

Education Committee

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# Further Education and Skills

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Sixth Report of Session 2024–26

HC 666

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# Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

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## Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2370; the Committee's email address is [educom@parliament.uk](mailto:educom@parliament.uk). You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsEd](https://twitter.com/CommonsEd).

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# Summary

The success of the Government's five national missions—economic growth, clean energy, public safety, opportunity, and healthcare—depends on a skilled, adaptable, and inclusive workforce. The further education (FE) and skills sector is central to delivering these ambitions but is currently under strain from fragmented policy, chronic underfunding, and systemic barriers to access and progression.

## Skills England

The creation of Skills England has broadly been welcomed by the sector. However, without a statutory foundation, Skills England may be altered or abolished by this or any future Government without the consent of Parliament. Skills England has been given the crucial role of transforming skills opportunities and driving growth and it is vital that it is able to work impartially and, if necessary, challenge Government policy and advocate for resources. We recommend a review of Skills England's governance and leadership structure within two years to ensure independence and cross-departmental influence. The way in which Skills England collects data, engages with employers, and communicates with the sector must also be significantly improved.

## Devolution

Devolution of skills policy should be deepened and widened. Devolving further powers to Strategic Authorities will help to drive growth, encourage the co-ordinated delivery of education and training services across the country, and meet the unique needs of local communities. It is disappointing that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill limits the devolution of skills and employment support to those aged 19 and over and does not make provision for the devolution of 16–19 education and training. We call for the Government to broaden its commitment to “devolution by default” by devolving appropriate 16–19 education and training, skills programmes, and funding streams to each Strategic Authority.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) have been effective in aligning employer needs with education and training provision, and in utilising and developing local partnerships. However, we have heard about the difficulties for employers and providers to navigate LSIPs in a crowded landscape of

overlapping initiatives and there is a perception that local partnerships are not always balanced. The Department for Education should conduct a policy audit to identify overlaps between LSIPs and other skills initiatives in order to streamline LSIPs and make them more coherent and easier to navigate.

The number of young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England is unacceptable. The Government's Youth Guarantee goes some way to support 18–21-year-olds to access education, training and employment opportunities. However, it will only benefit those in the narrow 18–21 age group, excluding young people aged 16–17 and 22–24. We recommend that the Government expands eligibility for the Youth Guarantee to include all 16–24-year-olds so that all young people are given the same opportunities to re-enter education or access employment.

We have heard how the devolution of adult education and training has led to a disparate and uneven adult skills landscape. Some authorities have more powers than others, co-ordination between areas is not always smooth, and employers can find it difficult to get involved. We recommend the creation of a Skills Co-ordination Board which would oversee and co-ordinate regional strategies with national sector needs across the increasingly devolved skills landscape.

## Post-16 qualifications and pathways

There is a stark disparity between how post-16 technical and vocational education and training pathways are presented to pupils and how academic pathways are presented, and fundamental differences in the levels of support and guidance that students receive about each. Compliance with the Baker Clause and the provider access legislation is inconsistent. The Department for Education must publish an annual report on the number and proportion of schools that are complying with these obligations and assesses the reasons for non-compliance.

Information about post-16 pathways can be fragmented, with no single platform covering both academic and vocational options. Vocational application timelines are misaligned with university admissions, making it difficult for young people to consider all options equally. These issues contribute to a lack of parity of esteem, with academic routes appearing more accessible and coherently structured than vocational alternatives. We recommend that the remit of UCAS be expanded to offer a single source of information for all routes, including academic and vocational pathways.

T Levels require urgent reform to improve retention, employer involvement, and public awareness. We recommend that the Department for Education launches a national awareness campaign for T Levels, targeting students, parents, and employers. The purpose and benefits of T Levels should be set

out clearly from the start of secondary school onwards. Parity of esteem between A Levels and T Levels should run through all communications, guidance and advice to schools, teachers, parents and students. We also call for the introduction of modular or smaller-sized T Level qualifications (e.g. equivalent to one A Level) to enable students to study a blend of academic and technical qualifications and allow more flexible entry and exit points. Employers should be involved more closely at the curriculum-design stage of these modular qualifications to ensure T Level programmes align with industry needs.

There remains uncertainty for both students and colleges around the long-term availability of level 3 qualifications that had previously been earmarked for defunding. Level 3 qualifications which provide an alternative to A Levels and T Levels are essential. The Government must publicly commit to the long-term retention of these qualifications and to providing sustained funding for them. Students should be able to pursue a mixture of A Levels, Applied General Qualifications and T Levels in order to support more tailored and inclusive educational pathways. The Government's review into level 3 qualifications reform lacked transparency and an appropriate level of consultation with stakeholders. The Department for Education must improve the way in which it communicates with the FE sector about any future reform of qualifications, for example by ensuring that the terms of reference are published and that there is open and transparent engagement.

The current requirement for all post-16 students who have not achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths to continue to study those subjects alongside their other studies is not working for the majority of post-16 students and the Government must change it. This policy can be demoralising for students and puts a huge strain on colleges and their staff. Whilst ensuring that students continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy is important, a different approach is needed. We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English, based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification or employment pathway. We also call for the Government to address the resit problem at source by examining the reasons for the low pass rates in GCSE maths and English at age 16 and taking steps to improve them.

## Apprenticeships

We welcome the Government's reforms of the apprenticeship system and the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy. The former apprenticeship levy was overly complex and inflexible. However, for many prospective apprentices and employers, the pathway to an apprenticeship remains unclear, bureaucratic, and discouraging. The process must be simplified



if the Government is to boost enrolment in apprenticeships and promote higher-paid jobs in key sectors. Dedicated support and guidance must also be provided to help Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) navigate the system.

Foundation apprenticeships have been welcomed by the sector. However, whilst these shorter apprenticeships rightly aim to help young people enter critical sectors, we heard concerns about the Government's decision not to target "everyday sectors", such as the hospitality, retail and care sectors. These sectors often serve as entry points into the workforce, and we recommend their inclusion in the foundation apprenticeship scheme.

Whilst removing the requirement for adult apprentices to attain grade 4 maths and English before completing their apprenticeships may increase participation, it also risks widening existing literacy and numeracy gaps and creating age-based inequalities. Changes to the maths and English requirements based on age increases the likelihood that employers take on adult apprentices, who now have fewer requirements than apprentices aged 16 to 18. Adult apprentices without a good foundation in literacy and numeracy may also face barriers to their progression. We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for apprentices of all ages who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen apprenticeship.

The evidence we heard was overwhelmingly opposed to the Government's decision not to fund level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over through the Growth and Skills Levy. The defunding of these apprenticeships will reduce uptake—particularly in key sectors such as healthcare—widen existing skills shortages, and limit career progression for many. We recommend that the Department for Education re-introduces levy funding for level 7 apprenticeships for all ages within the eight growth-driving sectors and for regulated professions, such as healthcare.

## Supporting further education students

Support for students and trainees must be strengthened. Poor mental health is a growing crisis for young people, with rising rates of anxiety, depression and eating disorders—particularly for those aged 17 to 19. The rollout of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) has been slow—only 41% of post-16 students are currently covered. There is an urgent need for increased investment, faster implementation of MHSTs, and earlier intervention and personalised support. The Government must improve access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and

adult mental health services for those children and young people with more severe mental health conditions and whose education is often interrupted for months or years at a time by the long waits for services and treatment.

On average, economically disadvantaged students aged 16–19 do not perform as well as their peers or achieve the same educational outcomes. Per-pupil funding drops sharply after the age of 16, creating a cliff edge that limits support for disadvantaged students. We call for the introduction of a 16–19 student premium for disadvantaged post-16 students. This funding should be pegged to the Pupil Premium and would be a targeted investment for post-16 students who have been eligible for the Pupil Premium in the last six years.

SEND policy is currently overseen by the Minister for School Standards whilst further education policy lies with the Minister for Skills. This split in ministerial responsibility has led to the neglect of FE SEND policy, as well as inefficiencies, limited accountability and policy fragmentation. Specialist further education should have its own ministerial brief and be included in the Minister for Skills’ portfolio. We also recommend that the Department for Education considers extending the statutory duty on local authorities to provide home-to-college transport for further education students with SEND from the age of 16 to 25. The Department must also mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people in this age group, for whom such training is appropriate, to promote independence and safe travel.

Care leavers face significant challenges transitioning into further education, employment or training. Care leavers aged 19–21 are three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training than their peers. There is insufficient support for those transitioning into further education or training. We call on the Department for Education to develop a strategy to support all those with care experience as they transition from secondary school level to further education or training. The Department should create a transition programme for students including mentoring and orientation for care leavers entering further education, building on existing best practice, as part of the national offer for care leavers recommended in our report on Children’s Social Care.

## Funding

The further education sector faces significant funding challenges due to prolonged real-terms cuts since 2010. A rise in the number of 16–18-year-olds over the coming years will continue to increase pressure on colleges and other providers, yet per-student funding has not kept pace with the consequences of this population bulge. Without substantial investment,

per-student funding will fall further, undermining the Government's reliance on the further education sector to achieve its national missions. It is crucial that the Government increases per-student funding across all post-16 funding streams, based on a detailed assessment of need.

Colleges face significant challenges due to limited and short-term capital funding. Whilst recent allocations have addressed urgent maintenance needs, the lack of sustained capital investment prevents long-term improvements. Without ongoing and increased investment across the sector, colleges and other providers risk falling behind in providing modern, industry-aligned facilities which are essential for skills development and for delivering the ambitions of the Government's Industrial Strategy. We recommend that the Department for Education increases capital funding significantly to support further education providers with modernisation and expansion.

