



Department
for Education

Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

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Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009**

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Letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills



Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

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Chief Executive
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20th July 2020

Dear Jennifer,

STRATEGIC GUIDANCE TO THE INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION 2020-2021

I am pleased to issue you with strategic guidance for the financial year 2020-2021. This gives you a steer concerning the government's priorities for the remainder of the year in the areas of apprenticeships and technical education reform, including the introduction of the first wave of T Levels and reforms to Higher Technical Qualifications and qualifications at level 3 and below.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) must have regard to the matters set out in this document when performing its functions (the legal basis for the guidance is at annex B). I expect the Institute 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 quarterly performance reviews, as well as through the apprenticeships and technical education programme boards.

I would like to thank you for the significant progress the Institute made in 2019-2020, working with the department as part of the delivery system that puts employers right at the heart of our reforms so they take ownership of setting the content, and supporting the quality of both apprenticeships and T Levels. The COVID-19 outbreak has posed

unprecedented challenges to the economy and the skills sector, including the work of the Institute. I am deeply grateful to the Institute and its staff for the work you have done over the past few months to respond to this crisis. This includes the introduction of flexibilities to end-point assessment, which is allowing a large number of apprentices to complete their apprenticeship, as well as continued preparations for T Level roll-out from autumn 2020. I expect the Institute to continue to work closely with the department, employers and apprentices to support the development and implementation of measures in response to COVID-19.

Technical Education in all of its forms will play a central part in helping our economy to recover from the current downturn. For the apprenticeships programme it is essential that standards attract a significant number of starts, enable career progression and include common work skills to support apprentices wishing to transfer between technical routes. End-point assessments should add value and be aligned with professionally recognised qualifications, and we should build on the successes of our COVID-19 response by continuing to promote the right flexibilities to employers.

For T Levels, success will mean that they offer a route to positive employment outcomes because employers recognise the programme as reliably delivering high-quality training. Students need clearer pathways in technical education and achieving this will mean reshaping the skills system to offer fewer but higher-quality qualifications that support clear paths for progression, including through levels 4 and 5. Finally, we have a responsibility to ensure that technical education and apprenticeships help address skills shortages, including those emerging as a result of the pandemic.

I expect the Institute to have regard to policy decisions made by the department and to make operational changes required to reflect and deliver policy. The department will work with the Institute during the policy development process to make sure that operational and delivery requirements are taken into account. Furthermore, I would ask that the Institute continue to support the wider FE reform agenda and contribute to the affordability of the apprenticeship programme by ensuring that the content, assessment plans and funding band recommendations of standards maximise value for money.

The Institute's remit is England-only. There may be occasions where it would be beneficial for the Institute to participate in discussions with devolved administrations to address issues facing employers who work across borders, in accordance with its legislative remit and the priorities and objectives set out in its business plan.

The Institute should continue to work with employers and build strong relationships with government and other arm's length bodies, such as the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofqual, Ofsted and the Office for Students including through the Quality Alliance. I would also like to see the Institute work more closely with occupational regulators, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health and Care Professions Council, to ensure that there is good alignment between developed Technical Education and the needs of regulated occupations. This may require you to

build closer links with other government departments in collaboration with the Department for Education and I am keen to support you in doing this.

Similarly, you should work with, and where appropriate consult, other organisations who do not have a statutory role but represent groups with significant involvement or interest, such as awarding bodies, professional bodies, providers and assessment organisations. Finally, the Institute should engage with the Skills and Productivity Board, a new expert committee reporting to the Secretary of State for Education, and consider the committee's activities in its forward planning.

I expect the Institute to deliver the priorities set out in annex A and to discharge its functions in a manner that is transparent and ensures that employers, and other stakeholders, are clear about its approaches, rules, procedures and the support it offers to engaging with the national skills system.

I look forward to working with you as you continue to deliver against these important priorities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

Annex A: Priorities for 2020-2021

1. Enabling continued learning and assessment throughout the COVID-19 outbreak and building a stronger skills system for the post-COVID-19 period

- Continue to work closely with the department to support the development, testing and implementation of measures in response to COVID-19. This should include regular sharing of information about the impacts of COVID-19 that the Institute receives from its stakeholders, to help inform that ongoing response.
- Work collaboratively with the department to remove barriers to starting and completing apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical education in priority areas.
- Prioritise the development of standards which meet needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Work with the department to enable more apprentices who have been made redundant to continue in learning to complete their apprenticeship.
- Review end-point assessment (EPA) flexibilities introduced during the COVID-19 outbreak to understand whether more use can now be made of technology and different delivery models to deliver efficient and effective assessment that retains credibility with employers.

