



Department
for Education

Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to
section ZA2(9)(b) of the Apprenticeships,
Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009**

March 2023



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Contents

Letter from the Minister of State (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education).....	4
Annex A: Priorities for 2023 – 2024	6
Annex B. IfATE deliverables by the end of this Parliament (2024).....	10
Annex C: Legal basis for the guidance	13
Annex D: Budgets.....	15

Letter from the Minister of State (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education)

Jennifer Coupland
Chief Executive
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
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20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

30th March 2023

Dear Jennifer,

STRATEGIC GUIDANCE TO THE INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION 2023-2024

I am pleased to issue you with strategic guidance for the financial year 2023-2024. The guidance sets out government priorities for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE's) role in apprenticeships and technical education reform.

I believe in creating a ladder of opportunity which everyone in society can climb. Helping people gain new skills, from Level 2 right up to degree apprenticeships, is a key aspect of this vision, leading to a society where everyone can achieve. The government is passionate about delivering this social justice and through an investment of £3.8 billion over this parliament, we have launched a skills revolution that is rocket boosting technical education and means more people can climb that ladder.

IfATE remains central to this work, ensuring that the government's reforms deliver employer-led, high-quality skills provision that meets the needs of a modern economy. Working together, we have made strong progress, but there is more to do, and this guidance re-affirms the government's commitment to building the strong, integrated skills system that delivers for employers, learners and the economy, now and in the future.

My top priorities for IfATE over the coming year are to:

- Continue to play your part in maintaining the quality and relevance of apprenticeships, including through integrating qualifications, so that more people can climb the ladder of opportunity by achieving their apprenticeship.

- Ensure more training and technical education will be aligned to the occupational standards – helping employers to secure the skills they need and learners to access the programmes that will deliver them.
- Ensure that T Level qualifications are of a high quality and that contracts with awarding organisations are managed effectively such that they focus on the quality of products and services.

As Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, you will have my full support in delivering these priorities and I look forward to championing the work you do for employers and learners. I was privileged to meet your apprentice panel, and through engagement with such will help to ensure that our collaborative work delivers for apprentices.

As set out in previous versions of the strategic guidance by my predecessors, IfATE must have regard to the matters set out in this document when performing its functions (the legal basis for the guidance can be found in Annex C). I expect IfATE to include this guidance as part of its business planning process and objective-setting. I look forward to receiving updates on progress through our regular conversations; and through your quarterly performance reviews.

I look forward to continuing to work with you as you deliver against these important priorities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

Annex A: Priorities for 2023 – 2024

Objective One: Create an employer-led, future-facing, and high-quality skills system based on occupational standards.

1. Use employer-led occupational standards to underpin all technical education and training products, increasing employer confidence, understanding and investment in these skills products.
2. In overseeing the skills landscape, take a longer-term view to ensure all technical education and training within its remit:
 - Is informed by and is responsive to high-quality jobs and skills data, including through close working with the Unit for Future Skills.
 - Meets sector needs and is applicable to a wide range of employers delivering good jobs and higher productivity.
 - Promotes achievement, upskilling and reskilling through its content and foundation knowledge, including digital, English and maths which is occupationally relevant.
 - Sets the foundations for long term growth by meeting the emerging and future skills needs of the economy, including digital and green technologies.
3. Develop new occupational standards and revise existing occupational standards where there is strong evidence of employer demand and economic need. Rationalise standards where there is not.
4. Using occupational standards, occupational maps and other necessary tools, communicate clearly to individuals and employers the career paths that exist and progression opportunities that technical education provides as part of them.
5. Work with others to develop technical education products that can be trusted and relied on. Employers should be able to rely on these to indicate valuable capability. Individuals should be able to use them to progress through their career.
6. Develop an approach to oversight reflecting IfATE's oversight powers as set out in the Apprenticeship, Children and Learning Act 2009 section ZA2A. Further establish the relationship with Ofqual as described in the Act in section A2D11, alongside the relationship with other key partners including the Department for Education, Office for Students and Ofsted.

Objective Two: Develop, review and update apprenticeships so that they are streamlined, high quality, well-assessed and responsive to employer need.