Whilst academies and schools with sixth forms do not have to pay VAT, FE colleges and standalone sixth form colleges are not eligible for refunds in the VAT they incur on their expenditure. As colleges were reclassified as public bodies in 2022, this arrangement is unjustifiable and FE colleges and sixth form colleges should now benefit from a VAT exemption.

There is a growing pay disparity between school and college teachers in England, with college staff earning significantly less—on average college teachers earn 15% less. This issue has contributed to the recruitment and retention crisis. Whilst school-teacher pay is centrally reviewed and funded, college teacher pay decisions can be fragmented and underfunded, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate pay increases. We call for the establishment of a statutory pay review body for colleges comparable to the School Teachers' Review Body. The Department for Education must commit to closing the gap in pay between college teachers and their school counterparts within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period.

The Department for Education must address the underlying and unresolved reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis amongst school and college teachers, which include pay disparities, excessive workloads, limited professional development and job insecurity. In so doing, it must develop incentives for post-16 teaching staff to remain in the profession.

The Government's reduction in adult education funding for 2025–26 will further undermine efforts to upskill the existing workforce and to support those who are out of work or struggling to progress. Reduced investment in adult education threatens the Government's broader social and economic goals on employment, health and digital inclusion. Funding for adult education and skills must increase to meet demand and to ensure that those over the age of 19 are able to participate in, and benefit from, the Government's national missions. The Government must ensure that learning

and training opportunities remain accessible to anyone seeking to enhance their skills, broaden their knowledge, or take incremental steps toward personal development, and that adult learning is not narrowly framed as a pathway to employment alone.

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# 1 Introduction

## Purpose of the inquiry

1. The Government has set out five ambitious missions to shape the future of the UK—missions that span economic growth, clean energy, public safety, opportunity, and healthcare. Each of these missions depends not only on policy and investment but on people: skilled, adaptable, and empowered individuals who can drive change in every region and sector.
2. At the start of this Parliament, we launched an inquiry into the current state of further education in England and the Government’s proposals to strengthen the skills system. With the Post-16 Skills White Paper expected later this year, this inquiry was designed to provide the Department for Education with clear findings and recommendations to shape its reform agenda effectively.
3. Further education underpins each of the Government’s five missions and therefore provides a clear incentive to ensure the FE sector is fit for purpose:
  - **Kickstart economic growth**—The Government has made a clear link between its ambition to grow the economy through its Industrial Strategy, and the need for a robust post-16 education and training system. The Government has said: “The skills system is central to achieving economic growth.”<sup>1</sup> Skills shortages are currently responsible for over half a million vacancies (around 36% of all unfilled roles) which pose a significant barrier to economic growth. The Government believes this is holding back economic growth. The Department for Education has said that through Skills England it will build a highly trained workforce that employers need, which will “drive economic growth and deliver the national, regional, and local skills needs of the next decade.”<sup>2</sup>
  - **Make Britain a clean energy superpower**—Delivering clean energy by 2030 will require a new generation of skilled workers: engineers, welders, programmers, technicians and more. The Government’s ambition to train a “clean power army” depends on the capacity of further education institutions to provide high-quality, industry-relevant

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1 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), June 2025.

2 Department for Education, [FES0261](#).

training. Skills England has reported that employment in clean energy industries is growing five times faster than the UK average, and that FE colleges are key entry routes into these sectors.<sup>3</sup> We explore in this report how the sector can be supported to meet this demand.

- **Take back our streets**—The aim of this mission is to reduce serious crime and increase public confidence in policing and in the criminal justice system. One of the measures proposed by the Government to achieve this mission is to introduce Young Future Hubs. These hubs will have youth workers, mental health support workers and careers advisers “to support young people’s mental health and avoid them being drawn into crime.”<sup>4</sup> By providing mental health support, mentoring, careers guidance and activities for young people, Young Futures hubs will help address some of the more difficult challenges currently facing young people which we have explored as part of this inquiry. Our report includes further positive and practical proposals to help tackle some of the challenges we have heard about, including insufficient mental health support, inequalities and a lack of opportunities.
- **Break down barriers to opportunity**—The Government’s aim to ensure there is “no ceiling on the ambitions of young people” is at the very heart of this inquiry. The Government has said that further education provides people with “the skills they need to thrive in life and work, which is crucial to raise living standards and break down the barriers to opportunity.” The Department for Education told us that high-quality careers advice, the adult skills system, and the support it provides to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are all essential parts of the Government’s mission to break down those barriers.<sup>5</sup>
- **Build an NHS fit for the future**—NHS Employers—the employers’ organisation for the NHS in England—has said that a strong relationship between the health and social care sector and further education is “crucial for identifying workforce supply gaps and ensuring students are supported in their career aspirations.” It said that in many areas of the country the health and social care sector is the largest employer and that FE colleges are the largest education providers. “By working collaboratively there are opportunities to share

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3 Skills England, [Sector skills needs assessments: Clean Energy Industries](#), June 2025, p 7.

4 Prime Minister’s Office, [Young Futures Hubs to launch offering vulnerable young people lifeline](#), July 2025.

5 Department for Education, [FES0261](#).

knowledge, skills and experience to create a strong offer to the local population. That will enable more people to train, enter employment and continue to learn throughout their careers.”<sup>6</sup>

## Scope of the inquiry—what is further education?

4. For the purposes of this inquiry, we have used the Government’s definition of further education: “Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that’s not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree).”<sup>7</sup> However, the further education sector does not exist in isolation. In order for us to conduct a comprehensive examination of the subject it was necessary to explore qualifications, curricula, funding streams, training programmes and education levels which exist beyond the boundaries of the Government’s definition. For example, the way in which post-16 education and training options are presented to secondary school pupils forms part of this inquiry, as do apprenticeships, adult education and access to higher education.
5. We begin our report by exploring the role of the newly established Skills England. We heard directly from the Chairs and Chief Executives of Skills England when that organisation was still in shadow form; one of the recommendations we put forward in this report is that Skills England should continue to appear before the Education Committee regularly to account for its work. In chapter 3 we look at the devolution of skills policy and the Government’s “devolution by default” approach. We also consider the effectiveness of Local Skills Improvement Plans, the Government’s Youth Guarantee and the devolution of adult skills and education.
6. In chapter 4 we examine the diverse range of post-16 qualifications and pathways available to those entering further education. Our particular focus in this section is on achieving parity of esteem between academic pathways on the one hand and technical or vocational routes on the other; the successes and challenges of T Levels; the Government’s reforms to level 3 qualifications; and maths and English resits. We review apprenticeships in chapter 5 and the Government’s commitment to increase the number of apprentices in the coming years. We look at the new foundation apprenticeships, which are shorter in duration and designed to appeal to young people looking for an entrance into the workplace. We also consider the Government’s recent reforms of the apprenticeship system, including

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6 NHS Employers, [Making links between health and care and further education](#), May 2024.  
7 GOV UK, [Further education courses and funding](#), accessed August 2025.

an overhaul of the apprenticeship levy, changes to requirements for adult apprentices and the decision not to continue funding level 7 apprenticeships through the levy.

7. In chapter 6 we assess what steps the Government has taken to support both existing and prospective further education students and trainees. From the evidence we have seen, we identified four major challenges which the Government must address: a rise in the number of further education students with mental health difficulties; a lack of funding for disadvantaged students; multiple issues facing further education students with SEND, including transport provision; and challenges for further education students with care experience. Our final chapter looks at the all-encompassing issue of funding. We consider the effects of a prolonged period of reduced funding for the further education sector; the unfair VAT arrangement for FE and other colleges; discrepancies in staff pay; and the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention in FE.

## Acknowledgements

8. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the students, parents, teachers, colleges, organisations, charities, businesses, academics, civil servants, and individuals who shared with us their experiences and expertise. The conclusions we have drawn and the recommendations we have proposed in this report are founded on their evidence and we thank them for their vital contributions. During our inquiry we received 275 pieces of written evidence and heard from 26 expert witnesses over four oral evidence sessions. These written submissions and evidence sessions informed and shaped our work; witnesses drew our attention to the most pressing issues, but also shone a light on aspects of the further education sector which are often overlooked or underexplored.
9. We would also like to thank the staff and students at City College Norwich for welcoming us on a visit in June 2025. We were struck by the college's comprehensive range of education and training options, as well as its impressive teaching, support services and facilities. The college's dedication to promoting and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for every student was inspiring. We gained a great deal from our discussions with Jerry White, Chief Executive Officer and Principal of the college, and his colleagues about the challenges currently facing the college and the further education sector more widely—including the continued imposition of VAT for colleges, the difficulties around adult education funding not meeting the demand for places, the strain of accommodating maths and English resits each year, and the cut in funding rates for 18-year-olds in their third year of study. Staff and students at the college made a compelling case



for reform and what we took away from our visit underpins a number of our recommendations. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Association of Colleges for facilitating our visit to the college.

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## 2 Skills England

10. The Government has said that “skills needs” are changing and that “megatrends”, such as an ageing population, a move towards a green economy, and the increasing use of technology and artificial intelligence, will have an impact on the way in which jobs are distributed and skills are harnessed. In October 2024, the Government said that “while the skills system in England has a crucial role in ensuring that businesses and individuals are equipped to thrive in the modern (and future) economy, several features of its current design and operation risk preventing it from being the driver of economic growth and individual opportunity that the country needs.”<sup>8</sup>
11. In its 2024 General Election manifesto, the Labour Party said it would establish Skills England “to bring together business, training providers and unions with national and local government to ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver Labour’s Industrial Strategy.”<sup>9</sup> The King’s Speech 2024 made reference to a Skills England Bill which would “pave the way for the establishment of Skills England by transferring functions from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.”<sup>10</sup> Skills England was established in shadow form on 22 July 2024 within the Department for Education. Following the passing of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Act 2025, Skills England became fully operational on 1 June 2025.

