



Department
for Education

Review of higher technical education: interim impact assessments

**Accompanying document for the
government consultation on the review
of higher technical education at levels 4
and 5**

July 2019

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Overview

Following the report of the Sainsbury Panel on Technical Education and the Post-16 Skills Plan, government is proposing how to extend reforms to higher technical education (HTE). As part of this government launched a review of HTE in England in October 2017. The aim of this review is to ensure that education at level 4-5 meets the needs of students and the economy.

Getting quality right up-front is crucial. A high-quality technical education offer will assist in creating the needed prestige to gain employer and student buy-in.

The general and equality impact assessments set out in this document have been prepared to accompany and be read alongside the consultation linked to the review.

Both assessments are interim assessments only. This is because our consultation does not set out firm proposals for change on which full and detailed impact assessments can be based.

Once views on our proposed reforms have been considered we will bring forward our specific proposals for change. A clearer assessment of impacts, including equality impacts, will be possible using the framework set out in this document.

Purpose of publication

This document sets out the impact assessments for the HTE consultation in England.

Structure of the document

The document covers:

- Part 1 – General impact assessment
- Part 2 – Equality impact assessment

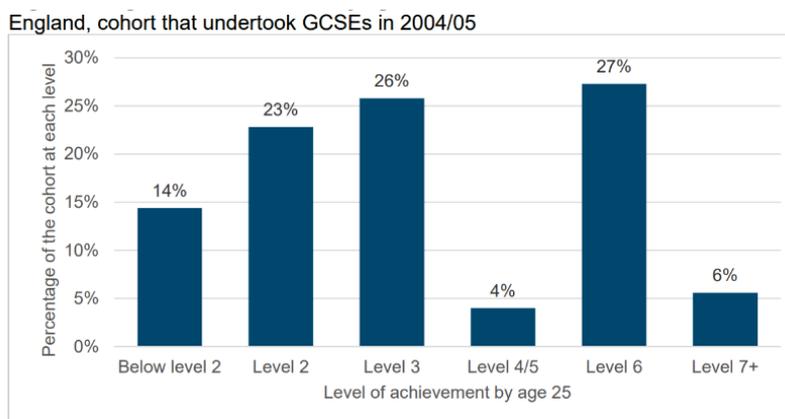
Part 1 – General impact assessment

Background

1. Level 4-5 provision is delivered across Further and Higher Education (FE/HE) and includes a range of qualifications and duration of study. In England, as in most other countries, level 4-5 provision is overwhelmingly technical.¹ This means that it provides participants with occupationally-specific, professional knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs). Nearly 90% of all classroom-based level 4-5 provision maps to a technical route.²

2. However, the range of terminology, qualification types, delivery styles and provider types at level 4-5 creates a complex landscape. Learners and employers are not always aware or able to navigate the options available at this level.³ Additionally, there is currently no national assurance that every higher technical qualification (HTQ) is meeting employer needs. Level 4-5 provision continues to represent the smallest proportion of the whole English education system.⁴ Uptake of qualifications at these levels, and the resulting supply of skills, is low compared to other levels.

Figure 1 Highest level achieved by age 25⁵



Source: Longitudinal Education Outcomes Study.

1. Age is based on academic age, which is age at the start of the academic year, 31 August.

3. There are numerous reasons to suggest why this gap is unusual including labour market analysis which shows that the demand for higher technical skills, which level 4-5 education could supply, is growing.⁶ Further details on this skills gap can be found in the Case for Change document published alongside the HTE consultation.

¹ [The missing middle](#) (Simon Field 2018)

² [Mapping the higher technical landscape](#) (RCU 2018)

³ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

⁴ [Good practice in level 4-5 qualifications](#) (DfE 2018)

⁵ [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

⁶ [Skills beyond school](#) (OECD 2014); [Engineering UK 2018: The state of engineering](#) (Engineering UK 2018)

Rationale for intervention

4. Evidence suggests that the low supply of high quality level 4-5 skills is caused by market failures⁷ that dissuade students from studying at this level. These failures warrant government intervention. Correcting them can have positive impacts such as increased productivity for employers and the economy as well as positive wage returns for individuals, as highlighted in the case for change. Market failures that prompt government intervention include:

- **Information failures** – There is a lack of awareness of qualifications at these levels among students and employers, those that are aware find it hard to assess their quality.⁸ A report by UCAS finds that there is a lack of visibility of options available outside of the traditional route of A Levels to 3/4-year degrees.⁹ In 2016/17 there were over 4,000 different level 4-5 qualifications available to students¹⁰ but no recognised brand or consistent quality assurance process making for a confusing landscape - especially when compared to the established, well understood offer of an undergraduate degree. This makes it more difficult for students to make fully informed choices on what to study, and the same applies to employers when choosing who to hire.
- **Financial disincentives & asymmetries** - Financial disincentives to studying at levels 4-5 can skew choices of providers and students. For students, the eligibility for student finance, as well as differing funding options depending on qualification type, can encourage them to study degrees instead.¹¹ For Higher Education (HE) providers, higher fee income from degrees¹²¹³ may mean they are encouraged to focus provision there. For Further Education (FE) providers, the high costs for staff and equipment can act as a barrier to provision at level 4-5, they tend to focus on provision at lower levels which accounts for a large majority of their total provision.¹⁴

⁷ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

⁸ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

⁹ [Progression pathways 2017: pathways through higher education](#) (UCAS 2017)

¹⁰ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

¹¹ [Remaking Tertiary Education: can we create a system that is fair and fit for purpose?](#) (Alison Wolf 2016)

¹² This is compounded by the fact that, on average, degree study is longer in duration than level 4-5 qualifications

¹³ [Higher Education Tuition Fee Prices](#) (DfE 2019)

¹⁴ [Level 4 and 5 provision in England: provider perspectives](#) (York Consulting 2018)

- **Equity arguments** - For students who want to progress to a degree, there is a clear offer for them that is well understood culturally and financially.¹⁵ For students wanting to do HTE, a consistently high quality offer across all qualifications and provision does not exist. This fails the individuals themselves, and as shown in the case for change, causes problems in the wider economy. It means that individuals stopping at level 3, could benefit from higher earnings and labour market outcomes by studying levels 4 and 5, and, for middle GCSE attainment students, returns at levels 4 and 5 are similar to those for level 6.¹⁶ Additionally, levels 4 and 5 have a higher proportion of students in the lower deprivation bands across the deprivation scale, meaning increasing access will support those with a more difficult start in life.¹⁷

Policy objectives and intended effects

5. Our proposed approach is to prioritise the quality of HTE and ensure course provision is the best it can be – and that it is recognised as such by students and employers. To do this we are focusing on ensuring that a coherent high quality offer exists to meet the needs of employers and wider economy.

6. Qualifications will be approved by the Institute against existing, employer-led occupational standards. Quality assurance of HE providers delivering reformed HTQs will be done through the Office for Students (OfS).

7. Our proposals therefore lean into existing frameworks with the intention of minimising additional regulatory burden. Building on examples of high quality qualifications and providers that already exist, we are taking an incentivised approach to system reform.

What we are consulting on

8. We are seeking views on the following areas:

- Approval process of HTQs against national employer-led occupational standards
- Quality assurance and regulation of providers
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG) for students and employers

9. Our consultation welcomes views from anyone with an interest in Higher Technical

¹⁵ [Progression pathways 2017: pathways through higher education](#) (UCAS 2017)

¹⁶ [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

¹⁷ [Mapping the higher technical landscape](#) (RCU 2018)

Education in England. Interested parties include the following:

- Employers
- Awarding Organisations/Bodies
- Schools
- FE providers including colleges and independent training providers
- HE providers
- Adult Education providers
- Teachers and trainers
- Head teachers and college principals
- Equality organisations
- Governors of education and skills providers
- Local Enterprise Partnerships

Other interested parties may include: local authorities, students, young people, parents and carers, careers advisers, unions, representative organisations, mayoral combined authorities, professional bodies, voluntary sector organisations and academics.

Groups affected and likely impacts

10. The following section considers the main potential costs and benefits of reforms to HTE and how they may affect key groups. The impacts are presented in a descriptive way, as it is not possible to quantify them at this stage. These assessments are relative to a 'do nothing' scenario where no changes are made in the level 4-5 space. Ultimately, overall impacts will depend on the policy proposals taken forward following the consultation.

11. We expect that there will be four main groups affected by the outcome of the HTE review: students, providers, awarding bodies and employers. Within the overall group of students, it will be important to identify groups of students which share protected characteristics and whether any such groups may be particularly adversely or positively affected by any policy change. We consider this further in Part 2 below, where we set out an initial equality impact assessment.

Costs and benefits

12. The costs and benefits will ultimately depend on the behavioural responses to reforms. For example, impacts will depend on the response of students considering enrolment in level 4-5 courses leading to these qualifications, and what they would have done otherwise. We have commissioned more targeted user research to enrich our analysis. This is a long-term undertaking.