Streamlined and high quality

7. Implement responsive arrangements to review, update and maintain the content of apprenticeships, so that they are more relevant and responsive to the needs of a wider range of employers and learners and promote achievement. Within this, prioritise:
 - the integration of End-Point Assessment (EPA) with degree and (subject to the outcome of your current consultation) other mandated qualifications, so that more learners benefit from streamlined arrangements which promote apprenticeship achievement.
 - simplifying the apprenticeship landscape, by taking opportunities to merge or rationalise occupational standards so that a single standard offers a range of potential options in which to specialise, making the system more flexible and easier to navigate for employers and learners alike.
8. Through its joint leadership of the Quality Alliance with the Department, work with organisations across the sector to raise the quality of the apprentice experience and ensure that the employer voice remains central to the programme.
9. Establish a process to identify and strengthen occupationally relevant maths content within occupational standards, so that apprentices continue to be supported to develop and successfully apply maths knowledge during the achievement of their apprenticeship. Within this, identify what resourcing is required to assess standards and implement the necessary updating of maths content.

Well-assessed

10. Ensure that all apprentices receive consistently high-quality EPA, focusing on streamlining and improving assessments plans to ensure that these are proportionate, sustainable, and deliverable for apprentices and End-Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs). Ensure that external quality assurance (EQA) is conducted in line with the IfATE EQA Framework.
11. Work collaboratively with the Department and EQA providers to create governance structures to support the provision of EPA where there is a gap, or a potential risk of lack of capacity in the market, by exploring and supporting alternative options, such as the Department's Alternative Framework, or revisiting the standard requirements.

Responsive

12. Deliver risk-based funding band recommendations, both accelerated and annually, prioritising quality, uptake, affordability, and value for money.
13. Support the department to ensure that standards can be delivered more flexibly to align with the current and future changes to the Department funding model.
14. Provide advice and support on the simplification and streamlining of funding for Apprenticeships to support high-value provision relevant to the labour market.

Objective Three: To develop, review and update all Technical Education products so that they are streamlined, high quality, support progression, are well assessed and responsive to employer need.

Level 2 and 3 technical qualifications

15. Work with the Department to finalise and launch the Level 2 approvals process and criteria.
16. Deliver an effective and efficient approvals process, ensuring that all qualifications approvals are processed in line with agreed timelines and in line with agreed approach and criteria.

T Levels

17. Work with the Department to provide advice and assistance on a range of matters relating to T Level delivery, and Technical Education reform more broadly. Ensure that T Level Technical Qualifications (TQs) are of a high quality and developed to agreed timescales.
18. Work collaboratively with Ofqual as it implements regulatory arrangements to establish and maintain high standards for technical qualifications, including recognition of Awarding Organisations (AOs).
19. Engage with a wide variety of employers and other stakeholders to ensure that T Levels are regarded as high-quality and enable progression directly into skilled employment in relevant occupations, higher apprenticeships, or onto further study as appropriate.
20. Where the Secretary of State has agreed that new T Levels should be developed, ensure that development of high quality TQs for these is undertaken to agreed timescales.
21. Build improvements based on previous experience into the processes for procuring awarding organisations for future T Levels, ensuring that the AOs procured have the capacity to deliver. Ensure that contracts with them are managed effectively such that they focus on the quality of products and services, specifically to ensure that T Level assessments are effectively quality assured.
22. For each T Level, map possible progression routes into apprenticeships indicating if an apprenticeship is not applicable or accelerated. Highlight the areas needed for further development to support initial assessments, and to inform and publish minimum expected reductions to durations for accelerated apprenticeships. Engage with work to support progression, including consideration of cost reductions and utilising live data.
23. Ensure that progression profiles are developed and published to agreed timescales, that feedback is sought from a wide variety of stakeholders, and that they are updated and improved as regularly as necessary.
24. Consider the options for, and implications of, accelerated apprenticeships when designing new T Level TQs and revising existing ones.

25. Develop progression pathways for any other IfATE approved skills offers within the scope of IfATE's statutory powers and duties that are based on the occupational standards.