### The Independence of Skills England

12. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) was a Non-Departmental Public Body, whereas Skills England operates as an Executive Agency of the Department for Education. Whilst the Cabinet Office defines both Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Executive Agencies as “arm’s length bodies”, there are key differences between the two types of

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8 Department for Education, [IfATE \(Transfer of Functions\) Bill, Policy Summary Notes](#), October 2024, pp 4–5.

9 The Labour Party, [Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), June 2024, p 85.

10 Prime Minister’s Office, [King’s Speech 2024](#), July 2024, p 66.

public authorities, including the form in which they are established, their internal governance, and the extent to which they are independent of their sponsoring Government departments.<sup>11</sup>

- 13.** The Government’s decision to establish Skills England as an Executive Agency, and its consequent level of independence from the Department for Education, was a key topic of discussion during the passage of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill. Concerns were raised in both Houses about the Government’s intention to transfer IfATE’s functions and responsibilities to the Secretary of State for Education, who would in turn delegate them to Skills England. When questioned in the House about why Skills England had been established as an agency within the Department for Education rather than as an independent statutory body, the Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said the issue was one of “time and speed”. The Education Secretary argued that Skills England would still have the independence it needed to be effective:

[Skills England] will have the independence that it needs to perform its role effectively, with a robust governance and accountability framework and a chair who brings an enormous wealth of experience from business. A strong, independent board, chaired by Phil Smith, will balance operational independence with proximity to Government. It will operate in the same way that many Executive agencies, such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, already operate.<sup>12</sup>

- 14.** A number of written evidence submissions received by the Committee raised concerns about Skills England’s independence. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which represents 170,000 businesses across the UK, told the Committee that whilst its members supported Skills England’s objectives, they had concerns about its “level of independence and capacity to influence skills policymaking, given that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Transfer Bill (IfATE) Bill assigned most decision-making powers to the Secretary of State.”<sup>13</sup> Make UK, a representative body of the manufacturing and engineering sectors, argued that Skills England should “sit independently of the Department for Education to ensure it works most effectively across Government” and that the Government should take care that “increasing the powers of the Secretary of State in relation to the preparation and approval of [apprenticeship] standards does not limit the ability of the ‘employer-led system’ to be responsive to employer needs.”<sup>14</sup>

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11 Cabinet Office, [Classification Of Public Bodies: Guidance For Departments](#), accessed August 2025.

12 HC Deb, 25 February 2025, [col 683](#).

13 CBI, [FES0168](#).

14 Make UK, [FES0246](#).

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) told the Committee that Skills England ought to have been established “as a statutory, independent body.”<sup>15</sup>

15. The Committee asked the Chairs and Chief Executives of Skills England if its agency status posed any risks to its independence and, if so, how they would address those risks. Sir David Bell, Vice Chair of Skills England, told Members:

The executive agency model works very effectively because you have the impact of being slightly removed from the main policy Department to focus on the delivery of certain activities, but you are also close enough to have an influence with Ministers. If you look cross-government, there are a whole bunch of executive agencies—the Met Office, the Health Security Agency, the Forestry Commission and the like—that do have a strong role to play, and I do not think people get terribly consumed about their constitutional status. It will be for Skills England to be able to demonstrate that impact and influence as it really gets up and running.<sup>16</sup>

16. We presented the Chairs and Chief Executives of Skills England with the evidence we had heard on the chronic underfunding of the further education sector, and asked what representations they had made to the Department for Education to advocate increased resources ahead of the spending review. Tessa Griffiths, joint CEO of Skills England, told us that Skills England’s role in helping to prepare for that spending review was to articulate where the skills gaps were. “Our efforts are focused upon convening partners, talking to employers and talking to others to identify and, as we have all talked about, understand and get under the skin of the challenges in each of the different sectors.”<sup>17</sup> When asked if they had the operational independence to express concerns about the level of funding, Sir David Bell, Vice Chair of Skills England, said that Skills England was responsible for providing the evidence base for the skills requirements of the country. “It is then, during the spending review, for Ministers to determine the priorities both within the Department and across the Government as a whole. What we have done already is powerful in providing that evidence, but the decisions quite rightly will fall out of the spending review.”<sup>18</sup>

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15 National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), [FES0260](#).

16 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q34](#).

17 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q52](#).

18 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q54](#).

17.

**CONCLUSION**

Given the primacy of the Government’s economic growth mission, and the emphasis the Government has placed on a high-functioning and forward-looking skills system to deliver that mission, the comparison between the status of Skills England on the one hand and organisations such as the Met Office and the DVLA on the other is a weak one. Skills England has been given the crucial role of transforming skills opportunities and driving growth and it is vital that it is able to work impartially and, if necessary, challenge Government policy. We were concerned, therefore, by the reluctance of the Chairs and CEOs of Skills England to comment on the adequacy of funding for the FE sector when they gave oral evidence. Furthermore, without a statutory foundation, Skills England may be altered or abolished by this or any future Government and without the consent of Parliament.

18.

**RECOMMENDATION**

As an Executive Agency, Skills England is accountable to the Department for Education and therefore answerable to Parliament through this Committee. We will hold Skills England to account through annual accountability sessions and urge subsequent Education Committees to continue this practice.

19.

**RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education commits to an independent review of Skills England within two years of it becoming fully operational—by June 2027—with a commitment to legislate further to ensure full independence if necessary.

## Skills England’s Chief Executive Officers

20. Another point of concern raised by parliamentarians during the passing of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill was the status conferred on Skills England’s Chief Executive Officers.<sup>19</sup> When the job advertisement was published in October 2024, it emerged that the CEO of Skills England would be appointed as a Director within the civil service and would report to a Director General—a senior civil servant at the Department for Education—who themselves report to the Permanent Secretary. The role of CEO at Skills England was subsequently awarded jointly to Tessa Griffiths and Sarah Maclean.<sup>20</sup>

19 HL Deb, 22 October 2024, [col 593](#); HC Deb, 25 February 2025, [col 688](#).

20 Department for Education, [10,000 more apprentices as government slashes red tape to boost growth](#), 11 February 2025.

21. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) has said that Skills England’s CEO role occupies “too junior a position within the civil service to have sufficient visibility and impact elsewhere in Government” and that its director-level status will affect the way senior officials and Permanent Secretaries in other departments and agencies view Skills England staff including the CEOs themselves.<sup>21</sup> Engineering UK—an organisation that works in partnership with the engineering community, including over 400 businesses—told the Committee that it has concerns about the Government’s decision to appoint Skills England’s Chief Executives at director level (rather than director general level) and not to create the agency on a statutory footing, “meaning its future existence will be subject to the whim of the Government of the day.”<sup>22</sup>
22. TechUK, a membership organisation for the technology sector, warned that the status of the Chief Executives “may reduce the organisation’s influence and effectiveness within the Government structure. This lower positioning raises concerns about whether Skills England will have sufficient authority to shape policy and drive meaningful change. There is also a risk that Skills England could become a largely symbolic organisation with limited power to influence critical decisions or secure the necessary resources and support.”<sup>23</sup>
23. The Committee asked the joint CEOs of Skills England, Tessa Griffiths and Sarah Maclean, whether they had been given the right level of seniority to perform their duties and to have a meaningful impact across Government. Sarah Maclean said that the level of the CEO role is the same as in other executive agencies: “it is the same as the CEO of IfATE, for example. We do not see that as an issue, but the proof will be in what we manage to deliver and how well we do that.”<sup>24</sup> However, in comparing the role and functions of IfATE with those of Skills England, Baroness Smith of Malvern told the Committee that Skills England “has a much more authoritative view of where skills needs are, as opposed to simply, but importantly, the focus that IfATE had on developing qualifications.” Skills England, she said, “needs to be able to do all the work that it has already started to do: the analysis of skills gaps, the real granularity of thinking about where the real priority areas are, the convening of employers alongside trade unions and regional structures to make sure that the system is working as effectively as possible, and bringing employers together on that.”<sup>25</sup>

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21 HEPI, [When Skills England calls, will anybody answer the phone?](#) March 2025.

22 Engineering UK, [FES0109](#).

23 TechUK, [FES0262](#).

24 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q36](#).

25 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q140](#).

24.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We have heard serious concerns that the role of Chief Executive Officer at Skills England is too junior within the civil service hierarchy. The director-level status given to the holders of that position may limit their ability to influence those working across Government and undermine the authority they need to perform their duties effectively. Whilst the joint CEOs said the role aligns with equivalent positions in similar agencies, we believe that the Chief Executive Officers' strategic leadership and the responsibility they have been given to oversee the Government's national skills policies demand greater seniority.

25.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education reviews the status of Skills England's Chief Executive Officers in June 2026—twelve months after Skills England became fully operational—to ensure they have been given the right level of seniority and that they have been able to perform their cross-departmental duties freely and effectively. The CEO position must be regraded if it is clear that seniority issues have prevented them from performing their duties constructively.

