong learning entitlement up to Level 3, including for subsequent Level 3 study where it is in an economic priority area or where adults have significant National Insurance contribution records.

We also highlighted the need for a more flexible learning offer – with both short and longer courses, offering face-to-face, online and blended provision – to fit with adults' work and wider lives. And of course, a universal support offer is only helpful

if adults are aware of it and if they recognise the relevance and value of the offer in helping them achieve their ambitions and goals. A large-scale awareness campaign will be needed.

Support for Career Changers

For those adults looking to reskill for new careers, the white paper needs to deliver more substantial support. We have proposed that this should include enhanced careers advice and a £5,000 learning account to help finance the costs of retraining.

Action is also needed to ensure that the right provision is in place, at all levels – from basic English, maths and digital skills to sector specific provision up to Level 5 and beyond. This could involve a series of sector-based Ambition programmes, bringing together businesses and skills providers to develop and deliver training tailored to specific career pathways and jobs. As well as being involved in design and delivery, employers would be asked to guarantee interviews for career changers who complete these programmes.

Ensuring affordability

Finally, as our adult participation in learning survey shows, costs can be a major barrier to retraining. While a learning account will help with fee costs, adult learners often have wider financial commitments that make it impossible for them to earn less as they seek to step across to a new occupation or sector. The white paper should include a commitment to providing these adult learners with some form of maintenance support either through a means-tested maintenance grant (a Career Changer Grant) or as a Career Change Premium in Universal Credit. Eligibility could be linked to an individual's National Insurance contributions history.

An Opportunity not to be Missed

This is an opportunity not to be missed. An opportunity to introduce comprehensive and ambitious support for adults to upskill and reskill. An opportunity to invest both in economic growth and social justice.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should commit to introducing a universal support offer for all adults, providing online support and one-to-one careers advice, as well as a lifelong learning entitlement to free education to achieve up to a first Level 3 through modules or whole qualifications.

Second, the white paper should include a package of assistance for career changers based on enhanced careers advice, sector-based programmes bringing business and skills providers together to develop training tailored to specific career pathways and jobs, a £5,000 learning account to pay for up-skilling or re-skilling.

And third, the white paper should either introduce a part-time DfE maintenance grant or a DWP Career Changer Premium within Universal Credit, to sustain upskilling and reskilling to mitigate wage drops as people move sectors.

Strategic Partnership and Workforce Skills

The world of work is set for radical transformation over the next decade. Technological change will revolutionise entire industries and engender employer demand for new and higher-level skills. The post-16 white paper therefore represents a critical opportunity to locate the needs of the future economy at the heart of our education and skills system.

Strategic Partnership

Strategic partnership between business, further education and higher education will be vital to capitalising on opportunities created by new technologies and ensuring labour market resilience to economic upheaval. In this sense, tertiary education's role in driving social mobility, levelling up opportunity, and improving productivity throughout the labour market will require responsiveness to employers' skills needs

Broad and balanced curriculum

But what skills do employers need? CBI's latest [Education and Skills Survey](#) found that 44% of employers felt young people were leaving school, college or university were not work ready. Whilst a definition for "work ready" can be difficult to pin down, employers agree that rounded curriculum that includes character, skills and knowledge is essential. Creativity, resilience, and problem solving will become increasingly important to employers in the context of rapid technological change. Employers have an important responsibility to step up engagement with education providers, support curricula co-design and ensure these skills are embedded.

Technical Education Route

The CBI have long called for the creation of a high-quality technical route, that is of equal esteem and value to A levels. It is important that there are academic and technical routes into rewarding careers and T levels represent a golden opportunity to tackle skills gaps in key economic sectors. However, in addition to occupationally specific competencies, technical education must support a core base of relevant transferable skills to set learners up for success in the labour market. Broad, diverse, and balanced curricula will also be key to supporting flexible routes, and clear progression pathways to both higher technical and academic education.

Demand for L4+ Skills

Indeed, clear progression routes through further and higher education will be vital to meeting employers increasing reliance on employees with higher skills. A recent [CBI member survey](#) revealed that 79% businesses expect to need more people with higher skills (Level 4) in the next three to five years. As lower skilled tasks are automated, the labour market shift in favour of higher skilled work will accelerate.

Fuelling Demand for More Level 4, 5 and 6 Qualifications

Presently, only 10% of UK adults hold a Level 4 or 5 at their highest qualification ([OECD, 2014](#)). To be clear, the source of this skills shortage is not too many young people

attending university, but barriers to learners progressing from lower levels.

This “hourglass skills problem” creates challenges for employers to access the skills they need. For workers it also stymies upward income mobility and greater employability in the labour market. The introduction of a simplified, high quality and employer led offer at Level 4 and 5 can help remove these barriers. New higher technical qualifications should therefore be promoted as a progression route from lower level study, not an alternative to degrees.

A Reskilling Revolution

However, the clearest expression of the government’s ambition in designing a skills system aligned to economic need must be in their proposals for lifelong learning. With [80% of the 2030 workforce already in employment](#), and [30% of roles due to be affected by automation](#) over the next ten years, the need for a bold vision on reskilling is clear.

The scale of the challenge should not be underestimated. Our upcoming report outlines that 9 in 10 workers will require some form of reskilling by 2030 at a cost of £130bn. Whilst businesses will deliver the majority of investment, adequate incentivisation will be key, particularly for SMEs who face unique barriers to investing in training. Furthermore, government at all levels will need to redress the decline in public spending on adult learners, and enable providers to offer flexible and shorter courses, more closely aligned with the labour market.