2. A set of occupational maps to show how standards and qualifications help people to progress in their occupation

The Institute is responsible for populating the occupational maps. In 2020-2021, the Institute is asked to:

- Set out a clear plan for developing the occupational maps to cover all occupations in relation to which apprenticeships and technical qualifications might be taken, and ensure the maps are embedded within all relevant aspects of the Institute's processes.
- Test occupational maps with stakeholders to ensure they provide a clear and consistent picture of the current and potential future technical education landscape and clarify the alignment between technical education products.
- Present the maps clearly so that they assist users, including learners, to understand the occupational landscape, including how occupations are linked to each other, how they are named, and how an individual can progress between them.
- Work with the department to consider the emerging evidence on any difference in outcomes between T Levels, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and their corresponding apprenticeships, to ensure that the progression options for T Level

students and HTQ students align as closely as possible with the apprenticeships system.

- By 30th September 2020, present to the department a planned approach, including a timetable, for ensuring that pathways are clear, coherent, and support obvious routes for progression, including through levels 4 and 5 where appropriate.
- Engage with government departments and partners, such as the National Careers Service and ESFA, and employers, to promote the use of occupational maps data to help develop accessible resources to demonstrate career and progression routes.

3. A comprehensive set of high-quality, employer-owned standards that encourage take-up and enable progression

Continue to work with employers to ensure that apprenticeships have currency and suitability, through developing and maintaining high-quality occupational standards. In 2020-2021, the Institute is asked to:

- Develop robust estimates, via employers and independent data sources, on the expected demand for a standard, balancing this consideration against potential skills needs where demand is low, before approving its development. These will also assist the department in assessing future uptake and potential programme costs.
- Prioritise development of standards with high projected demand; also prioritise the development of standards which meet specific skills shortages that emerged during the pandemic or fill gaps which result from the phasing out of apprenticeship frameworks, where it is clear that those apprenticeships remain needed.
- Where take-up of an apprenticeship, T Level or other qualification linked to a standard is unexpectedly low, establish the reasons for this and work with the department to remove barriers or agree a process for managing these out of the market, where appropriate.
- Ensure that standards are designed to support apprentices to achieve progression throughout their careers, including to higher level occupations within a route, with clear pathways linked to the occupational maps. Apprenticeship content should reflect the occupational requirements but also include common work skills to enable transferability between different sectors and technical routes.
- Maintain relationships with trailblazer groups and set out a clear expectation of their ongoing roles and responsibilities in keeping standards up to date. Also involve an appropriate range of providers and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) in the development and review of standards to ensure that they embody best practice and are deliverable.
- Work with the department to deliver an approach to managing new versions of standards. Together with the department, develop and publish a process for

communicating changes to standards and assessment plans to the employers, EPAOs, training providers and apprentices affected by those changes.

- Continue to conduct regular reviews of occupational standards to ensure their continuing relevance and value to employers. Reviews must be purposeful and allow the Institute to be satisfied that standards are reflective of the requirements of individual occupations, or to know when corrective action is needed and allow it to be taken. Elements for reviews therefore are likely to include the content of standards and their inclusion in linked technical education provision (e.g. apprenticeships and T Levels). This may involve looking at the approach to delivery and assessment; value for money of content and funding levels; take-up; and consideration of accessibility, gender neutrality and inclusivity to different groups including people with a disability.
- Use market insight, data sources and feedback from employers to monitor whether standards are recognised by employers and apprentices as a high-quality and transferable mark of occupational competence. Advise the department of barriers to meeting these aims and recommend policy options for removing them.

4. End-point assessment that is fit for purpose and consistently quality-assured

- Continue to support trailblazers as they develop their assessment plans. To support this, use External Quality Assurance (EQA) findings in order to:
- Identify the common characteristics of both high and low-quality assessment plans, as well as the common pitfalls to avoid when developing assessment plans, and share these with trailblazers.
- Monitor and refine the standardised assessment plan template that supports trailblazers to develop good quality assessment plans.
- Review the implementation of the mandatory qualifications policy in the context of the objectives of the programme; and where apprenticeships include mandatory qualifications, whether these are essential to meeting the occupational standard. Where there are regulated qualifications and other mandatory qualifications that are deemed to be essential, where possible these should be aligned and integrated with the end-point assessment (EPA) in order to reduce the duplication of assessment and ensure value for money.
- Improve the prestige of EPA by developing a system of post-nominal letters for apprentices, linked to the achievement of the apprenticeship certificate, consulting stakeholders about this new system and supporting implementation in cooperation with the department once the new system has been agreed.
- Continue to ensure that standards are accessible to people with a learning difficulty and/or disability and that reasonable adjustments are made to support participation in apprenticeships so that every assessment plan is compliant with the Equality Act 2010. To support EPAO reasonable adjustment provision within EPA delivery, continue to work with the department to review and update the published EPA reasonable adjustments guidance.