## **The Role of Skills England**

26. The creation of Skills England and the role that it has been given has broadly been welcomed by those who submitted written evidence to this inquiry. Organisations as diverse as KFC UK and Ireland, Airbus, the British Film Institute (BFI), and LinkedIn have described their support for the establishment of Skills England and that they look forward to building working relationships with it.<sup>26</sup> However, as Skills England emphasised in its first report, *Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities*, there are “significant skills barriers” to overcome.<sup>27</sup> It was with these challenges in mind that the Education Secretary set out the Department for Education's priorities for Skills England as it began its first year as a fully operational body. Skills England's immediate priorities are to:
- understand the country's skills needs and improve the skills offer
  - simplify access to skills to boost economic growth and encourage uptake in technical education and apprenticeships

26 KFC UK & Ireland, [FES0096](#); Airbus, [FES0169](#); British Film Institute, [FES0244](#); LinkedIn, [FES0259](#).

27 Skills England, [Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities](#), September 2024, p 32.

- mobilise employers and other partners to co-create solutions to meet national, regional and local skills needs.<sup>28</sup>

### Understand skills needs and improve the skills offer

- 27.** The Gatsby Foundation suggested that Skills England should oversee the collection and dissemination of labour market, skills and employment data both at a national level to support the industrial strategy and data that enable local areas to deliver training efficiently. It also recommended that Skills England delivers a “robust communication strategy” to improve public understanding of the skills system, to “shift perceptions” and encourage greater participation in technical education.<sup>29</sup> The Institute of Physics, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, and the Royal Statistical Society also called for improved data collection and information sharing.<sup>30</sup>

### Simplify access to skills and encourage technical education and apprenticeships

- 28.** Written evidence received by the Committee is clear that the main reason for the drop in apprenticeship participation in recent years was the complexity and inflexibility of the apprenticeship levy. The UK Fashion and Textile Association described the levy as “an over complicated and often changing funding system which only serves large, levy-paying companies, even though most companies are SMEs.”<sup>31</sup> The CBI said its members agreed that meaningful reform of the growth and skills levy would “significantly impact their ability to invest in training to address their skills needs.”<sup>32</sup> Professor René Koglbauer, Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice at Newcastle University, suggested that whilst the new levy offers greater employer input into training provision, its effectiveness “will depend on clear implementation plans and long-term certainty.”<sup>33</sup>

### Mobilise and co-create solutions to meet national, regional and local skills needs

- 29.** Ben Rowland, Chief Executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) argued that “a change in gear” was needed from Skills England, and that it “needs to be moving forward and driving forward—not just listening to people, not just waiting for evidence, but

28 Department for Education, [Skills England priorities 2025 to 2026](#), 2 June 2025.

29 Gatsby Charitable Foundation, [FES0211](#).

30 Institute of Physics, [FES0219](#); Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, [FES0239](#); Royal Statistical Society, [FES0092](#).

31 The UK Fashion and Textile Association, [FES0033](#).

32 CBI, [FES0168](#).

33 Professor René Koglbauer, [FES0212](#).



pushing things forward.” He told the Committee that Skills England’s priority (its “apex task above all others”) ought to be the creation of the programmes that can be used for the growth and skills levy. He described how, in some cases, AELP members had hundreds of young people lined up for industrial strategy sectors who could not start because the programme is not yet ready yet: “If that happens across the board, that is a bit of a disaster.”<sup>34</sup>

30.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Skills England has been broadly welcomed by the further education and skills sectors. We agree with the Government’s priorities for Skills England, including identifying national and local skills needs, simplifying access to training, and collaborating with employers and training providers to develop mutually beneficial solutions. However, Skills England must address the issues our evidence has raised, including a lack of data collection and information sharing, a complex levy system that disadvantages SMEs, and a lack of urgency and clear communication over the training programmes to be funded by the Growth and Skills Levy.

31.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

To meet its priorities, Skills England must within a year of becoming fully operational—by June 2026—enhance data collection and sharing through a centralised platform that tracks skills gaps and training outcomes. Within two years—by June 2027—Skills England should deliver reform of the complex levy system to ensure SMEs can access funding, with simplified processes and tailored support. Skills England must also provide clear communication about Growth and Skills Levy-funded programmes for employers and learners.

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34 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q60](#).

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## 3 Devolution

### Devolution of skills and further education

- 32.** Between 2015 and 2018, the Government agreed a series of devolution deals with regional authorities in England, which included elements of devolved skills policy. The Adult Education Budget (AEB)—now the Adult Skills Fund (ASF)—was transferred to Mayoral Combined Authorities, giving those devolved authorities more responsibility for determining local skills needs. Following a summit of the then-six metro-mayors and the Mayor of London in November 2017, the mayors issued a joint statement arguing that “a major and sustained programme of devolution to cities and regions” was in the interest of the whole of the UK. They identified skills, training, apprenticeship services and welfare to work programmes as areas where further devolution was required most urgently.<sup>35</sup> By August 2025, the Government estimates that it will have devolved 68% of the ASF to Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority.<sup>36</sup>
- 33.** In its English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, the Government said it wanted to deepen and widen devolution across England—including skills policy and funding. The White Paper set out plans to establish Strategic Authorities in every area of England under a “devolution by default” approach. The Paper included proposals to:
- Enable joint ownership of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) between Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs). The white paper confirmed that LSIPs must be clearly linked to local growth plans
  - Continue with the devolution of the Adult Skills Fund, removing ringfences for Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamps for Mayoral Strategic Authorities
  - Give Mayoral Strategic Authorities the opportunity to feed into the Department for Education’s annual strategic conversations with colleges to inform FE delivery, including on 16–19 provision.<sup>37</sup>

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35 London.gov.uk, [Mayors unite to call for major devolution to city regions](#), November 2017.

36 [Adult Education: Finance](#), PQ 44214, 4 April 2025.

37 MHCLG, [English Devolution White Paper](#), December 2024.

**34.** The Skills Federation welcomed these proposals for a wider and deeper devolution as “an opportunity to ensure that local skills provision can be better tailored to the needs of individuals, including connecting them to employers and employment opportunities in their local area.” However, it warned that the devolution of skills policy presents challenges to employers, particularly those that work across the country. It recommended that the Government considers how to co-ordinate meeting sector needs across an increasingly devolved landscape.<sup>38</sup>

**35.** Dr Fiona Aldridge, Chief Executive Officer of the Skills Federation, told the Committee that one of the main challenges around devolution is that local authorities are dependent on “what the centre is willing to give away.” Dr Aldridge explained how providing local authorities with greater responsibilities would make a difference:

Combined authorities have great potential to bring ... skills budgets together, but they can be really limited by a central Government Department saying, “Actually, you can have this bit but not that bit.” You cannot really think about the full levers and what the challenge is that can be fixed in a place, and giving them all those levers ... There is something about making sure that combined authorities have the right levers and the flexibility to do the things with them that they think will solve those issues. Have high accountability—absolutely—but also the flexibility to meet those.<sup>39</sup>

**36.** The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) told the Committee that it would welcome devolved flexibility around technical and vocational funding for 16–19-year-olds. For example, devolving responsibility and funding for T Levels to ensure closer alignment with the city-region’s economic needs, and “ensuring Greater Manchester has the levers to galvanise employers to deliver industry placements at scale.” However, the GMCA said that “the simple truth is that without a place-based approach to drive these models—highlighting the benefits to businesses and young people in place—there will simply not be enough momentum to build the necessary capacity and ensure these opportunities are taken up.”<sup>40</sup>

**37.** The Greater London Authority (GLA) argued that giving it control over the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) would provide it with greater influence on how capital funding is allocated. It said that “while we are pleased that Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) are now the responsibility of Mayoral Strategic Authorities, devolution of the LSIF would enable us to streamline the use of capital funding in London and ensure better value for money.”<sup>41</sup>

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38 The Skills Federation, [FES0217](#).

39 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q107](#).

40 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [FES0206](#).

41 Greater London Authority, [FES0264](#).

The GLA also called for greater influence over 16–19 technical skills and the devolution of the Growth and Skills Levy, based on the amount raised in levy receipts by London businesses.<sup>42</sup>

38. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has recommended that the Government devolves further funding to combined authorities and regional partnerships to invest in tailored solutions to local workforce development priorities and skills needs. It said that it is “critical that any regional workforce development programme is based upon local intelligence and evidence and able to respond to regional employer and industry skills needs.”<sup>43</sup>
39. However, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers described the devolution of apprenticeships as “a backward step.” It told us that shifting the commissioning of apprenticeships to local leaders would “undermine the employer-led approach and create a postcode lottery for employers who want to access apprenticeship delivery. Local authorities do not have the understanding of shifting industry needs that employers have.” The AELP argued that what ought to be devolved are the programmes that prepare people “so that they can get a job and/or an apprenticeship: SWAPs, Bootcamps etc.”<sup>44</sup>
40. In July 2025, the Government introduced the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of the Bill is to “support the Government’s ambition to rebalance power away from Central Government so that local leaders can take back control and increase prosperity for local people.”<sup>46</sup> The Bill would introduce a Strategic Authority for each area in England and would devolve to them seven “areas of competence” including skills and employment support. Adult education functions would be transferred from Central Government to Strategic Authorities, enabling the Department for Education to devolve the Adult Skills Fund. The Government’s guidance on the Bill states that “Strategic Authorities can use this [Adult Skills Fund] as they see fit to meet the skills needs of adults in their region.”<sup>47</sup>

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42 Greater London Authority, [FES0264](#).

43 Education and Training Foundation, [FES0043](#).

44 AELP, [FES0115](#).

45 [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) [as introduced], Bill 283, (2024–25).