Collaboration

Collaboration between businesses, colleges and universities is essential to prevent pitting different parts of tertiary education against one another in this area. Together, businesses and providers can enhance opportunities for learners, coordinate the delivery of skills needs, and design a system aligned to demand. A coalition between providers, business and government can capitalise on the opportunities presented by the fourth industrial revolution, drive social mobility, and boost productivity throughout the UK economy. The post-16 white paper can be a roadmap for this journey.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the post-16 white paper must facilitate the development of partnerships between business, further education and higher education to systemically align our education and skills strategy to the demands of the future economy.

Second, the white paper should propose an expansion of higher technical education at Level 4-5 which is addition too and not in replace of numbers attending full-time Level 6 degrees at universities.

And third, the white paper should outline how flexible provision and provider funding will support widespread reskilling across the labour market.

Iain Murray, TUC

Social Partnership and Workforce Skills

The overwhelming policy priority for government at present must be to boost jobs and skills to combat the fallout from Covid-19 and to reduce significantly the numbers facing unemployment. In this context the impending post-16 white paper needs to address this immediate challenge as well as providing a route map for longer-term reform. Additionally, the government must assimilate its vision for FE and skills into a wider economic strategy that triggers a better recovery and builds a fairer and greener Britain.

Combatting the impact of Covid-19

Since lockdown the TUC has called for a significant skills boost on three fronts to address the impact of Covid-19, as follows:

- a job guarantee programme targeted initially on young people with a flexible training component, including the option for commencing a proper apprenticeship
- an 'education and training guarantee' for all school leavers and other young people that would support access to an apprenticeship, a place at college or university, and other education and training options, and
- a new right to retrain for everybody, backed up by funding and personal lifelong learning accounts.

Young people

The Kickstart programme has gone some way to meeting our call for a subsidised job programme for young people, but we are of the view that a dedicated training component would go some way to increasing progression rates to permanent employment. The pandemic has hit apprentices hard with new starts down by over a half since lockdown and a rapidly growing number of redundancies.

Action on a number of other fronts is urgently required, including a commitment by government to establish a cast-iron guarantee for all existing apprentices to complete their training and to give employers and unions the opportunity to flex the levy to maximise apprenticeship recruitment in the coming period.

But our apprenticeship system requires longer term reform to address wide-ranging challenges and key priorities must include new measures to:

- strengthen enforcement of employment and training rights
- boost wage levels and provide universal travel discounts
- improve equality of access, and
- guarantee a minimum progression to a Level 3 apprenticeship for all our young people.

Adults

The Chancellor said very little in his announcement in July about adult skills and this

was partly put down to the necessary focus on young people and the anticipated white paper. The government's response to the Augar Review will now finally emerge and the TUC is pressing for many of its proposals to be fast-tracked, especially the following:

- a new funded entitlement for all adults to progress to a Level 3 qualification
- improved financial support for FE students, and
- making investment in the FE workforce a priority.

Pre-Pandemic Funding Announcements

There have been some welcome pledges to increase investment, including increased capital spending of £1.8bn to upgrade our college estate and an additional £600 million per annum on a new National Skills Fund. But these two specific spending commitments were made before the pandemic hit and were openly aimed at repairing the damage done by years of cuts. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the promised additional investment on the National Skills Fund would only reverse about one fifth of the cuts to total spending on adult education and skills since 2010.

A New Context for the Post-16 White Paper

Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic and its dire impact on the economy and employment has created an entirely new context for the post-16 white paper which is also a vehicle for responding to the Augar Review of Post-18 Education in England. A more substantial and sustained response is required.

A Significant Funding Boost

We need an unambiguous commitment from government that it will provide the necessary funding to support a huge expansion of learning and training opportunities to boost job prospects in the coming months and to sustain the FE and skills system over the coming years.

A Stronger Apprenticeship and Technical Education Offer

It is anticipated that the white paper will reinforce the current direction of travel on expanding take-up of technical qualifications by more young people and adults through the introduction of T levels and revitalising of higher-level qualifications. The TUC supports the broad thrust of this policy approach and our ambition must be to emulate high-quality and well-funded apprenticeship and technical education systems in other countries.

A Step Change in Adult Training and Retraining for Unemployed Workers

The government must now press ahead with a much-expanded skills offer for the increasing number of workers losing their jobs as a result of Covid-19. It should bring forward committed funding for the National Skills Fund (£600m per annum from

2021-22) into the 2020/21 financial year. And for the longer term we need a massive adult retraining programme.

Strategic collaboration

Putting in place extensive skills reforms which the nation needs will require a high degree of strategic coordination by government, employers, unions and other stakeholders. According to a recent OECD report the UK lacks the national social partnership arrangements that underpin high-quality skill systems in many other countries.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should embrace the principle of social partnership between government, employers and unions and create a National Skills Taskforce covering apprenticeships, technical education and workforce training.

Second, the white paper should empower all young people to attain a Level 3 qualification or advanced apprenticeship and outline a clear pathway to progress to Level 4-5 higher technical education.

And third, the white paper should commit to the radical reform of adult training and retraining based on a new right to paid time off for education and training for workers, a new entitlement to a mid-life skills/career review, the development of an all-age careers guidance service and extra adult skills funding linked to Personal Learning Accounts.

Matt Waddup, University and College Union

A Broad View of Further Education

Start with an external review, add in some international comparisons, promise more money, implement qualification reform and explain how you intend to simplify the mission. Then repeat every five years, each time with less funding.

Rising Expectations

After thirty years of false starts no wonder frontline FE staff are cynical about governments that promise to “revolutionise” further education. So far, the build up to the white paper is following the playbook precisely. The government says it wants to build a “German style” system, create a bonfire of qualifications, drive a shift from university to technical education and supercharge employer engagement.

