

Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Programme

BIS / DfE brief on progress for FE Governors and Leaders:

March 2016

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Apprenticeships

We are committed to reaching 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. We are working with businesses to begin or expand their programmes, setting new expectations for public sector bodies and through public procurement.

Over 150 Trailblazers involving more than 1300 employers are designing new apprenticeship standards with 210 published (of which over 60 are Higher and Degree Apprenticeships) and more than 150 new standards in development. There have been over 1,000 starts on the new standards so far.

The UK-wide levy for all public and private sector employers will help fund the increase in quantity and quality of apprenticeships training in England. Fewer than 2% of employers will pay the levy.

The independent employer-led Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) will be fully operational by April 2017. It will be responsible for setting quality criteria for the development of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans; reviewing, approving or rejecting them; determining the maximum level of Government funding available for standards; and quality assuring some end point assessments. The body will be funded by Government using public funds. Rachel Sandby-Thomas will be taking up the position of Shadow Chief Executive of the IfA with effect from 4 April 2016. Building on her in-depth knowledge of the apprenticeships programme as Director General for skills in BIS, Rachel will play a major role in establishing the IfA.

The Apprenticeship Grant for Employers is helping smaller businesses take on new younger apprentices. Eligible employers can receive £1,500 per apprentice for up to five new young apprentices. From April 2016, employers will not be required to pay employer National Insurance contributions for apprentices under the age of 25 on earnings up to the upper earnings limit.

Apprenticeships Week

National Apprenticeship Week 2016 was held on 14th to 18th March. The focus of this year's events was on progression and opportunity as a way to showcase the rich and diverse apprenticeship offer, from traineeships right through to higher and degree apprenticeships.

National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) 2016 contributed to the government's key priorities and commitments, including our aims to deliver 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020 and increasing the number of higher and degree apprenticeships.

739 events took place across the country during National Apprenticeship Week to spread the word about the benefits of apprenticeships for young people, employers and the economy. 30,084 new apprenticeship pledges were made by employers which is the highest ever NAW total.

Degree Apprenticeships

We are happy to say that more HEIs are showing an appetite to recruit degree apprentices in the Autumn. More standards have been approved – the full list of higher and degree apprenticeships can be found on the gov.uk website. As we said last time, as we talk to HEIs they are very keen to work with FE providers to ensure the standards are delivered, building on the best quality training that's available.

Traineeships

In August 2013, we introduced traineeships for young people who wish to get an apprenticeship or other employment but lack the basic skills and experience that employers are looking for. The programme has continued to grow and get good results for young people and employers: over 37,000 traineeships have been started to-date; around two-thirds of year-one trainees reached positive destinations following their traineeship, including apprenticeships; and 94% of employers consider traineeships an effective way of preparing young people for work.

We want to see continued growth of traineeships in order to support as many young people as possible into apprenticeships and other jobs. The Skills and Education Funding Agencies are continuing to encourage more providers to deliver traineeships and both agencies will consider in-year growth cases during the spring to support expansion of the programme.

When we introduced traineeships we required providers to be graded 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. From February 2016 we removed this restriction, putting traineeships on par with the rest of FE provision and increasing provider capacity.

Technical Education and the Independent Expert Panel

Since their formation in December the Independent Panel, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, has been developing its proposals on the future of reforming technical education.

The Panel has been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders including employers and college principals and expects to submit their report to the Minister shortly.

Advanced Learner Loans

We expect to launch the 2016/17 application system for Advanced Learner Loans in mid-May. As you will recall from my last letter, for courses starting from 1 August 2016, Advanced Learner Loans will be available to those aged 19 and over, studying at levels 3-6. You will want to review your provision in light of this expanded remit and talk to awarding organisations about qualifications available at levels 5 and 6 outside of higher education.

We expect the resources available on the SLCs Practitioner Site, including factsheets and FAQs for learners, promotional materials etc to be updated with details of the expanded remit and ready for you to use by end March.

In the meantime, the case studies published on the [NCS website](#)¹ about how colleges and independent training providers have made loans work for their business may be useful in your communications to learners and with your staff.

Restructuring of Further Education – Area Reviews

We have recently published updated guidance to support the delivery of the reviews (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-training-institutions-area-based-reviews>). Further information about those colleges and local authorities who will be involved in the third wave, which will begin shortly, will be published in the near future. The guidance now includes revised and additional information drawn from the lessons learnt from the early reviews, recognising the importance of sharing this learning widely and enabling those starting later in the cycle to get full benefit from it.

Key to the successful implementation of the area reviews is the ability of each college to measure their performance against other institutions and the sector as a whole to ensure that they are achieving comparable levels of performance. In the updated guidance we have provided an initial indication of the range and scope of benchmarks for the post-16 sector so that you can begin to use these to measure current performance and assess future options.