46 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: Guidance](#), July 2025.

47 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: Guidance](#), July 2025.

41.

**CONCLUSION**

We welcome the Government's plans to deepen and widen the devolution of skills and employment support in England. Devolving further powers to Strategic Authorities will help to drive growth, encourage the co-ordinated delivery of education and training services across the country, and meet the unique needs of local communities. It is disappointing, however, that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, as introduced, limits the devolution of skills and employment support to those aged 19 and over and does not make provision for the devolution of 16–19 education and training. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that every part of the country benefits from further devolution and that no area is left behind, regardless of its status within the devolution process.

42.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Government should broaden its commitment to “devolution by default” by devolving appropriate 16–19 education and training, skills programmes and funding streams to each Strategic Authority. We recommend that the Government amends the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to make provision for the devolution of 16–19 education and training.

43.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Government should consider utilising the trailblazer model to pilot a more comprehensive skills devolution programme and report back to the Committee.

## Local Skills Improvement Plans

44. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that employers, providers and other stakeholders in a local area “can get behind to drive change.” LSIPs are designed to:

- place employers at the heart of local skills systems
- facilitate direct and dynamic working arrangements between employers, providers and local stakeholders
- help learners gain the skills they need to get good jobs and increase their prospects<sup>48</sup>

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48 Department for Education, [Local skills improvement plans \(LSIPs\) and local skills improvement fund \(LSIF\)](#), updated April 2024.

**45.** In autumn 2022, Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) were designated to lead the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans for each of the 38 areas of the country. The majority of ERBs are local chambers of commerce. Each LSIP provides an agreed set of actionable priorities that employers, further education providers and other stakeholders in a local area can deliver in partnership. LSIPs were approved by the Education Secretary in summer 2023, in line with the approval criteria set out in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022. In summer 2024, each of the 38 areas produced an annual progress report setting out:

- Which of the actions or changes in the LSIP had been achieved
- The impact and benefits of those actions or changes
- What still needed to be achieved in their area<sup>49</sup>

**46.** The British Chambers of Commerce described Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) as “an effective mechanism” to address the gap between the skills needs of employers and the training provision available in their local area. It suggested that LSIPs are “beginning to narrow this gap by opening up conversations and partnerships between business and providers, helping to ‘translate’ the skills system for employers, stimulate and aggregate demand for skills, and helping to plan for the medium to long term skills needs of a local economy.”<sup>50</sup>

**47.** David Gaughan, Interim Director of Employment and Skills at WMCA, described LSIPs as “a work in progress.” He said “We have a very strong relationship with Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, which has been driving our LSIP. But LSIPs are a little bit limited, and I don’t think we should put all our eggs in one basket in focusing on an LSIP. It is a component of the skills system within a region, and the employer voice has been a real core component of that.”<sup>51</sup>

**48.** Dr Susan Pember CBE, Policy Adviser at HOLEX, struck a similarly cautious note:

I have a plea: if it is going to be LSIP, let it be LSIP, but actually there are so many other vested interests. We are going to have the growth plans, we have the mayoral combined authority plans and we now have the Connect to Work plans. There are just too many. The infrastructure is too heavy, not only for the employer but for the provider, who has to demonstrate to Ofsted that they are actually taking notice of all these plans.<sup>52</sup>

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49 LSIPs and annual progress reports are published on the designated ERB websites [here](#).

50 British Chambers of Commerce, [FES0232](#).

51 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q108](#).

52 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q109](#).

49. The UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy told us that it is essential for the Government to approach the implementation of LSIPs “with meaningful involvement from local and regional authorities, FE providers, Skills England and Universities as local employers.” It warned that LSIPs should not be developed in isolation but through ongoing dialogue and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure they accurately capture local labour market dynamics and future growth sectors.<sup>53</sup> The University and College Union (UCU) argued that LSIPs place “numerous demands on education providers without bestowing upon them any legal rights.” It said that the work of Employer Representative Bodies, and the extent to which they invite education providers to take part in the LSIP process, lacks transparency.<sup>54</sup>

50. **CONCLUSION**

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) have been effective in aligning employer needs with education and training provision, and in utilising and developing local partnerships. LSIPs are a relatively new initiative and will need time to become fully established. However, those most closely involved in their production and facilitation have already identified some potential challenges which the Government should address. It can be difficult for employers and providers to navigate LSIPs in a crowded landscape of overlapping initiatives and there is a perception that local partnerships are not always balanced.

51. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education conducts a policy audit to identify overlaps between LSIPs and other skills initiatives in order to streamline LSIPs and make them more coherent and easier to navigate. We also recommend that the Department for Education considers how local partnerships between Employer Representative Bodies, FE providers, local authorities, Skills England and others can be rationalised and strengthened. The Department must set out within a year how it will ensure that there are formal criteria for each of these groups to follow when contributing towards their Local Skills Improvement Plans and that transparent decision-making processes are in place.

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53 UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy, [FES0220](#).

54 University College Union, [FES0078](#).

## Youth Guarantee

- 52.** The latest Labour Force Survey estimates for England show that 837,000 16–24-year-olds in England were not in education, employment or training (NEET) between October and December 2024. This equates to 13.6% of those in that age group—almost 1 in 7 young people.<sup>55</sup> As set out in its Get Britain Working White Paper, the Government has committed to a Youth Guarantee “so that all 18-to-21-year-olds in England have access to education, training or help to find a job or an apprenticeship.” The Youth Guarantee, which the Government said is based on existing provision and entitlements, involves:
- Working with mayoral authorities to mobilise eight place-based Youth Guarantee trailblazers with £45 million of funding in 2025–26. These trailblazers will design and test how different elements of the Guarantee can be brought together into a coherent offer for young people, with clear leadership and accountability and proactive engagement to make sure no young person misses out
  - Expanding opportunities for young people by transforming the Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible Growth and Skills Levy. As a first step, the Government will create new foundation and shorter apprenticeship opportunities for young people in key sectors
  - Exploring a new approach to benefit rules for young people, to make sure they can develop skills alongside searching for work, while also preventing young people from falling out of the workforce before their careers have begun
  - Acting to prevent young people losing touch with education or employment before the age of 18, with a guaranteed place in education and training for all 16 and 17-year-olds, an expansion of work experience and careers advice, action to tackle school attendance, and steps to improve access to mental health services for young people.<sup>56</sup>
- 53.** The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)—one of the eight Youth Guarantee trailblazers—told the Committee that young people are finding it harder to move into, and stay in, the labour market. Nearly half of 16-year-olds in the West Midlands left school in summer 2024 without achieving level 2 GCSEs in maths and English and nearly 2 in 5 failed to achieve the five GCSE passes. The WMCA’s own research and analysis shows these young people experience lower levels of employment (and are more likely

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<sup>55</sup> Department for Education, [NEET age 16 to 24](#), 20 March 2025.

<sup>56</sup> HM Government, [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), November 2024, pp 6–7.



to be employed in low-paid and insecure work harming long-term career prospects), reduced access to apprenticeships (especially for marginalised groups living in deprivation), and barriers to equality of opportunity.<sup>57</sup>

54. Tom Richmond—a former skills advisor to the last Government—said it is “immensely frustrating” that the Youth Guarantee “appears to be little more than a wrapper for several existing initiatives rather than offering any new funding or innovative approaches.” He said the scheme “lacks the ambition and firepower of a Kickstart-style scheme and lacks clarity in terms of who will be driving it forward and take responsibility for ensuring its success.”<sup>58</sup>
55. However, proposals for the Youth Guarantee have been welcomed by other organisations. Youth Employment UK said the Youth Guarantee offers the opportunity “for enhanced and tailored support for young people”, but that involving young people in the design of the services is essential “to ensure it meets their needs effectively.”<sup>59</sup> The Skills Federation said that it welcomed the Youth Guarantee, but that “the engagement and input of employers will be essential to ensure a positive impact.”<sup>60</sup> In supplementary written evidence, the Skills Federation suggested that consideration should be given to extending the guarantee down to 16 and up to 24: “Whilst the number of NEETs is lower, at 65,000 for 16–18 year olds, there are still too many young people who are not getting the best start to their careers.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the British Chambers of Commerce called for the Youth Guarantee to be extended to include all under 25s, “to provide more opportunities for young people to benefit, and to align this demographic with the NEET population figures.”<sup>62</sup>

56. **CONCLUSION**

The number of young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England is unacceptable both for the life chances of young people and for economic growth. The Government’s Youth Guarantee goes some way to support 18–21-year-olds to access education, training and employment opportunities. However, it will only benefit those in the narrow 18–21 age group, excluding young people aged 16–17 and 22–24.

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57 West Midlands Combined Authority, [FES0265](#).

58 FE Week, Youth guarantee: [A ‘real chance’ or lacking ‘firepower’?](#) 26 November 2024.

59 Youth Employment UK, [FES0165](#).

60 The Skills Federation, [FES0217](#).

61 Skills Federation, [FES0273](#).

62 British Chambers of Commerce, [FES0269](#).

57.

**RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Government expands eligibility for the Youth Guarantee to include all 16–24-year-olds so that all young people are given the same opportunities to re-enter education or access employment.