Certainly our FE system is in urgent need of help. As Gavin Williamson himself was shocked to discover we have lost more than one million adult learners since his government came to power in 2010; while 18 year olds in colleges have been systematically underfunded; and college staff have seen their pay fall dramatically in value compared to their counterparts in schools and universities.

Meanwhile the impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated the fragile finances of the sector with 13% of colleges close to insolvency and 40% actively considering redundancies. We know too the huge impact that the pandemic has had upon apprenticeships and other vocational opportunities. Firms are focused on their own survival and retaining the staff they have not on taking on new people.

The Reset Button has been Pressed

So, will it be different this time? To be positive, Covid-19 has unquestionably pressed the reset button on the established norms of public policy in the UK. Outside wartime government has never taken on such great powers nor intervened to such an extent in the economy or in fact in education.

Change has been fast and furious. One week the government was calling for less people to go to university, the next it was ripping up its algorithm and agreeing to thousands more attending. No doubt this was the right decision for these extraordinary times but an illustration that we are in uncharted waters and things can change fast when the politics demands it.

Beyond Robbing HE to Fund FE

This really is, therefore, the perfect time to think big about FE and the whole post-16 landscape. But that will mean government looking again at its ‘zero sum’ view that to fund FE we must reduce spending on HE - and to justify that we must cast doubt on the value of university.

Our country needs more investment across post-16 education not some binary process in which one sector’s gain is another’s loss - not least because in any bun

fight it will be HE that gets the buns as the A Level debacle has proved beyond doubt.

Be Wary of the Narrow View of FE

We must also be wary of the narrow view that FE is simply about vocational and technical skills and supporting employers. This work is very important but it is vital to our society and economy that it does not crowd out the incredibly diverse mission that FE has.

The local college can provide the first steps back into learning for many as well as the ability to learn our language for new comers. Colleges provide pathways into higher education as well as the opportunity to gain a degree locally. They even provide rehabilitation for the tens of thousands of prisoners who study under offenders learning programmes.

Despite everything thrown at them colleges are still remarkable places that change lives on a macro scale. All those different ways in which colleges work with their communities matter - to the fabric of our society and our economy.

Beyond Qualifications and Standards

Education white papers often focus on qualifications and standards. For this white paper, DfE should stand back and ask a different question. In a post Covid-19 society where huge economic change has been unleashed and where the pandemic has hit the poor and the already disadvantaged the hardest: what is it that we need post-16 education to do?

The gap between the funding of students in FE compared to schools and universities is the biggest impediment to progress in this area. The white paper should actively close that gap and, more particularly, set out concrete plans to improve the pay and status of the brilliant staff who work in FE - not just some but all.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the post-16 white paper should start with learners rather than structures and qualifications, establishing a clear, funded right-to-learn for every citizen, as a precondition for a more equal as well as a more productive society.

Second, the white paper must for once and for all create a properly funded, national information and guidance (IAG) service through which anyone can get independent advice about their education and career options.

And third, the white paper should place a new legal duty for all post-16 institutions to cooperate with each other to the benefit of learners in FE and HE. This alongside the right to learn would be transformative for those who need FE most.

David Russell, Education and Training Foundation

Transforming FE Teaching as a Profession

Nobody within the political machine ever reads articles by those outside their immediate sphere. Ministers and officials are swamped with more reading than they could ever absorb in the course of their jobs, all written by others inside Government. This is why white papers always seem so disconnected from the realities as experienced by teachers, leaders and employers. They are written by clever sages who live inside a high castle with very narrow arrow-slits, through which they peer from time to time so they can bring news to their masters about the movements of the outside world.

The sages have little knowledge of what came before - they have come from elsewhere in the castle, and the libraries are not well-used. Sometimes they manage to spend enough time looking through the same arrow-slit that they get a good understanding of that part of the kingdom; when this happens, either they or their ministers are led away to another part of the system.

Writing a White Paper in a Revolutionary Way

What would an FE white paper say, if it were written in a different or revolutionary way? What if the sages came down from their towers, and spent time talking and walking through the villages and fields with the people? Would they become lost "down in the weeds" (a place they regularly invoke with horror)? Would they become confused without their "helicopter view"? Might they become seduced by the merely "transactional" and lose their vision of the "strategic"? Or would they be able to meld their understanding of the whole landscape with new insight from the lived experience of the people they are trying to support and influence?

Insight from the Ground

A white paper that was written with insight from the ground as well as the high castle would say something like this.

The purpose of the FE system is to educate and to train. What people need to learn will vary hugely, depending on background, experience, age, job, prior attainment, preference and purpose. It will be as varied as life itself. But the consistent thing the FE system must do is be excellent at education and training.

Teacher and Learner Interaction

There are many things that affect the quality of the learning experience, but at the heart of it is the interaction between the teacher and the learner. This may be face to face or remote. It could be one to one, or one to many. It could be intermittent or intensive. It could be expert to novice, or it could be peer to peer in professional exchange. But it is by far the dominant factor in how much one learns, develops, grows, gains skill, knowledge and power.

Many other things are relevant. Funding, qualifications, equipment, setting. Even second order considerations, such as governance of the teaching institution, or

accountability regimes for teachers and their leaders. But all of these myriad factors – which civil servants and ministers have influence over or can even determine wholly – are peripheral. The thing which actually shapes the learning directly and profoundly is the teachers, what they do and how they do it.

Key Questions

So a white paper that was really serious about putting the quality and impact of the FE system at the heart of everything would address these key questions:

- How do we attract, develop and retain talented, knowledgeable, skilled and committed individuals in FE teaching?
- How do we free them to focus on teaching and learning, and help them to excel?
- How do we create a profession with pride, prowess, high status and good self-knowledge?