- Continue to lead EQA, and promote consistent, robust and reliable delivery of quality assurance of EPA through the Institute's common EQA framework.
- In 2020-2021 specifically, confirm the future model for EQA in the published response to the consultation on a simplified system of EQA, taking into account the consultation responses. Continue to integrate the voice of employers and professional bodies as part of a simplified system.

5. Funding band recommendations that reflect actual costs and provide value for money to the taxpayer

Reviewing existing standards and funding bands

- As part of the Institute's revisions process, develop responsive models to monitor funding band recommendations, for example in response to market intelligence and departmental policy. Such responsive approaches should allow the Institute to update funding band recommendations, even where it does not plan to conduct a full-scale review of the relevant standard and funding band imminently.
- Manage a structured process for the regular review of funding band recommendations for all standards at least every 3 years, ensuring continuing accuracy and value for money of recommendations.
- Ensure that the content and price of standards continues to maximise value for money, including for standards that have replaced comparable frameworks.

Future funding band allocations

- Continue to drive value for money in the development of standards and their funding band recommendations:
- Ensure that content included in a standard is focused on the requirements essential to achieving occupational competence.
- Thoroughly scrutinise inputs into the funding band recommendations process (including quotes) to confirm that these represent as efficient an approach as possible to the delivery of the content.
- As the Institute develops a new funding band recommendations process in 2020-2021, make sure that this represents a rigorous and transparent assessment focusing on the actual cost of delivery of training and EPA. Ensure that funding recommendation processes and any associated process changes are well-understood by stakeholders.
- To support this work, continue to develop and maintain an evidence base of high-quality data on delivery costs. This should inform a funding band recommendations process that focuses on the actual costs of delivering standards, supporting providers to deliver standards that maximise value for money.
- Work with the department to develop the funding process for EPA, identifying a

funding allocation approach for the EPA component that, as with training provision, reflects the actual cost of delivery.

6. A quality strategy to deliver an excellent apprenticeship experience

- Work with the department to develop and help deliver its quality strategy for apprenticeships. The strategy will build on the work of the Quality Alliance and reflect the programme's current level of maturity and future direction.
- Work with the department to refresh the Quality Alliance (which will be jointly chaired by the department and the Institute) to ensure that it is best able to support the quality strategy going forward and review the Quality Alliance scorecard to ensure that the programme has the data it needs to measure quality and progress on the quality strategy.

7. Launching T Levels to deliver world-class technical education at Level 3

Continue to have regard to the 2019-2020 strategic guidance in relation to T Levels and to all T Level policy documents published by the department, and in addition:

- For Wave 1 delivery and Wave 2 development, work with Awarding Organisations (AOs), Ofqual and the department to identify suitable flexibilities to maintain high-quality and reliable assessment methods, should current plans be affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Ensure that changes and improvements identified through a review of the Wave 1 and 2 procurement and development processes are reflected in subsequent Waves and risks are mitigated as far as possible. In working with AOs that are developing technical qualifications (TQs), draw upon a range of expertise, including from the department where necessary.
- Manage contracts with AOs proactively and robustly to ensure that the timetable for T Level roll-out set out by the department can continue to be met and that the quality criteria for T Level qualifications are met. Assure that T Levels and any other qualifications overseen by the Institute are monitored and evaluated with regard to meeting the needs of employers.
- Work with the department and AOs to ensure that T Level providers receive appropriate support as the TQ is developed. This includes consultation with employers and providers during the development of materials as well as the sharing of draft TQ materials with T Level providers at each milestone. Providers must be given adequate lead-in time to prepare for teaching the new programmes, as agreed with the department.
- Work with AOs on the development of provider approval criteria and other materials relating to provider preparation and delivery of the TQ.