## Devolution of Adult Education and Training

58. Public funding for adult education programmes has largely been devolved over the last decade. At least 60% of England’s Adult Skills Fund has been devolved to Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority. In regions where the Department for Education has devolved the ASF, an authority is responsible for providing education and training to develop the skills that local employers need. It determines what those skills are by referring to the priorities set out in its Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).
59. The Government has said that devolving the Adult Skills Fund allows participant areas to shape adult education in their area to support local needs and provide a “bespoke” service to their residents based on local knowledge. The Government has stated that its intention is not to “dictate to any devolved area” how they approach the devolved ASF, but rather “to offer potential solutions which may be of use and could lead to a more unified approach across all areas leading to a less complex landscape for providers and ultimately learners.”<sup>63</sup>
60. Hoxby told the Committee in its written evidence that Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) help strengthen regional coordination “by leveraging devolved powers to align economic development, transport, and skills strategies across wider areas.” However, Hoxby identified what it describes as weaknesses in the devolved system of adult skills funding:
- Uneven devolution—some areas have stronger mayoral powers than others, leading to inconsistencies in regional development
  - Challenges in co-ordination—disparate local priorities can make alignment across multiple councils difficult
  - Employer engagement gaps—businesses may struggle to navigate and influence combined authority policies effectively.

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63 Department for Education, [Adult skills fund: funding framework part 2 – guidance on operating a devolved portion](#), December 2024.

61. One solution proposed by Hoxby to address these issues is to establish Regional Skills Councils, “creating a standardised approach to skills planning across different areas to ensure consistency, even where mayoral powers vary.”<sup>64</sup>
62. The Workers Educational Association (WEA) also highlighted the challenges of delivering adult education and training in devolved and non-devolved areas, “where learners get very different offers based on the flexibility or otherwise of funding agreements. Even across MCAs there are very different approaches not only determined by evaluation of local needs.”<sup>65</sup> The Skills Network said that devolution has introduced flexibility in skills and adult education funding, “but regional variations present challenges for both providers and employers.” It argued that “differences in funding priorities, eligibility criteria, and qualification approvals can make it difficult for providers to deliver consistent and scalable programmes” and suggested that a balanced approach to devolution is needed “ensuring local authorities have the flexibility to tailor provision while maintaining a cohesive national strategy to ensure consistency, accessibility, and alignment with employer needs.”<sup>66</sup>

63. **CONCLUSION**

Funding for adult education programmes has largely been devolved over the last decade which has provided local areas with more control, but it has also led to a disparate and uneven adult skills landscape. Some authorities have more powers than others, co-ordination between areas is not always smooth, and employers can find it difficult to get involved. On top of this, differences in funding rules and course approvals make it difficult for providers to run consistent, scalable programmes.

64. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education and Skills England create a Skills Co-ordination Board by April 2026. Local areas must be given the flexibility to develop and implement their own tailor-made strategies on adult education and training; the purpose of the Skills Co-ordination Board therefore would be to oversee and co-ordinate regional strategies with national sector needs across the increasingly devolved skills landscape. The Skills Co-ordination Board would be responsible for driving quality of skills services in each region and ensuring there is consistency of effectiveness across local areas and no area is left behind.

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64 Hoxby, [FES0178](#).

65 Workers Educational Association, [FES0044](#).

66 The Skills Network, [FES0214](#).

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## 4 Post-16 qualifications and pathways

### Achieving parity of esteem

- 65.** Written evidence received by the Committee suggested that post-16 technical and vocational options are often not presented to secondary school pupils with the same prominence as academic routes. A joint submission from eight Yorkshire colleges and college groups explained how there are “extremely limited options to explore technical or creative subjects prior to age 16.” The colleges called for “greater parity of esteem between academic and technical routes” which, they contend, will lead to economic growth and social mobility.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Dr David Allan of Edge Hill University said that despite numerous attempts to “bridge the divide”, vocational learning remained undervalued. Dr Allan made the point that vocational pathways are often perceived as a working-class route into employment or an easier choice for “non-achieving individuals.”<sup>68</sup>
- 66.** The apparent disparity of esteem between academic pathways on the one hand and vocational and technical routes on the other was explored in oral evidence. Dr Emily Tanner from the Nuffield Foundation told the Committee that “if you look at young people who struggle with the transition from school to post-16 college—the lower attainers, in particular—their needs are much greater and they really need support to be able to make vocational choices earlier than some of their peers, who might stay on academic pathways. They need much greater guidance to be able to make that transition.”<sup>69</sup>
- 67.** Responsibility for “approving, reviewing and ensuring the quality” of technical qualifications has now been transferred to Skills England. Vice Chair of Skills England, Sir David Bell, told the Committee that there is an issue with parity of esteem between academic and technical post-16 routes into education and training. Sir David said:

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67 West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges et al, [FES0145](#).

68 Dr David Allan, Edge Hill University, [FES0167](#).

69 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q97](#).

We cannot solve this problem overnight, but there is a serious commitment now to try to find new ways to give people opportunities at all stages. For example, we already have the introduction of the new foundation apprenticeships coming. That will be an interesting and important route. We have the development of T-levels [ ... ] We see it very much as our role to ensure that different qualifications are available. They are all seen as equally valid, but they all serve slightly different needs.<sup>70</sup>

68. A national five-year research study conducted by the Edge Foundation and King’s College London—Young Lives, Young Futures—has found that Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) in secondary schools “typically reinforces traditional choices by not presenting young people with adequate or full information about the advantages and logistics of vocational options.”<sup>71</sup> The research notes there are “clear inequalities” in the support young people receive in finding apprenticeships compared with ready information on A Levels. The research found there is “no clear, common pathway into apprenticeship as there is for higher education through UCAS for either young people or their employers and levels of support and guidance from schools and colleges was extremely varied.”<sup>72</sup>

### Baker Clause

69. The findings of Young Lives, Young Futures accord with the conclusions drawn by the previous Education Committee, which scrutinised careers information and guidance provision in 2022–23. The Committee found that careers education at secondary school level tended to steer pupils towards academic routes and did not focus enough on vocational and technical education.<sup>73</sup> It recommended that the Department for Education should track compliance with the “Baker Clause”—an amendment to the Technical and Further Education Act 2017 which aimed to address the issue of bias towards academic routes by requiring schools to give training providers and colleges access to pupils in years 8 to 13 to discuss technical education and apprenticeships.<sup>74</sup> The Department said that they were supporting schools to comply with the legislation and that they had seen improvements in compliance.<sup>75</sup>

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70 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q39](#).

71 Young Lives, Young Futures, [Accessing careers advice](#), accessed August 2025.

72 Young Lives, Young Futures, [Apprenticeships in England](#), November 2024.

73 Education Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2022–23, [Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance](#), HC 54, para 103.

74 Education Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2022–23, [Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance](#), HC 54, para 114.

75 Education Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2022–23, [Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Government response to the Committee’s Fourth Report](#), HC1848, para 133

- 70.** The Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 introduced reforms, called the “provider access legislation”, with the aim of strengthening the enforcement of the Baker Clause, as well as increasing the number of encounters schools are required to provide. As of January 2023, schools must provide at least six encounters with providers of technical education or apprenticeships, four of which are mandatory for pupils to attend (two in years 8 or 9 and two in years 10 or 11), followed by two in years 12 and 13 which are optional for pupils to attend.<sup>76</sup> The Department for Education’s statutory careers guidance states that a school would be offered targeted support “if there are concerns about a school’s adherence to the provider access legislation” and that if a school continues to fall short after receiving support, a minister will write to it, setting a deadline by which to comply “to avoid moving to formal intervention.”<sup>77</sup>
- 71.** However, we have been told that compliance with the Baker Clause remains a problem. In written evidence, the Edge Foundation explained that “despite the introduction of the Baker Clause, post-16 vocational options are still not presented on an equal footing with academic routes.” It said there is a risk that it becomes a box-ticking exercise unless there is “closer support and guidance.”<sup>78</sup> Robert Nitsch, Chief Executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, told the Committee: “I definitely think the Baker clause is not working; it is not sufficient. Where we see it applied, it seems to work reasonably well; 16% more apprenticeships in school settings have actually pushed that, so we really need to think about the Baker clause and how that is applied.”<sup>79</sup>
- 72.** Baroness Smith of Malvern told the Committee that it was necessary to ensure that the provisions of the Baker Clause and the provider access legislation are “actually being delivered.” Baroness Smith announced to the Committee that the Government had instructed the Careers and Enterprise Company to map schools’ compliance with these statutory duties in the coming year “so that we can be confident that students are getting the ability to see what the options are for them.”<sup>80</sup>

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76 Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, [section 14](#).

77 Department for Education, [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers](#), updated May 2025.

78 Edge Foundation, [FES0137](#).

79 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q4](#).

80 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q129](#).

73.

**CONCLUSION**

There is a stark disparity between how post-16 technical and vocational education and training pathways are presented to pupils and how academic pathways are presented, and fundamental differences in the levels of support and guidance that students receive about each. The Baker Clause and the provider access legislation are meant to ensure that school pupils are introduced to a diverse range of post-16 options, yet compliance with these statutory requirements is inconsistent. The support and intervention measures that already exist to ensure compliance with these provisions should be strengthened if levels of compliance do not improve.

74.

**RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that Department for Education publishes an annual report on the number and proportion of schools that are complying with the Baker Clause and provider access legislation, and assesses the reasons for non-compliance. The proposed work to be carried out by the Careers and Enterprise Company to map compliance should be comprehensive, transparent, it must consider pupils' experiences, and it should be published. The Department should report annually on the action that has been taken to intervene to ensure compliance with the Baker Clause and provider access legislation, and should consider whether the threshold for intervention should be lowered.

75.