And in answer to these questions it would set out a bold, ambitious and far-reaching transformation of FE teaching as a profession.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should propose a long-term, properly funded programme of recruitment, qualification and initiation into the FE profession.

Second, the white paper should create professional pathways, standards, and professional statuses with clearly defined, high-prestige roles at local, intuitional, regional and national levels.

And third, the creation of structures and culture to support the application of the science, art and craft of teaching, with vibrant debate and professional exchange between teachers, researchers and industry

Susan Pember, HOLEX

A Government-Wide Lifelong Learning Strategy

We have spent the last 40 years going through the same debate, using the same narrative and the same rationale about why we need another Further Education Review. It would be ground-breaking if this white paper could be the last for a very long time, setting the framework for the next 30 years.

We must have a white paper which ensures FE achieves its full potential, at the heart of a productive, competitive economy and a supporter and facilitator of social justice. And this white paper must, once and for all, put aside the Groundhog Day of FE having to justify its existence.

Longevity of Overseas Systems

We are not a great believer in picking-up another country's skills system and transplanting it into England's unique economic and social landscape. But what other countries with a successful post-16 system have in common is the longevity of their approach. We need a new narrative, one that all are willing to sign up to, starting with agreement on what works and what the remit of FE is – and then stick to it for 30 years, without change until 2050.

Recognising Success

The white paper needs to build on the success of the present system.

We have many dynamic colleges, adult education centres and Institutes for Adult Learning, with over 80% providing good or outstanding provision. We have a loyal local base of employers working with or sending their employees to those organisations.

We have amazing students who each year embrace the offer and work hard to ensure success and we have a teacher base that is inspiring and stoical who are undervalued and underpaid compared to other education sectors.

We should be proud of our system – and although there are some problems they mainly stem from systematic under funding for last 10 years combined with over complicated funding and audit systems.

A Clear Place in English Society

FE has a clear place in our society. Those who have attended FE, teach in it or lead an FE organisation know their role. They know they must engage with employers but also work with their community to support a learner's life journey. Providing a first-class learning experience - which embraces knowledge and skills acquisition - can take that learner on to the next stage of their life be it in employment, a job with an apprenticeship, full-time and part-time higher education or the next step up in further education.

Out of Touch Policy Makers rather than Out of Touch Learners

Just because those in government who have never been touched by FE do not understand it, is no reason to change it. The problem lies with FE policy makers not FE

learners. Policy makers need to get closer to the Further Education Sector. They need to accept that the Further Education sector is central to delivering the skills which are essential for economic success and offering individuals of all backgrounds and aspirations the opportunity for gaining productive and sustainable employment.

Restatement of Self-Evident Truths

In some respects, the white paper does not need to be revolutionary at all. It simply needs to restate some self-evident truths. Specifically, the white paper should reaffirm:

- the twin goals of FE to help build a productive economy and inclusive society
- the role of FE to equip young people and adults with the skills for employability which underpin economic success, social mobility and improved wellbeing, and
- the need to set the FE sector free with reduced bureaucracy and removal of all unnecessary and unwieldy regulation.

Placing the Learner at the Heart of the Reforms

In the obsession about doing what employers want, our policy makers sometimes forget they are also there to support the learner and be their voice - when often they are not heard. So, the white paper should be clear and reinforce the requirement to have the learner's interests at heart, the learner's interests should be a golden thread running throughout, from the creation of policy to its implementation.

Building Blocks for the White Paper

With this driving principle in mind, the white paper should include the following basic building blocks for a world class post-16 system:

- map and promote to learners and employers the entitlements to free post-16 education and how government and mayoral combined authorities are supporting post-18 students, including those who may not have done well at school
- a guarantee for every 16-24 year old of either a job, a job with an apprenticeship, a subsidised job, a full-time place at university or a full-time place at college
- create a curriculum and assessment landscape that provides clear basic skills and vocational pathways and progression routes for learners from pre-entry to Level 6, including reinvigorating the vocational Level 2 rung of the ladder
- include a commitment to long-term sustainable funding so that colleges and adult education centres can work with their local partners to plan and grow properly;
- introduce a fairer playing field for capital funding available to colleges and adult education centres and immediately introduce a new fund for devices for learners who have been left behind as a result of Covid-19
- support providers to continue the movement to online and blended learning prompted by Covid-19 by establishing a development fund for teachers, and
- develop a funding system which is driven by the choices and needs of learners and employers and is easy to understand and simple to implement.

Inserting 'Skills' into the 16-24 Kickstart Programme

The new Kickstart initiative is based upon the minimum wage and its goal seems to be about employers getting some cheap labour rather than what the individual really needs. DWP should strengthen the 'learning new skills' part of the initiative and insist that vocational skills are learnt. Otherwise DWP are returning to the 'revolving door' situation where people are forced into low skilled, low paid work only to be made redundant again because they do not have the skills to succeed. Indeed, DWP must use this opportunity to break that cycle and ensure each person's long-term prospects are improved by going on a vocational course as well as gaining work experience with an employer.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the white paper should establish a Government-wide post-16 lifelong learning strategy. As part of this strategy, DWP should support access to skills training within their own employment programmes – such as the Kickstart Programme – as well as enabling unemployed and low-paid Universal Credit claimants to join DfE training and retraining programmes without losing benefits.

Second, the white paper should confirm the extension of free education for first full Level 2 and 3 for all adults aged 19 and over, and introduce maintenance support – loans and grants – to encourage participation on a full-time and part-time basis.

And third, the white paper should secure the means for community education to grow and be recognised as a vital part of ensuring society engagement, integration and wellbeing.

Andy Westwood, University of Manchester

What does 'Revolutionary' Really Look Like?