- Work with AOs to ensure a consistent quality standard is applied to the delivery and administration of TQ assessments across T Levels. This includes, where appropriate, streamlining procedures and assessment approaches to support consistency across TQs and overall manageability for providers.
- Work with the department and with AOs to ensure that they pay due regard to Industry Placement policy and that they align assessment, where possible, with a range of Industry Placement models. Take into account the T Level Industry Placements Delivery Guidance.
- Work with AOs and the department in cases where it is deemed necessary to use the Industry Placement for the purpose of assessing TQ content, ensuring that this would be manageable for providers, employers and students.
- Work with AOs to ensure they sufficiently consult with employers and HE providers so that T Level TQs support progression to employment, apprenticeships and higher education (levels 4-6). This should include the sharing of draft TQ materials at an early stage.
- Once final TQ materials are approved, undertake a mapping exercise of the difference in outcomes with the corresponding apprenticeship(s) in order to inform understanding and policy consideration of progression options.
- Confirm the components of each T Level and publish these on the Institute's website. As well as allowing it to meet its statutory responsibility, this will provide clarity for providers about the requirements that a student must meet in order to be awarded a T Level certificate. In carrying out these functions have regard to the T Level Industry Placements Delivery Guidance and to the department's policy on English & maths for 16-19 year olds.
- Obtain evidence of demand and skills shortages from employers for sectors and occupational specialisms in scope for inclusion in a T Level. Consider this together with evidence of anticipated appetite from providers, students and AOs before proceeding with their inclusion in T Levels. Where evidence is available retrospectively, consider the case for suspending the development or delivery of any T Levels or occupational specialisms depending on their position in the lifecycle. Agree with the department an effective process for such decisions to be made.
- Feed into the department's development of a digital T Level service, designed to support the delivery and awarding of T Levels.
- Work with the department and provide advice and assistance on a range of matters relating to T Level delivery and technical education reform more broadly.
- Assist the department in the development of the T Level Transition Programme.

Technical Education assurance and regulation

- Conduct assurance and regulation of TQs in collaboration with Ofqual. Application of the powers and duties of each organisation will follow the Quality Framework for Technical Qualifications agreed by the Institute and Ofqual in February 2019.

- Work with the department and with Ofqual to develop proposals for a long-term framework for assurance and oversight of T Level TQs and other technical qualifications in the reformed landscape. This includes Higher Technical Qualifications and any technical qualifications recommended by the Qualifications Review at level 3 and below and the forthcoming White Paper.

8. Launching Institute approval of higher technical qualifications to build a strong skills system at levels 4 and 5

The Secretary of State's policy guidance to the Institute on Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) was published in a statutory notice on 14th July 2020 alongside the Reforming Higher Technical Education government consultation response. The Institute should deliver the approval of HTQs in line with that guidance. In summary, the Institute is asked to:

- Implement the published process and plans for the national approval of HTQs;
- Closely monitor the national approvals process during wave 1 to enable further refinement and evaluate wave 1 jointly with the department against agreed principles.
- Advise and support the department in developing policy and plans around future HTQ approval waves;
- Ensure that the approvals process and wider system is accessible to all users, including employers, Awarding Bodies, education providers and learners;
- Build and promote the HTQ brand in collaboration with the department;
- Advise the department on wider Higher Technical Education system design issues;
- Work with employers, Awarding Bodies and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies to identify additional occupations at Level 4 and 5 which meet the Institute's quality criteria and should be added to the occupational maps (and where an occupational standard should be developed).

9. Supporting departmental policy and strategy development to ensure it incorporates employer and operational insight

- Advise and assist the department as it develops proposals for technical education and training to be based on a system of occupational competence.
- Advise and assist the department in developing policy in relation to the level 3 and below qualifications review, in particular how the department might ensure that remaining qualifications meet employer needs. Take forward and implement any agreed proposals and processes which arise from the level 3 and below qualifications review, to the timescales to be set out in the upcoming consultation.

- Assist and advise the department on technical education system design issues, including ensuring alignment with other products. This should be coherent with the Institute's work with the department, Ofqual and other partners to develop sustainable, long-term proposals for assurance and oversight of all technical qualifications.
- Feed the Institute's user insight and subject matter expertise on apprenticeships into the department's future strategy development. This would include advising the department on recommended approaches to maximising the value for money of spending on apprenticeships.
- Work with the department to coordinate relevant research programmes, agree priorities, avoid duplication and provide value for money. The Institute and the department will share emerging and final findings and agree appropriate publication and handling plans.



Department
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