13. Additionally, impacts will be dependent on the choices of awarding bodies to seek approval of their qualifications against occupational standards as well as providers to seek quality assurance for their higher technical provision. These responses are likely to be interdependent: for example, the courses that are offered by providers will depend upon what qualifications are created and approved, and students can only take qualifications offered by providers.

14. We also know it will be very important to ensure that HTE is properly funded. The Post-18 Review panel have recommended that these approved qualifications should be entitled to the same tuition fee support and teaching grant, and equivalent maintenance support, as level 6

qualifications.

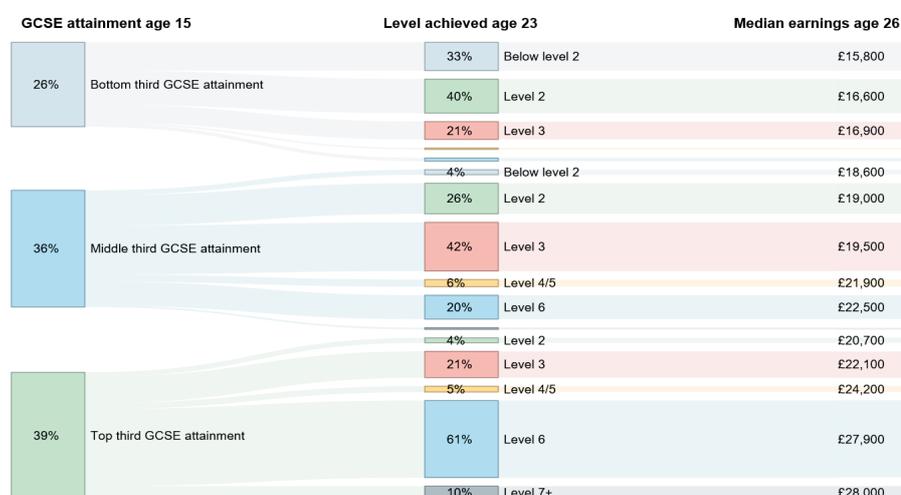
15. The intended benefits of level 4-5 reform proposals cover a range of areas and include the provision of better quality HTE, student skills aligning accurately to employer needs, and increased take up of HTQs. The proposals discussed below are initial ideas which will be discussed more fully in the HTE consultation. The costs and benefits will be dependent on the results of this consultation and government’s final decision for reforms.

Costs and benefits for students

16. Completing a level 4-5 course provides an opportunity for individuals to gain better economic outcomes in life. We anticipate that students would benefit from higher quality education, leading to improved progression to higher education and higher wage returns.

17. Some students who currently stop at level 3 and leave education are likely to have the ability to continue their studies to level 4-5. Of the cohort undertaking GCSEs in 2004/05 around 40% of students who attained good GCSEs did not go on to achieve higher than a level 3 by the age of 25.^{18 19} The analysis also looked at the median earnings of this cohort and showed that those who have achieved level 4-5 qualifications by the age of 23 have a median income around £2,000 higher aged 26 than those whose highest qualification is at L3.

Figure 2 Median earnings by age 26 by highest level of achievement age 23²⁰



18. Those with a level 4-5 qualification are also consistently more likely than those with level 2 or level 3 qualifications to be in sustained employment²¹.

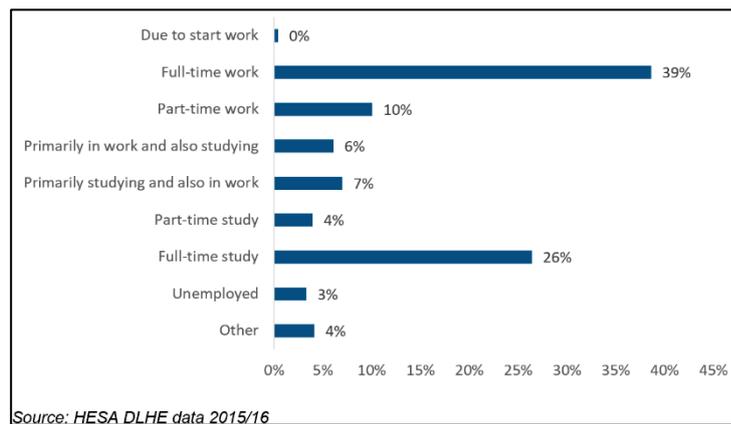
¹⁸ Good GCSEs = Five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C, new GCSE grade 9-4