**CONCLUSION**

Information about post-16 pathways can be fragmented, with no single platform covering both academic and vocational options. Apprenticeship applications are particularly complex due to the absence of a national framework and regional inconsistencies. Additionally, vocational application timelines are misaligned with university admissions, making it difficult for young people to consider all options equally. These issues contribute to a lack of parity of esteem, with academic routes appearing more accessible and structured than vocational alternatives.

76.

#### RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the remit of UCAS be expanded to offer a single source of information for all routes, including academic and vocational pathways. Application timelines for vocational courses, including apprenticeships, should better align with those for university admissions. Apprenticeship applications can be complex, and the availability of vacancies is not standardised. To address this, the Government should consider developing regional portals that integrate with the national admissions service. This would enable students to consider and compare their options simultaneously, rather than being influenced by staggered deadlines.

## T Levels

77. First launched in September 2020 and described by the Government as “the core of the new technical education offer at level 3”, T Levels are two-year technical courses taken after GCSEs and equivalent in size to three A Levels.<sup>81</sup> T Levels offer students practical and knowledge-based learning at a school or college, and on-the-job experience through an industry placement of approximately 45 days (20% of the course). The Department for Education has said that almost a third of the first cohort of T Level students that progressed into employment and apprenticeships are now employed by their industry placement organisation which, the Department believes, demonstrates the value of T Levels for employers.<sup>82</sup>
78. In 2023, there were 20,740 students aged 16 and 17 (1.5% of those aged 16 and 17) studying T Levels. The interim report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review describes T Levels as “the gold-standard technical qualification.” The interim report said “we want to ensure that the quality of their design and delivery is supported. Throughout the engagement process, we were encouraged to hear substantial positive feedback on the potential of T Levels and we are supportive of the opportunities they provide for learners.”<sup>83</sup>

### Retention Rates

79. Provisional data for the 2023–24 academic year suggest that only 71% of the 10,253 students starting T Levels in 2022 finished their course after two years.<sup>84</sup> For comparison, in the same academic year 92.3% of students

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81 Department for Education, [Using the new level 3 qualifications in the reformed landscape from 2025](#), May 2024, p 6.

82 [T Levels](#) PQ 11751, 6 November 2024.

83 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Interim Report](#), March 2025, p 32.

84 Department for Education, [Provisional T Level results](#), March 2025.



pursuing at least one A Level completed their course up to the point of assessment; whilst the retention rate for Applied General Qualifications for the same year was 85.3%.<sup>85</sup> The lower retention rate for T Levels has been ascribed to a number of factors, including student satisfaction and a “failing” T Level transition course.<sup>86</sup>

- 80.** End of course surveys with T Level students carried out by the Department in summer 2023 found that just over half of them were satisfied with their programme (57%) and likely to recommend it (51%). Satisfaction varied significantly by T Level route, however, with the highest satisfaction rates for Education and Early Years learners (79%) and the lowest for Health and Science learners (39%).<sup>87</sup> Darren Hankey, Principal and CEO of Hartlepool FE College, told the us that the success of the Education and Early Years T Level was due to the fact it had “a successful predecessor” which had a long, well-established track record of getting young people into placements.<sup>88</sup>
- 81.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) has described the T Level transition course—which is aimed at promoting progression into T Levels—as “overwhelmingly negative” and has recommended that the Department for Education abolishes or completely overhauls it. It said, “the programme is failing in its primary objective—promoting transitions to T levels.”<sup>89</sup> The EPI’s report into T Level access and progression concluded that the retention of T Levels students is “a major concern.” It said that one of the consequences of a lower retention rate is that, of those who withdraw, a large group drop out of education and training altogether, with disadvantaged students most vulnerable. The EPI has urged the Government to consider introducing “smaller alternatives” to T Levels (approximately one A level in size) to enable access “for a wider range of students and allow for greater breadth and flexibility in post-16 programme design.”<sup>90</sup>

### An unfamiliar qualification

- 82.** The qualification awarding body, the NCFE, identified in its written evidence an issue with T Levels that is highlighted in a number of other submissions: a lack of recognition and understanding of the qualification. The NCFE suggested that whilst some progress has been made to raise awareness amongst employers and other stakeholders, more time and effort is

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85 Department for Education, [A level and other 16 to 18 results](#), March 2025.

86 Education Policy Institute, [A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression](#), November 2024.

87 Department for Education, [Technical education learner survey 2023](#), September 2024.

88 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q3](#).

89 Education Policy Institute, [A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression](#), November 2024 p 7.

90 Education Policy Institute, [A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression](#), November 2024.

required. It said that “stakeholders still find it challenging to understand T Levels’ equivalence and comparability with A Levels.” For the NCFE, the purpose and design of T Levels have not been fully realised: “T Levels were originally designed to impart ‘occupational competence,’ with the main focus of getting learners ready to start work in their chosen occupation. [However], the DfE’s Technical education learner survey 2023 revealed that the most common destination was a university degree (44%).”<sup>91</sup>

83. Similarly, submissions from the Career Development Institute and the Edge Foundation argued that there is a lack of understanding of T Levels amongst employers, students and parents.<sup>92</sup> Written evidence from Barnsley College emphasised that the lack of familiarity with T Levels “can make it challenging for students to make informed decisions about their education and career paths and for employers to accept them.”<sup>93</sup>
84. Research conducted by the Edge Foundation into young people’s experiences of T Levels found that a lack of understanding or awareness about the qualification led to T Level students “starting their course with expectations that were not fully materialised.”<sup>94</sup> Alice Gardner, Chief Executive of the Edge Foundation, expanded on this point during oral evidence and said that the rollout of T Levels feels like “a guinea pig phase.” She said: “We cannot really afford to let any young person go through any qualification without being absolutely clear what the aims and objectives are and what they will get at the end of it.”<sup>95</sup>

### Employer involvement

85. GTA England—a network of not-for-profit training organisations that provide technical and STEM-related training—said in its written evidence that T levels can be a success, but that sufficient time is needed for them to become more established and accepted. It suggested that T levels offer “credible” classroom-based exposure to technical skills and knowledge, but that they do not currently provide the same work-based experience enjoyed by a level 3 apprentice. It described how employers “regularly cite a significant practical competence gap” between, for example, an engineering T level completer and a level 3 engineering apprentice.<sup>96</sup>
86. The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to review the early implementation of T Level qualifications in 2022 and 2023. In its final report the inspectorate concluded there was “considerable work to do” to improve

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91 NCFE, [FES0108](#).

92 Career Development Institute, [FES0098](#).

93 Barnsley College, [FES0121](#).

94 Edge Foundation, [FES0137](#).

95 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q8](#).

96 GTA England, [FES0105](#).

the quality and effectiveness of T levels.<sup>97</sup> Written evidence from Ofsted to the Committee said its review found both strengths and weaknesses with the T Level programme and employer involvement. On the one hand, Ofsted identified “very strong relationships” between T Level providers and a range of employers, which were “being used effectively to influence the design and implementation of the courses offered.” On the other, Ofsted said that employers are not being involved in the planning or implementation of the curriculum. This meant employers had little or no understanding of the content of the courses and therefore could not make useful links between classroom and practical learning.<sup>98</sup>

- 87.** Alice Gardner, Chief Executive of the Edge Foundation, told us that Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the “powerhouse” of this country and where most young people work. Yet these companies: “do not have the same capacity as big organisations to help and support young people, whether that is through the youth guarantee, apprenticeships or T-levels. We need to think about how we structurally support employers to do the best they can because we are asking a lot of them.”<sup>99</sup> David Robinson from the Education Policy Institute referred to research his organisation had recently carried out in partnership with Oxford University: “One thing that came out time and time again for small employers was the difficulty engaging with education and training structures, large amounts of bureaucracy for relatively small organisations, and the feeling that they are excluded from policymaking. A key task for Skills England going forward will be to make sure that SMEs are as involved in the processes as larger organisations.”<sup>100</sup>
- 88.** Chair of Skills England, Phil Smith CBE, said that small businesses “generally have a real problem in engaging with systems overall” and that Skills England would “simplify things.”<sup>101</sup> Joint CEO of Skills England, Sarah Maclean CBE, pointed to the flexibility that came with the offer of 20% of T Level industry placements with businesses being conducted online and the introduction of Local Skills Improvement Plans, which bring businesses and providers closer together. Ms Maclean said that there was still work to do and refinements to make in order to address issues surrounding T Level industry placements.<sup>102</sup>

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97 Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023.

98 Ofsted, [FES0159](#).

99 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q10](#).

100 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q11](#).

101 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q42](#).

102 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q43](#).

89.

**CONCLUSION**

T Levels are a relatively new programme of study, and they should be given adequate time to develop and gain traction. However, if T Levels are to become the “gold-standard technical qualification” the Government must urgently address a number of challenges. T Level programmes have low retention rates compared to A Level and Applied General Qualification courses; the ineffectiveness of the T Level transition programmes; responses to student surveys suggest there can be poor levels of student satisfaction; there is limited understanding and awareness of the purpose and value of T Levels among students, parents and employers.

90.

**RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education launches a national awareness campaign for T Levels, targeting students, parents and employers. The purpose and benefits of T Levels should be set out clearly from secondary school stage onwards. Parity of esteem between A Levels and T Levels should run through all communications, guidance and advice to schools, teachers, parents and students. The Department for Education should consider overhauling the T Level transition programme.

91.

**RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend the introduction of modular or smaller-sized T Level qualifications (e.g. equivalent to one A Level) to enable students to study a blend of academic and technical qualifications and allow more flexible entry and exit points. Employers should be involved more closely at the curriculum-design stage of these modular qualifications to ensure T Level programmes align with industry needs.