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)

26. Work closely with the Department to establish and maintain an effective and sustainable approval process which offers appropriate opportunities for Awarding Bodies to submit qualifications against all technical routes in scope beyond cycle 4 roll out.
27. Continue delivering and refining an effective HTQ approvals process ensuring that all qualifications are processed in line with agreed timelines, approach, and criteria.
28. Work closely with the Department to identify occupational routes that have low, or no, relevant level 4-5 standards. Work with the Department to analyse where there are suitable higher technical occupations missing from the occupational map and as such indicates a standard could be developed, working with employers.
29. Engage with a wide variety of awarding bodies across all occupational routes to increase the volume and quality of applications in order to meet agreed success measures and to support the raising of awareness of HTQs amongst awarding bodies, providers and students. Additionally, engage with a wide variety of employers to raise awareness and promote HTQs as a qualification that supports recruitment and progression.
30. Engage closely with the Department to support the government's commitments in the LLE consultation response - in particular, the transfer of ALL-funded technical qualifications into the LLE in 2025, and work towards establishment and resourcing of a gateway for new and upgraded technical qualifications into the LLE from 2025 onward.

Skills Bootcamps

31. Provide advice and assistance to the Department to strengthen the alignment of employer led work-based training to Occupational Routes and Pathways, and on Skills Bootcamps links to Pathway to Accelerated Apprenticeships (PtAA). Explore how Skills Bootcamps can be communicated alongside the occupational maps to enhance coherence of technical skill training offers.
32. Work with the Department on exploring options to pilot the procurement of Skills Bootcamps delivering emerging skills that are not yet included in occupational standards and for incorporating employer feedback into Skills Bootcamps policy development.

Annex B. IfATE deliverables by the end of this Parliament (2024)

Objective One: Create an employer-led, future-facing, and high-quality skills system based on occupational standards.

By the end of this parliament, IfATE is expected to deliver occupational standards that are:

- High quality, streamlined and maintained to protect quality and prioritised for review where necessary to meet the objectives in this guidance.
- Widely used and recognised by employers of all sizes.
- Available in all identified unique occupational standards at the appropriate levels which reflect the current and emerging requirements of employers (established through a responsive review process).
- Published within occupational maps which provide a coherent picture of the technical education landscape, the options that relate to individual occupations and associated progression pathways including accelerated apprenticeships. IfATE should have processes in place to ensure that the maps are updated on a regular basis and that they are continuing to meet users' needs.
- Developed through engagement with a wide variety of employers (large and SMEs) so that each sector is represented effectively in all product and process development.
- Embedded in clearly demonstrated mapped progression routes through IfATE's technical education products, which join up the skills landscape and consider prior learning.
- Overseen through established and embedded processes that are employer-led, collaborative, inclusive and responsive to the changing skills needs of the labour market, including emergent skills where demand is expected in the future.

Objective two: To develop, review and update apprenticeships so that they are employer-led, streamlined, high quality, well-assessed and responsive to employer need.

By the end of this parliament, IfATE is expected to:

- Have robust EQA processes in place with Ofqual, OfS and the small number of other providers, to manage the EQA of EPA delivered by EPAOs. This should include agreed reporting mechanisms to the DfE.

- Be able to demonstrate apprenticeship assessment plans are fit for purpose and consistently quality assured.
- Raise the quality of the apprenticeship experience and support the government's aim of reaching a 67% achievement rate on apprenticeship standards by 2024/25, through its joint leadership of the Quality Alliance with the Department and making best use of its available levers.
- Have continued with the ongoing development of assessment methodology and delivery, aimed at improving quality of assessment, apprentice experience and value to the employer.
- Have delivered risk-based, timely apprenticeship funding band reviews, prioritised to support uptake, affordability, and value for money, including a process that continues to include channels for early review based on market and the Department feedback.
- Using evidence, ensure that its new funding band recommendation methodology is supporting improved transparency, consistency and value for money.
- Have assisted the Department's aim to increase the take-up of flexibilities in apprenticeships, including acceleration following entry from other skills programmes, so that employers, providers and apprentices are informed and able to tailor apprenticeships to meet their needs.
- Have considered the impact and implications of accelerated apprenticeships in the development and management of T Level Technical Qualifications.

Objective Three: To develop, review and update all Technical Education products so that they are employer led, streamlined, high quality, support progression, well assessed, and responsive to employer need.