After a summer where FE has again been more of an afterthought than a priority, the autumn policymaking agenda promises to change this with a 'revolutionary' white paper. In many ways setting out radical reforms are rather easier than dealing with the day to day problems of running schools, colleges and exams. It is easier to stylise a future without outlining details of delivery, resources or the capacity to deliver real change – or in other words how we get from where we are to where we want to be.

Successive education ministers have, for example, aspired to create a 'German-style' technical education system many times in the past. But no government has delivered one. Many governments have also reformed vocational qualifications and set up new, specialist institutions too. Few of either have remained intact for very long. The most radical thing on offer this time might just be seeing reforms through and retaining ministerial and wider government interest while this happens. Even so, the key question is what 'revolutionary' really means and which specific agendas might demand such change.

Employment

The first of these three agendas is employment (and for the foreseeable future, unemployment).

As we know, Covid-19 is creating a growing unemployment problem, especially for young people. According to the Resolution Foundation, the current economic crisis risks pushing an additional 600,000 18-24-year olds into unemployment in the coming year – and causing long-term damage to their pay and job prospects. Another 800,000 18-24-year olds are expected to leave education this year, and according to the Office for Budget Responsibility – unemployment is forecast to rise by 6 percentage points. This is twice as large as the increase following the financial crisis in 2008.

But FE's focus on employment is not just about the immediate impact on the young. We were already facing major changes to the labour market and to the way we work. From technological change and Covid-19, to ageing populations and climate change, people of all ages will need new skills and retraining. This demands a real focus on adults in and outside of the workplace.

However, trends in adult learning are running in the wrong direction. Between 2010 and 2018/19, the number of adults in part time higher education fell by 53%. In the same period government spending on adult learning in England (excluding apprenticeships) fell by 47%. In 2019, the Learning and Work Institute recorded the lowest participation rate over two decades - the third year in a row in which the participation rate has fallen to a record low.

And so, from Kickstart to apprenticeships and the retraining of adults, the Further Education sector must play its part. In turn, this requires much better joining-up of employment and benefit policies of DWP and skills and student support policies at DfE.

Growth and Productivity

The second important agenda is growth and productivity.

The UK has a pressing and urgent productivity problem. This is magnified by the pandemic. The Augar Review rightly described a 'missing middle' at Level 4 and Level 5 pointing to much higher participation (and prestige) in countries such as Germany, France, the US and South Korea. Connected to this is a missing layer of applied research too. The Government intends to remedy this by doubling spending on R&D, meeting a target of 2.4% of GDP (the OECD average) in the middle of the decade. At both the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, all political parties committed to going further and hitting 3%.

DfE ministers have already promised to improve and expand higher technical education. Most recently this has been focused on new higher-level qualifications and building more Institutes of Technology. Funding for both must have parity with university or degree routes for either to have a chance of success (or longevity). But to maximise productivity, DfE funding and policies for Level 4+ apprenticeships, full-time and part-time higher technical education, full-time and part-time first degrees and postgraduate degrees must be better joined-up with BEIS policies to increase R&D spending especially on applied research.

Regional Inequality

The third agenda is addressing regional inequality and helping to deliver the Government's promise of 'levelling up'.

According to Phil McCann at the University of Sheffield, the UK has described a 'geography of discontent' pointing out that 'the UK is one of the most inter-regionally unequal countries in the industrialised world'. Increasing funding and expanding provision begins to counteract declining local economies, rebuilding skills and tackling perceptions - real or otherwise - of being 'left behind'. It requires a reconfirmation of colleges' civic role and an active role in economic and social recovery.

In turn this requires better joining up with the Ministry for Housing and Local Government. A white paper on devolution in England is expected shortly. It is unthinkable that the employment and productivity agendas are not integrated when the devolution white paper and the post-16 white paper are published.

Devolution and FE Autonomy

This leads to the fourth agenda of devolution and FE autonomy.

Regional inequality shows that one size does not and cannot fit all. It is vital that FE colleges have the flexibility and incentives to build partnerships and programmes at a local level - whether with other institutions - such as universities and training providers - LEPs, local councils, combined authorities and elected mayors, employers and national government.

In turn this leads to a very different conversation about devolution and not one based on control, power or planning a system. This sounds much more revolutionary than it is. Most other countries have much more institutional autonomy and in England this has been an explicit element in both schools (especially academies and free schools) and in universities.

There does need to be a bigger shift towards local priorities especially, but not exclusively, in city regions. This must include setting priorities for 16-19 as well as for adult skills. Full devolution and creating similar command and control local bureaucracies may be a step too far with the danger that local systems may be just as burdensome and sclerotic as nationally. A better first step may be to form local boards similar to those overseeing the NHS and social care in GM. National NHS representatives still sit on it and national targets, funding mechanisms still apply but strategic priorities and local commissioning is managed locally and in universities.

Repositioning FE

Each of these agendas can demonstrate that ministers are serious about FE and that Government sees it as an essential part of its broader objectives. FE will only really show its importance (and a white paper be really ambitious and radical) if it can demonstrate what FE is for. By effectively joining it up with the labour market, local and regional economic development and helping to improve productivity - especially as we recover and rebuild after Covid-19 - FE can demonstrate real worth to individuals, to organisations and to places. And to Government too.

Three Reforms for the White Paper

First, the post-16 white paper should introduce clear links and referral mechanisms between unemployment programmes and benefits (as well as for those on low-pay and for firms accessing benefits during Covid-19) to training and retraining programmes and to broader full-time and part-time FE and HE provision.

Second, the white paper should commit the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to link Institutes of Technology to Catapult Centres and to other applied research institutions and activity.