¹⁹ [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

²⁰ [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

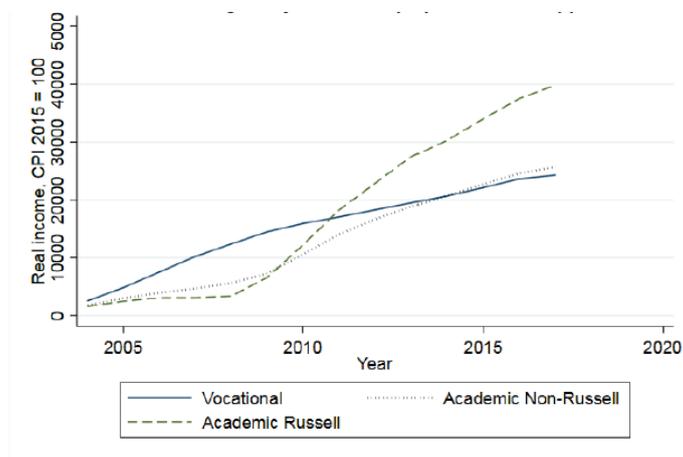
²¹ [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

Figure 3 Destinations of learners²²



19. Additionally, the reforms could result in students studying at level 4-5 when they would have otherwise studied at level 6, this may be because it is better aligned to the technical skills required for the job. Evidence shows that graduate level skills do not always align directly with the skills required in technician roles, particularly in engineering-related occupations where technicians are likely to have expertise in particular processes or instruments that graduates lack.²³ Analyses by the Centre for Vocational Education Research looked in detail at the returns to different qualifications achieved between ages 16 and 24, and found that level 4-5 (Vocational) can see similar returns to level 6 (Academic Non-Russell).

Figure 4 Earnings trajectories by qualification type²⁴²⁵



20. Students are also likely to benefit from an easier to navigate and high quality level 4-5

²² [Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25](#) (DfE 2018)

²³ [Delivering STEM skills for the economy](#) (NAO 2018)

²⁴ [A comparison of earnings related to higher level vocational/technical and academic education](#) (CVER 2019)

²⁵ This conflates different results by learner characteristics and subject type.

qualifications market. This will enable students to make better-informed choices between different higher education options. Making the right choices maximises student utility, both by studying something their skills are best suited to and they most enjoy and by achieving better employment outcomes. As highlighted, this is likely to increase both their wage returns and wellbeing.

Costs and benefits for Awarding Bodies (ABs)

21. ABs will be able to have their qualifications approved against national employer-led standards giving them a clear signalling mechanism to flag the quality of their qualifications. There may be an initial cost in terms of additional time and resourcing for ABs to familiarise themselves and prepare qualifications for the approval process. However, ABs will be able to put forward existing qualifications for approval, minimising the cost for most ABs.

22. The level 4-5 reforms are intended to increase overall uptake of qualifications, so we expect that a clearer high-quality offer has the potential to increase demand for those that are approved, increasing their potential revenue.

23. However, ABs which focus on level 4-5 qualifications, and which do not secure Institute approval, may experience a reduction in demand for such qualifications. This has the potential to impact their business and place in the market. However we expect this impact to be minimal as level 4-5 provision comprised only 2% (111,420 learners) of all AO-accredited qualifications awarded in FE and 3% (75,632 learners) of all HE learners.²⁶

Costs and benefits to providers

24. Higher technical education is delivered across a range of provider types.²⁷ By aligning quality assurance checks of level 4-5 providers, there will be a clearer signalling mechanism to flag the quality of their provision.

25. The aim of the level 4-5 reforms is to not only improve the quality of qualifications and providers at this level, but also to improve the awareness, understanding and value of provision amongst students, prospective students and employers. These reforms are also intended to increase overall uptake of provision, and so we expect that an increase in demand for high-quality providers will result in an increase in potential revenue.

26. There may be some providers that do not meet the relevant quality standard, and are therefore not eligible to deliver Institute-approved qualifications or access HE funding incentives. This could result in losses to business because providers may be unable to recruit students to take HTQs that do not have Institute approval and which therefore do not give access to HE student finance. There may also be an initial familiarisation cost for providers seeking to be subject to the additional specific ongoing conditions of registration required for access to grant funding and student support for HTQs.

27. A clearer signal of quality could cause students to defer applying for courses if they are aware that providers will be offering approved courses in the following academic year. This could result in an initial dip in student numbers followed by a large increase. However, level 4-5

²⁶ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

²⁷ Further details on this skills gap can be found in the Case for Change document published alongside the HTE consultation.

programmes are a small part of HEIs and FE providers' overall offer.²⁸ We expect any impact from possible student deferral to be slight in the initial years of HTQ reform as we will be taking a phased approach to qualification roll out. We also expect any adverse impacts to be mitigated by clear timely communications to providers. This will allow them to promote understanding and help to balance any fluctuation of intake.