In order to achieve the best recommendations it is essential that the reviews are able to consider the best options available to them. Many colleges are considering mergers or other changes to their structures; some, particularly sixth form colleges, will be thinking about the possibility of academisation. Where this is the case, as we set out in the guidance, we expect this to be included as part of the area review discussions which will need to consider how the needs of learners and employers can be best met through new structures and patterns of delivery.

It is essential that the recommendations of each review, which represent the agreed future model for post-16 education in each area, can be implemented. As independent organisations we expect colleges to meet these costs to secure their future. In cases where the required funding cannot otherwise be secured, there is a Restructuring Facility available to support the implementation of the recommendations of area reviews. This will generally be available on a loan basis reflecting the fact that colleges should be moving to a financially sustainable position. Importantly those loans will not be limited to 5 year terms as has been the case for Exceptional Financial Support.

¹ <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/aboutus/newsarticles/Pages/Advanced-Learner-Loans---funding-help-for-your-course.aspx>

We have also announced the availability of grants of £50k or £100k, to be provided to support the development of implementation plans for substantive area review recommendations. This time-limited funding is specifically intended to support you as governors to ensure that you have access to the best change management skills to enable implementation to be achieved.

Sixth Form College Academisation

As part of the Autumn Statement the Government announced that it will give sixth form colleges (SFCs) the opportunity through post-16 area reviews to establish themselves as 16 to 19 academies. SFCs will be able to consider becoming an academy as well as other restructuring options that will be available within post-16 area reviews. We expect any applications for sixth-form colleges to become academies to form part of the recommendations of the relevant area review; and decisions will be taken in the context of wider post-16 provision in the area.

SFCs applying to become an academy will need to be supported by a robust educational and business case that shows how becoming an academy would raise standards and improve value for money by improving collaboration and formal partnership between the college and schools in the area.

Our detailed advice and application form, published on 19th February 2016, sets out the criteria and process for SFCs considering becoming a 16 to 19 academy. The advice and application form are available on the area reviews page of GOV.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/post-16-education-and-training-area-reviews>. All proposals will be considered in the context of the relevant post-16 area review and the educational needs of the area.

The Department's initial point of contact for queries from SFCs on becoming an academy is the Joint Area Review Delivery Unit (JARDU): area.reviews@education.gsi.gov.uk

Localism

The Government set out in "Fixing the Foundations" its commitment to transform the skills system so that it can better support increased workforce productivity. We want strong local areas and employers to take a leading role in establishing a post-16 skills system that is responsive to local economic priorities.

The Government has announced 9 devolution deals (Sheffield, Tees Valley, Liverpool, West Midlands, the North East, West of England, East Anglia, Greater Lincolnshire and Greater Manchester), which include the full devolution of non-apprenticeship adult education budget from 2018/19. The Combined Authorities will be able to tailor skills provision in line with their key economic growth priorities

In advance of full devolution, we are working with the localities to build up their involvement in commissioning adult skills provision. They will take progressively

greater responsibility for determining the outcomes on which local providers will focus.

We will work with local areas to undertake area reviews to reshape post-16 education and training, setting it on an efficient and financially resilient footing. We will put the power to commission adult skills provision in the hands of those best placed to determine the outcomes needed in each locality.

FE/Sixth Form College Commissioner Summary Assessments

BIS continues to publish the FE Commissioner's summary assessment reports outlining the findings and conclusions from his assessment of colleges referred to him for intervention. A report is published once the college or institution has seen it and been given the chance to comment. Governing bodies and senior management across the sector will be able to learn lessons from the FE Commissioner's experience in intervention cases.

To date, the FE Commissioner and his team have carried out interventions in 43 institutions, including 36 general FE colleges, 6 local authority institutions and 1 specialist designated institution. Of these, 15 general FE colleges, 4 local authority institutions and 1 specialist designated institution have been successfully removed from intervention enabling provision to be maintained in the best interests of learners in the respective local areas.

To date, 35 summary reports have been published and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-commissioner-intervention-summary-assessments> A further five reports will be published in March 2016. The FE Commissioner's spring 2016 termly letter was published earlier this week.

The Sixth Form College Commissioner also publishes the summary reports and letters issued to sixth-form colleges that are subject to government intervention, that serve to drive improvement. These can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sixth-form-college-commissioner-summary-reports-and-letters>

Maths and English

Maths and English are essential building blocks for both life and work. They play an important role in helping people find and sustain employment and evidence shows us that acquiring these skills has wider social and personal benefits which can extend to improved self-confidence, health, social mobility and family life. This is why maths and English remain a priority for this Government at all stages of education. We have put these subjects at the heart of all of our programmes, and set high expectations for our young people and adults so that they are clear about the importance of studying these subjects.