And third, the white paper should establish local Skills and Employment Boards with powers for setting priorities and managing funding for 16-19 as well as adult skills. This should follow the model of health and social care devolution in areas like Greater Manchester with local oversight, relevant national standards and targets and based on a principle that more day to day and strategic autonomy for colleges must be a clear condition.

Key Themes

1 Revolutionary Change, Revolutionary Consequences

The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, is committed to publishing a post-16 white paper in the autumn. The white paper has been trailed as revolutionary, driven by the mantra Further Education, Further Education, Further Education. The post-16 system in England has many moving parts. Revolutionary change in one part of the system can result in revolutionary consequences for others.

2 Short-Term Crises and Long-Term Reform

A critical judgement to be made over the scope of the post-16 white paper is the extent to which it must respond to a short-term crisis, relative to outlining longer-term reform.

The Secretary of State has made clear that reform of certain aspects of the post-16 system will require long-term change. On the other hand, the reasonable worst case regarding the Covid-19 pandemic suggests lockdowns of varying degrees throughout 2020 and into 2021.

Short-term crisis management will need to go hand in hand with long-term reform or short-term crisis management inspires and shapes long-term reform. We have, for instance, witnessed how participation in full-time higher education by 18-24 year olds and full-time further education by 19 year olds has become a policy goal in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic to reduce youth unemployment and competition for non-student jobs.

Overall, the consequences of Covid-19 in terms of recession and mass unemployment means the post-16 white paper must deliver more opportunities for 16-18 year olds, 18-24 year olds and older adults to upskill and reskill, employers to grow and communities to level-up.

3 Funding Long-Term Reform

The expectation is that the Chancellor will deliver a Budget and a Spending Review covering revenue expenditure for three years from 2021/22 to 2023/24 in November. If, however, Covid-19 takes a turn for the worse, the Spending Review might simply set revenue expenditure for 2021/22.

The deficit is rising fast. National debt as a share of GDP is over 100%. Economic recovery will increase tax receipts and, for a given level of public spending, reduce the deficit. But to bring the deficit and national debt as a share of GDP down further will require tax rises or spending cuts. So far, reports indicate the scales are tipping towards higher taxation. And even though a looser set of fiscal rules could be in the offing, the notion of a spending largesse for post-16 in the long-term as well as the immediate term appears optimistic bearing in mind higher spending on the Covid-19 related areas of health and adult social care.

4 The Big One, The Last One or Groundhog Day

We are reminded in this pamphlet that every secretary of state publishing a white paper on reforming post-16 vocational education and training believes theirs is the Big One. Some believe what the current Education Secretary has said so far that this white paper really is

Key Themes

the Big One. Many hope it will be the last one as a key aspect of countries with successful post-16 systems is their longevity. Everyone though is crossing their fingers hoping this is not a Groundhog Day of yet another post-16 white paper that promises much but delivers little.

5 Two White Papers

The post-16 white paper is not the only white paper doing the rounds in the Whitehall Machine. We are expecting a Devolution white paper at the same time which re-organises local government and devolves powers and funding to more elected mayors, combined authorities and unitary authorities. Revolution does not always mean more resources, new provision and extended support. It can mean devolution of existing resources to lower tiers of government.

6 Devolving 16-19 Education Funding

The post-16 white paper will be the vehicle where Whitehall decides whether the long-term agenda is a national post-16 education and skills strategy that provides a framework for place-based plans developed between FE colleges, independent training providers, universities and relevant local authorities; or post-16 funding is devolved to elected mayors and strategic authorities. Funding devolution already applies to the Adult Education Budget and the share might increase as more elected mayors and strategic authorities emerge. Given higher education is funded through fee and maintenance loans, funding devolution to regional and local government is difficult. This leaves the DfE 16-19 education participation budget worth £6bn per year. A decision on where funding authority lies – nationally or locally – must be decided once and for all in the post-16 white paper.

7 Sustainable Apprenticeship Funding over the Long-Term

The review of apprenticeship funding in England in the context of the UK Apprenticeship Levy is expected to feed into the post-16 white paper. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a fear that the apprenticeship budget would go bust. Although we can expect funding pressures to ease on the Apprenticeship Programme Budget as employer demand for apprentices falls due to the shock to the economy and rising unemployment, sustained year-on-year economic recovery will result in a rise in apprenticeship starts.

The post-16 white paper must put apprenticeship funding in England on a sustainable long-term footing. The case for transferring responsibility for the funding of Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships from the levy to the 16-19 Education Participation Budget is strong (although it could be subject to devolution). A world-class vocational education and training system requires guaranteed funding for 16-18 apprentices. In turn, the Apprenticeship Levy would fund adult apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 6.

8 Made in England

The idea of picking the model of a competitor country and importing it into Britain – or to be precise England – is unwise. In the past, the German model was picked as an example of a world class apprenticeships system (although the system includes technical education). Today, the German model has been chosen as an example of world-class further education (which of course includes their apprenticeship system).

Key Themes

The problem is that the German economy is fundamentally different from the British economy: the manufacturing industry is still strong in Germany and the service industry prevails in Britain. Employer co-ordination at local and regional level is strong in Germany but weak in Britain. Tilting our post-16 system towards the German model is possible but weak employer co-ordination combined with a flexible labour market rule out much more. Made in Britain, or actually made in England, is the exam question for DfE.

9 A New Level 4-5 Higher Technical Education Pathway

There is no doubt that a key aim of the post-16 white paper is to create a new Level 4-5 higher technical education pathway. This is a laudable aim bearing in mind the relatively low numbers on existing vocational sub-degrees (c35,000) compared to Level 6 First Degrees (1.33m).

Participation on full-time vocational sub-degrees has fallen from 70,000 in 2016/17 to 22,000 in 2018/19, and part-time participation has fallen from 36,000 in 2016/17 to 14,000 in 2018/19.