Costs and benefits to employers

28. Working Futures estimates show that Associate Professional and Technical occupations will experience over 10% growth up to 2024 from 2014.²⁹ Projected skills needs are particularly pressing in certain sectors.³⁰ Evidence from the advanced manufacturing sector shows employers are struggling to recruit suitable qualified technicians in a number of industries.³¹ The acute shortage of technician-level STEM skills can be attributed to an undersupply of people with level 3-5 vocational qualifications over the last 20 years.³²

29. Employers are therefore likely to benefit from a simpler, easier to navigate, high quality level 4-5 qualifications market as well as a higher volume of students taking approved qualifications. This in turn should allow them to increase their productivity, with fewer resources spent on finding the right skills match.

30. Any transition period of training, which employers may encounter by employing over or under qualified individuals at level 3 or level 6 with more generic qualifications may no longer be required. Research for the Gatsby Foundation has found that of the workforce employed in science, engineering and technology (SET) occupations generally requiring level 4 qualifications, more than 20 percent were qualified to level 6 and above. There was also a significant proportion of the workforce – more than 30 percent – only qualified up to level 2 or 3.³³ Employers will be able to identify qualifications that provide occupation specific training therefore recruiting candidates with occupational competence. This may be particularly valuable for small and medium enterprises who have a limited capacity to train new staff.

31. We are asking for views in the consultation on the importance of including smaller, more specialised qualifications as part of the Institute approval process. This will help us assess the impact to employers within niche industry areas who may require more specialised or smaller qualifications, which may not be delivered widely. We are also asking for views on whether it would be beneficial to permit Awarding Bodies to include a certain amount of occupationally-relevant content in a qualification, which is not aligned to occupational standards. This could be

²⁸ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE 2019)

²⁹ [UK labour market projections: 2014 to 2024](#) (UKCES 2016)

• ³⁰ For example, analysis conducted on behalf of Engineering UK shows a net requirement of ~400,000 associate professional occupations in the engineering sector over 2014 to 2024. [Engineering UK 2018: The state of engineering](#) (Engineering UK 2018)

³¹ [Treating students fairly: The economics of post-school education](#) (Lord's Economic Affairs Committee 2018)

³² [Delivering STEM skills for the economy](#) (NAO 2018)

³³ [SET based technicians: Lessons from the UK and European Labour Force Survey](#) (Institute for Employment Studies 2010)

beneficial to employers by responding to specific local and sectoral skills needs.

32. We recognise that employers may face initial costs in familiarising themselves with the new level 4-5 qualification landscape, particularly if they do not currently recruit at this level. These employers may also require additional resource to support workplace learning and understand KSBs relevant to a role. We are proposing that employers are given information, advice and guidance to support them with this process. Further details are provided in the HTE consultation document.

33. In situations where approved standards for an occupation do not exist, employers who are part of trailblazer groups would need to assist in developing standards that reflect KSBs. However, these employers are likely to benefit from being associated with HTQ development.

Costs and benefits to others

34. As part of our early assessment of impacts, we have considered and factored in the following:

- **Impacts on families.** We anticipate a positive impact from our proposals on family relationships or functions. The changes to the level 4-5 market are intended to lead to improved educational and employment outcomes for students and in turn, deliver job, career and wage benefits for individuals. Although such benefits will only be realised over time, we will continue to consider these potential impacts as part of our review.
- **Impacts on regional, city, mayoralty and sectoral interests.** Level 4-5 reforms are intended to better meet the local skills needs of areas, which should make a positive contribution to productivity.

Conclusions and next steps

35. It is not possible at this stage to assess the precise impacts of the review given the preliminary nature of this consultation. We will apply the cost-benefit framework set out in this impact assessment as we continue to develop our policy proposals, to help to ensure that any changes represent a net benefit.

36. We are inviting respondents to the consultation to provide views on potential impacts of proposals to the level 4-5 market. This will play an important role as we consider policy developments, and a new impact assessment will be developed, highlighting our assessment of the likely impacts of the specific policy.

Part 2 – Equality impact assessment

The public sector equality duty

37. Under Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010, the Secretary of State has a duty to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

38. The relevant ‘protected characteristics’ for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnicity)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Who will be most affected by Higher Technical Education reforms?

39. For the purpose of the analysis, we have defined the group most likely to be impacted by policy reforms as broadly the same as those currently studying level 4-5 qualifications. We anticipate that reforms are likely to increase take up of level 4-5 from outside of this group.

40. The Department for Education commissioned ICF consulting to undertake a study to examine the functioning of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market, the results were laid out in the report: ‘Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market’. This analysis includes a breakdown of student characteristics for those studying level 4-5 in 2016/17. Available data also is split between qualifications accredited by:

- independent awarding organisations (AO accredited)
- HE and FE providers with degree awarding powers (HE accredited).