Alongside recent reforms to GCSEs, we are taking steps to reform Functional Skills qualifications in maths and English. These reforms will improve the relevance and content of the qualifications as well as improving their recognition and credibility in the labour market. The Education and Training Foundation is leading the reform programme and are running a consultation offering providers, practitioners and employers the opportunity to contribute. The consultation was launched on 16 January 2016 and will run through to 7 April 2016. Further details can be found here: <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/research/maths-and-english-functional-skills-reform-programme/>

Following consultation, Ofqual recently announced that the final opportunity to re-sit the current GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics will take place in summer 2017. This will allow students who do not secure A*-C grades in the final summer exams of the legacy GCSE maths and English qualifications to re-sit the exams in either November 2016 or the following summer.

Ofqual's guidance on timings for the withdrawal of legacy GCSEs, AS and A levels can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/timings-for-the-withdrawal-of-legacy-gcses-as-and-a-levels>

Reflecting Ofqual's decision on legacy GCSE maths and English resits, approval for teaching of legacy GCSE specifications in maths and English under the 16-19 condition of funding has been extended from November 2016 to June 2017 and achievement resulting from this final resit opportunity will count towards the new 16-19 maths and English progress measure that will report from 2016.

FE Workforce Strategy

To support the FE sector to recruit sufficient specialist maths and English teachers, we are pleased to confirm that the Government will continue to fund the FE initial teacher training bursaries for a further two years. Over the past three years, this scheme has provided over 1,000 bursaries, with over 850 of these supporting graduates to train to teach maths or English.

These bursaries will continue to be offered at the same rates as those offered for school teachers in these subjects. We will provide more details on the guidance and process for accessing these bursaries shortly.

In the near future we will also say more about how we intend to support the Education and Training Foundation in 2016/17 to raise professional standards across the FE sector, particularly with regard to maths and English provision.

16-19 Technical Qualifications

A wide range of technical and applied qualifications have been approved to count in one of three performance tables categories:

- Tech levels – level 3 qualifications for students wishing to specialise in a specific industry or occupation;
- Applied general qualifications – level 3 qualifications for students who wish to continue their education through applied learning;
- Technical certificates – level 2 qualifications that equip students with specialist knowledge and skills and enable entry to employment or progression to a tech level.

All of the approved qualifications have met tough new quality criteria and, importantly, have the support of employers and universities. Teaching qualifications from the approved lists will give students the confidence that the courses they are taking are of a high quality and are the right ones for their career aspirations.

The lists of qualifications that can count in the 2018 performance tables were published in January 2016. We expect to update the lists by the end of March 2016.

The lists can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2018-performance-tables-technical-and-vocational-qualifications>

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

We have recently announced £500k of additional funding to support the FE workforce in delivering the SEND reforms, which will mean that practitioners at all levels, from learning support managers to vocational tutors, should get the opportunity to access training and peer support on identifying and teaching students with SEND. We will be appointing a contractor to carry out this work in April. Providers will also have access to a range of training across organisations working on specific conditions, such as autism and dyslexia.

We have also recently published specific guidance for the post-16 sector on disagreement resolution. Post-16 institutions can now be named in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, so it is possible that post-16 providers will be involved in, or need to be aware of, the arrangements for resolving disagreements about EHC plans. The guide explains the routes that young people can take to resolve disagreements about their EHC plans, so that post-16 providers can discuss it with them from a position of knowledge and, where appropriate, take part in the process. The guide is available at: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2159>

Finally, colleges are reminded of the important transition timeline that learning difficulty assessments (LDAs) cease to have any legal basis from September 2016 and EFA will not fund on the basis of an LDA. The current EFA funding guidance is being updated to reflect this change.

Chartered Status

The sector's new chartered professional body is now accepting applications for membership. Following the sealing of the Royal Charter on 9 October, the Chartered

Institution has been hiring and training reviewers to assess applications for membership. They are now ready to assess the applications that are beginning to come in. High performing organisations with a commitment to self-improvement and mentoring others are encouraged to apply. With the FE landscape changing, it is even more important not to lose the focus on quality, and to take stock of the evidence for why you are a high performing organisation. The Chartered Institution will provide a forum for members to exchange information and learn from each other. For further information on the project or to enquire about membership please see www.fecharter.org.uk or email info@fecharter.org.uk.

Honours

Honours nominations are an important way of recognising and rewarding excellent governance. Governors and Clerks perform an invaluable and sometimes challenging role in our colleges and one way of rewarding those who have achieved much in their work and wider contributions is through the Honours system. We strongly encourage you to consider whether any members of your governing body have made an exceptional contribution to the success of the college.

You may submit honours nominations all year round to alison.marsh@bis.gsi.gov.uk (or titi.sanyaolu@bis.gsi.gov.uk from April 2016). If you need help, guidance or a blank citation form to complete, please get in touch with Alison or Titi. If you would like to learn more about how the honours system works and/or want to nominate people in other categories please see the guidance available on www.gov.uk/honours/overview.

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