Of course, there is a difference between full-time and part-time vocational sub-degrees. To study full-time a work-placement is essential but a job is not. By contrast, a job is essential to study a part-time vocational sub-degree in order to earn money to live.

10 Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Degrees and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

From a qualifications and standards perspective, Level 4-5 higher technical education will be developed in parallel with Level 4-6 apprenticeships. But from an employment perspective, the right comparison is between a job with part-time Level 4-5 technical education and a job with Level 4-6 apprenticeships. And whilst student numbers for part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees have fallen to 14,000, the number on Level 4-6 apprenticeships has risen to 120,000.

11 Employer Demand for Part-Time Level 4-5 and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

An interesting issue is whether 18-24 year olds and 25 year olds and over would prefer to have a job with part-time Level 4-5 technical education or a Level 4-6 apprenticeship than study full-time. But the post-16 white paper must address whether there is sufficient employer demand for both, especially bearing in mind employers paying the apprenticeship levy will want to spend these funds first which at present is restricted to apprenticeships rather than other forms of vocational education.

12 The Value of Level 6 First Degrees

Level 6 first degrees dominate the existing Level 4-6 market. There are far more students on Level 6 First Degrees (1.33m) than Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees and Level 4-6 apprenticeships combined (175,000). Not all Level 6 First Degrees, though, are the same. About 50% are in science subjects. The other 50% are what might be called humanity subjects. The question posed by the Secretary of State is whether Level 6 humanity degrees are aligned to the economic and societal needs of the nation.

13 Just More Level 4-6 From Everywhere

One school of thought to emerge in this pamphlet is that humanity First Degrees –

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sociology, psychology, history, classics and Greats for instance – develop skills which are in great demand by the economy. They are on a par with technical skills developed in classroom and work-based settings. And so, with a growing population of 18-24 year olds emerging throughout the 2020s and the need for adults to up-skill and re-skill, the answer is just more Level 4-6 qualifications from everywhere, First Degrees, technical degrees and apprenticeships.

14 A Zero-Sum Reform

And yet, there is another school of thought within this collection of articles that suggests if expansion of Level 4-5 technical education – or indeed Level 4-6 apprenticeships - requires fewer students on Level 6 First Degrees, so be it. In other words, we are in the realms of a zero-sum game. This is sometimes portrayed as robbing HE to pay FE or the fall of universities and the rise of FE colleges. There are growing concerns across the post-16 sector about a post-16 white paper predicated on a zero-sum reform.

15 Level 6 First Degrees by Mode and Age

Participation in Level 4-6 higher education is dominated by Level 6 First Degrees. In turn, full-time (1.2m) rather than not part-time (0.15m) study dominates Level 6 First Degree participation.

Age is also important. There are 1.1m 18-24 year olds studying full-time Level 6 First Degrees but only 50,000 studying them on a part-time basis. For those aged 25 and over, there about 100,000 studying full-time and 90,000 studying part-time.

16 18-24 Year Olds: Full-Time or Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Degrees?

In effect, a replacement strategy implies fewer 18-24 year olds on three-year full-time Level 6 First Degrees. This is because the 18-24 age group is where full-time Level 6 First Degree study is concentrated. But the critical issue to emerge from this pamphlet is whether the aim is to replace full-time three-year Level 6 First Degrees for 18-24 year olds with two-year full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees or jobs with part-time Level 4-5 technical degrees.

Contributors to this pamphlet considering the implications of the reforms to higher technical education from the perspective of the 16-18 sector raise the point that 18-19 year olds in particular need to know precisely what the DfE offer is on Level 4-5 technical education.

18-19 year olds know that the government can guarantee a full-time place to study two-year Level 4-5 technical degrees. A job is not required and so the challenge for the system is the supply of work placements by employers.

But if the offer to 18-19 year olds is a job with part-time Level 4-5 technical degrees, they may judge the offer is just too risky. 18-19 year olds want to know what they are doing. The government can guarantee the learning but not the key component – a job whilst they are learning.

17 A Dual Strategy for Growing Level 4-5 Technical Education

The white paper should adopt a dual strategy for growing participation in Level 4-5 higher technical education.

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For 18-24 year olds, the emphasis should be on full-time two-year Level 4-5 technical education courses bearing in mind the uncertainty from the student perspective of being to secure a job with part-time provision and from the employer perspective the ability offer part-time higher education as well as recruit Level 4-6 apprentices.

For older adults, growth is more likely through part-time higher technical education because participation in full-time higher education is relatively small in particular and participation at all levels of education amongst the working age population is less than 2%. Nevertheless, the post-16 white paper will need to explain whether employers have sufficient demand to recruit adults aged 25 and over for Level 4-6 apprenticeships and part-time Level 4-5 higher education degrees.

On the basis that the white paper endorses an expansionary policy towards Level 4-6 from all sources – apprenticeships, Level 4-5 vocational degrees and Level 6 First Degrees – the achieve growth through higher technical education will require additional incentives. Rather than reduce the cost of provision for full-time and part-time Level 4-5 technical degrees through lower fee-loans, the white paper should nudge additional demand by increasing maintenance support.

Full-time and part-time students on Level 4-5 higher technical courses should be entitled to a higher level of maintenance support over and above Level 6 First Degrees through an extra £1,000 per year either as a loan or a grant.

18 Level 4-5 and the 16-18 System

In many ways, the nature of the offer of higher technical education, the scale of pathway and whether the aim is to increase or replace existing student numbers are some of the most critical issues the post-16 white paper will need to clarify. To be clear, progression onto humanity First Degrees is driven by participation on humanity A levels. A redistribution of 18-24 Level 4-6 provision implies fewer 16-18 year olds studying A level sociology, psychology, politics, and history as well as media studies. The mission of academy and community schools with sixth forms would also have to radically change.