41. We have pulled out where there are any substantive differences between qualification types.

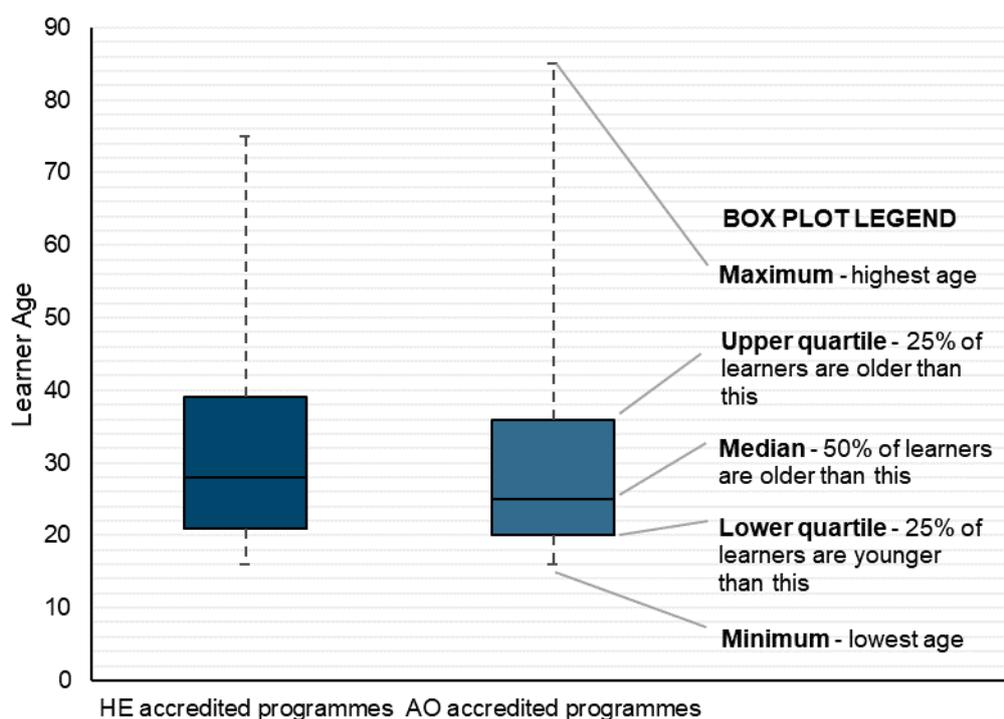
42. These descriptive statistics set out what we know about the current level 4-5 learner

population, we have laid this out in the following section, this acts as a basis for the equalities analysis highlighting where any 'protected characteristics' are likely to be impacted.

Age

43. The mean age of students undertaking level 4-5 qualifications is 30, which is broadly consistent for awarding organisation (AO) and HE accredited qualifications. As shown below in Figure 5, there is a relatively narrow distribution of level 4-5 students. The lower quartile for both AO and HE accredited qualifications is around the age of 20, while upper quartile is around the age of 40. This would be expected from qualifications undertaken by a high proportion of career changers and students in employment.³⁴

