



## State of the Nation Policy Briefing

**T Levels and Applied Generals** – From discussions with C&G, Pearson and OCR colleagues, DfE is surprised at the strength of support for Applied Generals from other than ‘the usual suspects’ in the consultation earlier in the year. [UVAC submitted a strong response](#) supporting T Levels but emphasising the value of and need to continue to fund AGs. The argument that there should be two principle 16 – 18 pathways - A levels/ “academic” HE and T levels/HTQs remains strongly held by some. We continue to make the argument for choice, while doing all we can to support HEI engagement in T Levels! There seems to be the prospect of a little more flexibility than we had feared.

**Degree Apprenticeship Consultation** – The consultation continues to be delayed. Colleagues from ESFA/DfE say the content i.e., focus and preference for the integrated model has not changed. The delay has been due to Treasury interest. We were informally asked if the consultation should be lengthened until after the Summer. UVAC said the faster the better!

**Apprenticeship Funding and Prioritisation** – ESFA have still not reported on the consultation on eligible and non-eligible funding costs conducted over Christmas. See our response [HERE](#). This in turn has delayed the IfATE’s work on the process for recommending Apprenticeship funding bands. We meet fortnightly with ESFA, and our understanding is the delay concerns affordability. The arguments are returning as to the prioritisation of funding, particularly young vis-à-vis older employees. Social mobility has re-emerged as a major issue. We have produced and had published [several papers/opinions](#) on the value of Higher and Degree Apprenticeship, focusing particularly on social mobility, diversity, public sector services and the Green Jobs agenda. We were also asked to input to the DfE/ESFA Apprenticeship strategy – we provided [a draft response](#) to ESFA colleagues and are consulting on the final version with the sector.

**Apprenticeship Flexibilities** – We continue to work with ESFA to support HEIs utilise the Apprenticeship flexibilities being promoted e.g., front-loaded, accelerated. We

expect the prospectus on flexi-job Apprenticeships to be published early next month. ESFA are keen to work with us to ensure appropriate schemes can link into HEI provision. This will be important for sectors such as creative, digital and agriculture. See our response to the consultation [HERE](#).

**HTQs** – We have had several meetings with IfATE colleagues on the quality mark process, funding incentivisation and dis-incentivisation and the role of PSRBs. IfATE and AO colleagues have also spoken at several of our SoTN webinars. We continue to work with IfATE to ensure HEIs can appropriately engage. On the 11th of June the ESFA launched the Higher Technical Education Provider Growth Fund. The fund is designed to support capacity building, readiness to deliver and grow HTQs.

**Occupational Maps** – IfATE has increased the size of its occupational maps team. We have had several recent meetings and they presented at UVAC's June SoTN Webinar. Occupational maps detail occupational standards and provide pathways between occupations at different levels e.g., technical, higher technical, professional occupations. Occupational standards form the basis of Apprenticeships and are used to develop T levels and AOs/HEIs seeking to have their qualifications secure the IfATE HTQ quality mark at level 4 and 5 have qualifications mapped against occupational standards. From discussions with Jennifer Coupland, we know IfATE will take a more active role in supporting the development of occupational standards where there is a gap. One potential development could be a greater use of occupational standards at level 6 and 7. Currently at level 4 and 5 occupational standards are used as the basis for Apprenticeships and to quality mark HTQs at level 4 and 5. Government has made clear technical qualifications at level 4 and 5 without the quality mark will be financially disincentivised. I suspect some are thinking how the current level 4 and 5 approach could be applied at level 6 and 7 – for some a useful way to regulate content, numbers and funding. UVAC also thinks there could be a greater role for Ofsted and Ofqual potentially.

**Skills Policy and Lifetime Learning Guarantee** – We continue to emphasise the value of skills programmes at level 6 and 7 in meetings and articles/responses. The argument to fund more level 4 and 5 provision at the expense of 6 and 7 ignores the skills gaps/shortages so evident at 6 and 7, key occupational areas e.g., police constable, nurse, social worker, digital, engineering etc. We have also made the case for the need for level 4 and 5 to be delivered by both FE and HE. Some of our FE colleagues argue that this is FE territory. We're reserving some time to work on responses to the Lifetime Learning Guarantee.

On the practical side UVAC continues to focus heavily on audit, compliance and Ofsted inspection. OfS/QAA don't seem to regard our agenda as a priority. We have for example found it difficult to engage OfS/QAA in discussion on EQA arrangements for the EPA of integrated Degree Apprenticeships. It will be interesting to see the respective roles of Ofsted and OfS/QAA in respect of HTQs. The concern is that Government will expect a more Ofsted like approach, especially as they are based/mapped against occupational standards.