19 Modularising Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees and the Need for Jobs

A key debate within the higher education sector is to develop a more modularised system of degrees at First Degree level. There is great merit in examining how participation in part-time education could be increased through the funding of modules of lowering intensity than 25% of a full-time course with associated access to fee and maintenance loans.

But this refers to a growth agenda of a small proportion for students on Level 6 First Degrees. The critical issue is whether modularisation would apply to the 1m 18-24 year olds on three-year full-time Level 6 First Degrees, more than 80% of whom live away from because of the prospects of a university experience.

If modularisation is to replace full-time Level 6 First Degrees for 18-24 year olds rather than expand them, the post-16 white paper must assess whether the economy will deliver sufficient jobs for young people to combine earning and learning with earning. And, of course, demand by modularised Level 6 First Degrees for 18-24 year olds cannot be

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recession-proofed. Just imagine the number of 18-24 year olds having to drop out of their degrees because they cannot secure a job and therefore live off part-time maintenance loans which are lower than full-time maintenance loans.

20 A Bigger Scandal: 16-24 Year Olds without a Level 3

One of the dangers of starting with Level 4-6 higher education is that there is a presumption that every young person and adult must at some stage reach this level and detracts from the bigger scandal of 16-24 year olds without a Level 3. By age 19, 60% have at least a Level 3 qualification. By age 24, the proportion is 66%. Not only is the 16-18 system producing too few young people with Level 3 qualifications, the 19-24 system is seemingly unable to raise attainment either.

If you do not get a Level 3 by age 19, it is improbable that you will get a first Level 3. This complacency cannot last. Relying on advanced apprenticeships to drive-up Level 3 attainment is not working. And the entitlement to a free education to achieve a first full Level 3 for 19-24 year olds is taken up by fewer than 12,000 young adults. Free education is not enough. The role of active labour market policies is to assist young people to enter jobs – with access to short-term training if needed – rather than to deliver full Level 3 qualifications.

21 Reforming 19-24 Further Education

As a consequence, revolutionary reform of 19-24 vocational FE should be at the heart of the post-16 white paper. Alongside free education to achieve a first full Level 3, 19-24 year olds wishing to study full-time should be entitled to maintenance loans (and passported housing support for those not living with parents). For 19-24 year olds wishing to combine a job with part-time study at level 3, part-time maintenance loans should be made available.

The Review of Post-18 Education and Funding rejected the argument for a national system of maintenance loans and grants to 19-24 year olds on Level 3 programmes because FE students face lower travel costs to college than HE students have to university. But the case for maintenance loans is based on income insecurity from low-paid employment and flexi-jobs which requires 19-24 year olds to put earning before learning as well as preventing full-time study.

22 Adult Training and Retraining: An Even Greater Priority

Where the Covid-19 pandemic and the post-16 white paper becomes co-joined is arguably adult training and retraining. The end of the Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and prospect of mass unemployment with some sectors and jobs never returning and other sectors and jobs coming back very slowly has made adult training and retraining an even greater priority.

23 Ideas for Adult Funding

There is no shortage of ideas. On the FE side, there are calls for extending the entitlement to free education for Level 2 and 3 beyond 19-23 year olds to include adults aged 24 and over. The Adult Education Budget should be doubled and some suggest adding funding from National Retraining Scheme and the National Skills Fund to it as well. All adult FE

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funding could be routed through Individual Skills Accounts or an entitlement to £5,000 could be paid into them to support career change training.

On the HE side, there are calls to look again at expanding part-time higher education through extending fee-loans to fund a second Level 4, 5 or 6 (i.e. ending the ELQ rule). But part-time higher education could be revolutionised if courses could be modularised and fee loans and maintenance support available in smaller amounts to facilitate credit accumulation over time. And from the workplace perspective, the case is being made for paid time off for training and retraining.

But there are lessons too. Not every adult with a Level 6 needs to retrain at Level 6. Sometimes a Level 2 will do including through apprenticeships. And up-skilling does not stop at Level 4 and 5. Sometimes Level 6 is needed, particularly in public service professions.

24 Universal Credit: Training and Claiming, Retraining and Claiming

As the economic impact of the pandemic hits household incomes and jobs, more and more adults who suffer losses in income or become unemployed will need to claim Universal Credit. In effect, participation on DfE training and retraining programmes for adults claiming Universal Credit – whether full-time or part-time at FE colleges or independent training providers – will be determined by the Department for Work and Pensions, the department which pays the cost of Universal Credit. It is imperative that adults are allowed to train and claim, and retrain and claim.

25 A New Deal between DWP and DfE

Indeed, the post-16 white paper must set out a new deal between DWP and DfE over the role Universal Credit paid by DWP to support training and retraining, and the role of maintenance loans and grants paid by DfE to support Level 2 and 3 training either full-time or part-time.

26 A Broad Definition of FE

We must, however, be wary of defining further education and the further education colleges purely in vocational terms. The power of adult education to transform lives, enhance well-being and bind communities should not be forgotten in the quest for aligning the post-16 system ever closer to economic and societal needs.

27 A Professional FE, HE and Independent Provider Workforce

We must remember that participation and achievement across the entire post-16 sector rests in large measure on the skills and professionalism of the FE, HE and independent provider workforce. The post-16 white paper will need to support teachers, lecturers, tutors and trainers alike if the long-term agenda the Secretary of State is due to announce will be implemented in reality.

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The Campaign for Learning works for social and economic inclusion through learning. The Campaign is a specialist in engaging people in learning. We work with partners to research, design and deliver innovative programmes and approaches that support people wherever they are to access life-changing learning opportunities.

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