Figure 5 Ages of level 4-5 students by type of programme accreditation



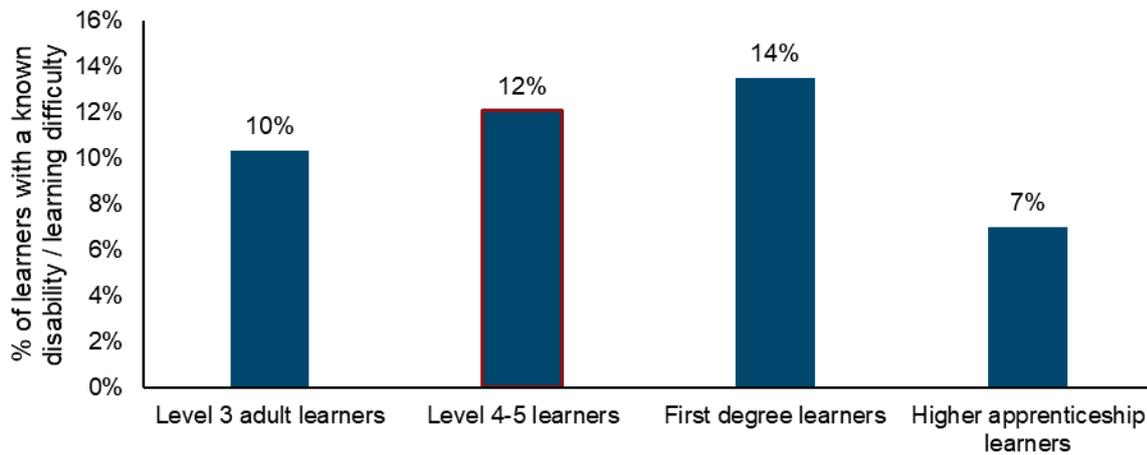
Disability

44. The proportion of Level 4-5 students with a disability or learning difficulty is around 12%, and this figure is relatively consistent for AO and HE accredited programmes. As shown below in Figure 6, Level 4-5 qualifications attract a higher share of students with a disability or learning difficulty than Level 3 adult (19+) programmes (10%) and higher apprenticeship programmes (7%), but slightly less than first degrees (14%).³⁵

³⁴ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE, 2019)

³⁵ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE, 2019)

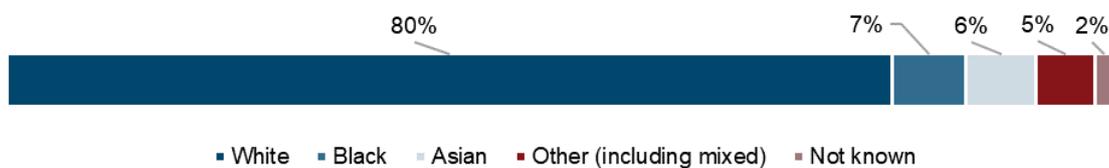
Figure 6 Proportion of level 4-5 students with a learning difficulty or disability compared to other programmes³⁶



Race (including ethnicity)

45. As shown in Figure 7, around a fifth (18%) of level 4-5 students are ethnic minorities. This is higher than the proportion of ethnic minorities in the workforce (15%)³⁷ and, higher than the proportion of ethnic minority FE and HE students (16%). The difference is statistically significant³⁸.

Figure 7 Ethnicity of level 4-5 students



Sex

46. Around 56% of level 4-5 students are women, and 44% are men. Notably, the gender split differs between HE and AO accredited programmes. In HE programmes, around 61% of level 4-5 students are women, while in AO accredited programmes women comprised only 52% of all students. This is likely to be attributable to differences in the subjects that these providers deliver. As shown below in Figure 8, the split between the sexes at level 4-5 is in line with students on first degree programmes, and there is a higher proportion of men studying level 4-5 qualifications compared to level 3 adult (19+) and higher apprenticeship programmes³⁹.

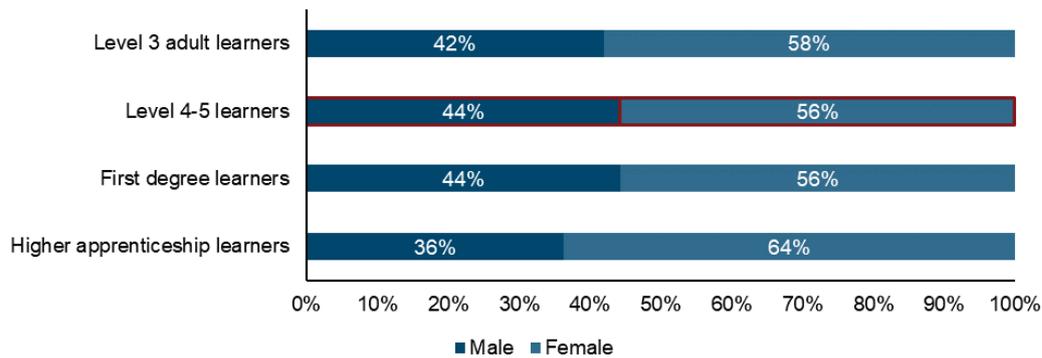
³⁶ Percentages based on the total number of students with a known disability/learning difficulty/health problem status for each programme type in England.

³⁷ Annual Population Survey (APS) data 2016/17

³⁸ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE, 2019)

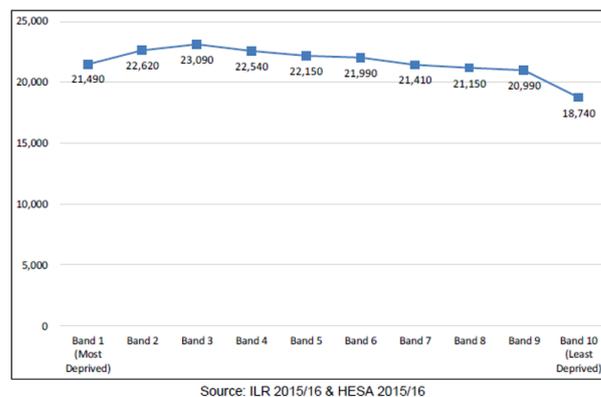
³⁹ [Review of the level 4-5 qualification and provider market](#) (DfE, 2019)

Figure 8 Gender split of students at level 4-5 compared to other programmes⁴⁰



47. We also have data on the deprivation profile of learners in 2015/16⁴¹ and as seen below in Figure 9 a high proportion of learners come from the most deprived bands. This is even more prominent for learners in further education colleges.