By the end of this parliament, IfATE is expected to:

- Review all the level 2 and 3 technical qualifications put forward into approval processes and, where they meet the set requirements, approve them ahead of the Department considering them for funding for the 2025-26 academic year.
- Support awarding organisations to engage effectively with IfATE prior to submission of technical qualifications for approval.
- Start to implement the review process for level 2 and 3 technical qualifications as part of the approval process for the 2026-27 academic year.

- Publish information on its approach to the periodic review of approved qualifications and its moratorium function.
- With AOs, develop high quality TQs for T Levels which are approved with sufficient time for providers to prepare for delivery, making qualification materials available 9-12 months ahead of teaching.
- Undertake a review of wave 1-4 T Level Technical Qualifications.
- Develop a process for collecting feedback on T Level specification content that can be shared with AOs for ensuring consistency in their content reviews.
- Ensure that Guide and Grade Standard Exemplification Materials for Occupational Specialisms for each assessment series are validated by a wide range of employers and therefore support public confidence in T Level results.
- Continue with the procurement for future T Levels, ensuring that lessons are learned from previous procurements and improvements identified are made.
- Improve contract management and monitoring arrangements with AOs, specifically to quality assure arrangements for developing, marking, and grading T Level TQ assessments.
- Develop and publish T Level progression profiles for all Wave 1-4 T Levels by June 2023, for T Levels taught from 2024 by autumn 2023 and for T Levels taught from 2025 by autumn 2024.
- Develop a process for monitoring the effectiveness of published progression profiles including mechanisms for collecting and acting on feedback.
- Work with AOs to ensure that qualification materials and guidance for employers, providers, and learners are updated to reflect changes to T Level industry placement delivery approaches.
- Develop and publish arrangements for the approval of HTQs across all routes in scope of future cycles.
- Achieving the target of receiving HTQ applications against 70% of occupational standards in scope for each occupational route rolled out, with flexibilities to be agreed with the Department on a route-by-route basis where appropriate.

Annex C: Legal basis for the guidance

The strategic guidance is a 'statutory notice' to which IfATE must have regard and is given by the Secretary of State under section ZA2(2) to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). Under ZA2(9) of the 2009 Act, a copy of this notice will be laid before Parliament and published on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>. IfATE is legally obliged to report to the Secretary of State on its activities once a year through its Annual Report.

Strategic guidance enables government to give IfATE steers and advice about elements of policy that it considers fundamental to which IfATE must have regard. IfATE is an independent organisation, able to choose how to operationalise that advice.

The Secretary of State is able to update and reissue this guidance at any time, usually only when further clarity or policy changes are required. Where possible, changes will be made once a year.

IfATE has a number of core functions set through legislation:

- an oversight duty in relation to the technical education and training within IfATE's remit;
- determining the occupations in relation to which it may be appropriate for people to undertake apprenticeships or obtain qualifications and publishing occupational maps in relation to the 15 occupational routes.
- setting quality criteria for the development and approval of all occupational standards and apprenticeship assessment plans;
- reviewing, rejecting or approving (and publishing) occupational standards and apprenticeship assessment plans;
- for each occupational standard, describing the occupation and the outcomes which a person will be expected to attain to successfully achieve the standard.
- ensuring all apprenticeship assessments are quality assured;
- specifying and publishing categories of qualification for approval;
- operating an approvals process and a range of technical qualifications (including T Level technical qualifications, Higher Technical Qualifications, and technical qualifications at levels 2 and 3) based on occupational standards, maintaining their content and quality.
- operating the procurement process for T Level technical qualifications, developing the technical qualification in conjunction with Awarding Organisations, considering and approving additional steps towards occupational competence and
- awarding and managing the contracts which will involve Awarding Organisations delivering the technical qualification within T Levels.

In addition, IfATE will provide advice and assistance to the Secretary of State in relation to a number of matters including:

- funding provision for apprenticeship training;
- technical education reform and related funding issues
- the T Level transition framework
- the introduction and sequencing of T Levels and
- higher technical education.

Annex D: Budgets

If ATE's budget for FY23-24 is set out below:

Area of business	FY23-24 (£)
Admin	11,643,000
Programme	19,176,000
Capital	1,895,000
Total Budget	32,714,000



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