Figure 9: Number of Learners by Deprivation Band



48. We do not have data on gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation of students enrolled in level 4-5 qualifications.

49. We are seeking more evidence on the impact of reforms through the consultation and will reconsider the equality impacts taking further evidence into account.

Equality impact assessment

50. Reform of HTE policy is likely to impact three different student groups:

- Those studying Institute-approved HTQs
- Those studying existing HTQs

⁴⁰ Percentages based on students in England. Where students were able to self-report a gender of 'other' this accounted for 0.03% or less of the total students on each programme type.

⁴¹ [Mapping the higher technical landscape](#) (RCU 2018)

- New students who would have not studied at this level prior to reforms.

51. We have highlighted the equalities impacts of individual policies below, our overall assessment is that many of the proposals set out in the HTE consultation will have positive differential impact on individuals who share protected characteristics.

52. We therefore expect that the impact to the student groups mentioned above is likely to be largely positive. There is a risk that those studying existing HTQs will be studying qualifications without a clear signal of quality. However students taking HTQs will benefit from a higher quality study programme, approved by the Institute to prepare them for skilled employment.

53. Assuming the current level 4-5 student profile will be similar in its future state, students who share the protected characteristics highlighted above will benefit from HTE reforms. It is likely that these positive impacts have the potential to reduce discrimination, increase equality of opportunity and improve relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This is because there will be more high quality options for students at level 4-5. This means those who, for example, do not study at level 6 will still have options to progress in the labour market with beneficial wage returns.

54. The following section assesses the extent to which policy proposals for level 4-5 could have different effects on those who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

Approval process of HTQs against national employer-led occupational standards

55. We expect any impact from our core proposal⁴² on students sharing any of the protected characteristics to be minimal. Potentially, some students may lack the signal that approval brings if they study non-approved qualifications. However we expect that the majority of qualifications, with larger student numbers, will go through the approval process.

Quality assurance and regulation of providers

56. Our key policy aim is to create a quality first approach. We expect any adverse impacts - such as resourcing for initial familiarisation with the assurance process - to be mitigated by the fact that only providers that meet the relevant quality standard will be eligible to deliver HTQs and their students will be eligible to have access to HE student finance for their courses. Students and employers will therefore be able to clearly identify and have assurance that they are in receipt of high-quality provision.

57. Providers that do not meet the quality standard will not be eligible to receive grant funding for courses leading to reformed HTQs, and their students will not be eligible to have access to HE student finance. This may mean some providers are unable to sustainably deliver HTE which may limit the number of eligible providers that students can choose from. There is a risk that students may be required to travel further to access HTQs which could disadvantage students

⁴² Institute approval of qualifications against occupational standards.

sharing protected characteristics.⁴³

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) for students and employers

58. A key reform aim is to increase uptake of HTQs. There is currently a high proportion of students sharing protected characteristics such as disability, sex and race (including ethnicity) who study at level 4-5. We expect that encouraging level 4-5 take up would not negatively affect students with these protected characteristics. Rather, we expect a positive impact as reforms will provide those with these protected characteristics a wider range of education and training options.

59. Through user research, we will seek to establish which types of messaging and methods of communication should be used to best reach different types of students. We are also looking at what specific types of support different groups may require to enable them to start and complete a HTQ.

60. Currently, young people (aged 21 and under) make up a relatively small proportion of the overall numbers of people studying for HTQs. Through our reforms we want to improve the IAG and support available to young people, to improve their understanding of different educational pathways and encourage more of them to study at these Levels. This includes students completing T Levels from 2022 onwards.

61. We anticipate that our reforms will therefore benefit this age group, by helping them to navigate the HTE landscape and enabling them to access high-quality HTE progression opportunities, with strong employer backing. Mature students will also benefit from clearer IAG, which will help them to understand the different options available to them and how they can support their aspirations.

Other protected characteristics

62. We do not anticipate a direct link between our proposals and the protected characteristics of gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief or sexual orientation.

⁴³ Such as disability as it may be more difficult for individual with disabilities to travel long distances.



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