## Level 3 Qualification Reform

92. In July 2021, the previous Government published a policy statement outlining its proposals to create “clearly defined academic and technical routes” for post-16 progression that would sit alongside apprenticeships. The then-Government said it hoped the reforms would remove “low-quality qualifications” from the system, and ensure students had confidence in the outcomes of their choices.<sup>103</sup> As part of these reforms, the Department for Education set out plans to withdraw funding from level 3 qualifications,

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103 Department for Education, [Clearer choice of high-quality post-16 qualifications](#), July 2021.

including Applied General Qualifications (AGQs)—such as BTECs—which overlapped with T Levels or that did not meet quality criteria for academic and technical qualifications.

93. In July 2024, the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson announced that the Government would pause the planned defunding of some AGQs and conduct a review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below.<sup>104</sup> The review included within its scope the 134 qualifications deemed to overlap with T Levels in digital, construction, education and childcare which were set to be defunded from August 2024. The pause meant that those courses could be delivered in the 2024–25 academic year, although many colleges had already removed the qualifications from their offering as they typically plan their curriculums 12 to 24 months in advance.

### Education Committee's scrutiny

94. In December 2024, the Education Committee examined the Government's review of level 3 qualifications reform. The Committee heard there was widespread discontent with the proposals to remove funding from many level 3 qualifications.<sup>105</sup> The Committee also heard about the impact of the Government's review itself—especially the level of uncertainty that the review had created. Simon Cook, Principal of Mid-Kent College, described the implications for schools, colleges and students at the time of the Government's review:

Thousands of schools and colleges are going through a series of open events with parents and young people, and a common question from parents and young people is, "Are these qualifications going to be here next year?" It is a very nervous and anxious time for so many young people making choices that they believe will set their future... A number of colleges have already modelled the level 3 defunding, as it was before the pause and review. A number of them will be facing uncertainty in terms of becoming insolvent through the reduction of student numbers, by 2027 for some and by 2028 for others.<sup>106</sup>

95. The leaders of 455 schools and colleges wrote to Bridget Phillipson to underline how this uncertainty was making it "extremely difficult" to plan for the future and to provide effective information and advice to young people.<sup>107</sup> The Government was also criticised for a lack of transparency by not making public the review's terms of reference. In response to a Freedom of Information request made by FE Week for these details, the Department

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104 [Technical Qualifications Reform](#), HCWS22, 25 July 2024.

105 Education Committee, Reform of level 3 qualifications, 3 December 2024, [Q1](#).

106 Education Committee, Reform of level 3 qualifications, 3 December 2024, [Q3](#).

107 Protect Student Choice, [Letter to Education Secretary](#), 28 August 2024.

for Education said the Government needed a “self-contained space” to consider its options and that sharing the review’s terms would “have a potentially corrosive effect”.<sup>108</sup>

- 96.** Following its short inquiry, the Committee wrote to the Department for Education to outline the evidence it had heard and to recommend that the three-route qualification model at level 3 (academic [A Level], applied [AGQs] and technical [T Level]) should be retained. The letter emphasised that students “should not be faced with the binary choice of A Levels or T Levels” and that alternative forms of level 3 qualifications, including Applied General Qualifications, must remain a long-term option. AGQs have the additional benefit of providing students with a ladder of opportunity. By allowing students to build their expertise in smaller increments over time, Applied General Qualifications offer students a shorter distance between the rungs of that ladder. The Committee also criticised the Department for the way in which it had conducted its review, saying it had “caused great uncertainty.” The Committee had concerns that the terms of reference for the review had not been published and that there had not been a full and open consultation process.<sup>109</sup>
- 97.** In December 2024, following its review, the Government announced that it would continue to fund 157 qualifications previously earmarked for defunding until 2027. Funding will continue to be withdrawn for the other qualifications in scope of the review, including more than 200 qualifications with low or no enrolments. The Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby, told the House of Commons that the Government’s curriculum and assessment review “will take a view on qualifications in the long term”, but that the Department will invite awarding organisations to submit further new level 3 qualifications in the spring in health and science, construction, digital, and education and early years, as well as in the care services route.<sup>110</sup>
- 98.** Darren Hankey, Principal and CEO of Hartlepool FE College, described alternative qualifications to A Levels and T Levels as “essential”. He emphasised the significance of T Level industrial placements and the difficulties in meeting demand:

In the five FE colleges of Tees Valley—Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar and Darlington—we probably have about 500 young people doing level 3, non-T Level engineering qualifications. That is aerospace engineering, automotive engineering, civil engineering, electrical, mechanical, and mechatronics. There is no way that we

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108 FE Week, [BTEC review terms kept secret despite transparency pleas](#), 6 September 2024.

109 Education Committee, [Correspondence to the Secretary of State and Minister for Skills](#), 4 December 2024.

110 HC Deb, 12 December 2024, [col 1081](#).

would be able to find 500 placements for those students if we went down the A Level, T Level or apprenticeship route ... I like the intent behind T Levels, and A Levels are well established, but we do need another alternative.<sup>111</sup>

**99. CONCLUSION**

There remains uncertainty for both students and colleges around the long-term availability of level 3 qualifications that had previously been earmarked for defunding. Despite a temporary extension of funding until 2027, the sector remains in limbo, without the clarity it needs to plan ahead. Level 3 qualifications which provide an alternative to A Levels and T Levels are essential. The Government's review into level 3 qualifications reform lacked transparency and an appropriate level of consultation with stakeholders.

**100. RECOMMENDATION**

Level 3 qualifications—including Applied General Qualifications—which provide students with a popular and respected alternative to both A Levels and T Levels must remain an option for all young people. The Government must publicly commit to the long-term retention of these qualifications and to providing sustained funding for them. We hope this will go some way to address the extreme instability the sector has endured during the recent reviews by the current and previous Government.

**101. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education should ensure that post-16 students are able to pursue a mixture of A Levels, Applied General Qualifications and T Levels in order to support more tailored and inclusive educational pathways. Providing students with the flexibility to combine different forms of post-16 qualifications would better reflect individual learner needs and open up a wider range of future pathways.

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111 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q3](#).



**102. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must improve the way in which it communicates with the FE sector about any future reform of qualifications, for example by ensuring that the terms of reference are published and that there is open and transparent engagement. Timescales for any future reforms should be set specifically to avoid uncertainty and disruption for providers and students. The Government should evaluate the impact its review into level 3 qualifications reform had on students and colleges and be more transparent in the way it conducts such reviews in future.

## Maths and English Resits

- 103.** Since 2014, successive Governments have maintained the condition of funding requirement that full-time students aged 16 to 18 who have not attained grade 4 (grade C under the previous grading system) in GCSE maths and/or English must continue to study an approved qualification in those subjects and work towards achieving the required pass grade.<sup>112</sup> The majority of these students continue to study the relevant GCSE. However, some students are eligible to take a functional skills qualification in maths or English (also a level 2 qualification), which aims to teach numeracy and literacy skills needed in daily life and the workplace.
- 104.** The Government’s guidance on this condition of funding—more commonly referred to as maths and English resits—explains the purpose of the policy. It describes how gaining level 2 skills in maths and English helps students “realise their potential and gives them the opportunity to progress in life, learning and work.” It also notes that achieving a grade 4 or above in GCSE maths and English (or an equivalent level 2 qualification) is often used as a minimum entry requirement to employment opportunities, apprenticeships and further and higher education.<sup>113</sup>

### Impact of the resit policy on students

- 105.** The latest figures for maths and English GCSE resits are from 2023–24:
- In the 2023–24 academic year, 70.2% of 16-year-olds in England attained level 2 (GCSE grade 4 and above) in both maths and English. This is up slightly from 69.6% in 2022–23 and significantly from 60.3% in 2021–22.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb, 2 July 2014, [col 57WS](#) [Commons written ministerial statement].

<sup>113</sup> ESFA, [Guidance: 16 to 19 funding: maths and English condition of funding](#), updated July 2025.

<sup>114</sup> Department for Education, [Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25](#), April 2025.



- The progression rate—the proportion of young people who had not achieved level 2 in maths and English at 16 but had achieved both at 19—had remained at around 30% over the past ten years. However, in 2023–24 19.7% of 19-year-olds who had not achieved level 2 in maths and English at 16 had achieved both by 19. This is a significant drop in the progression rate from 27.7% in 2022–23, partly due to the rise in attainment at age 16.
- In 2014–15—the year in which the condition of funding requirement was introduced—70% of 19-year-olds in England had attained level 2 maths and English. In 2023–24, 76.1% of 19-year-olds had achieved level 2 maths and English.<sup>115</sup>

**106.** Attainment figures show that certain groups of students are disproportionately affected by the resit policy. For example, disadvantaged students (those who are eligible for free school meals) are more likely to have to resit maths and English after the age of 16 than their peers. In 2022–23, disadvantaged students accounted for 39% of resit entries but represented only 26% of total students of the same age. Furthermore, disadvantaged students are around a third less likely to pass than resit students on average.<sup>116</sup>

**107.** Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities with an EHC plan can be exempted from the resit policy if the setting in which they intend to continue their studies offers appropriate literacy and numeracy as part of their programme of study.<sup>117</sup> However, research conducted by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) shows that students who receive SEN support are more likely to have to resit maths and/or English and are less likely to attain a pass grade by age 19. Students with SEN support are around 40 per cent less likely to pass English and maths than their peers. The EPI said that the resit policy is “struggling” and that if the policy is not working well, “we risk widening disadvantage gaps and inequality even further.”<sup>118</sup>

### Impact of the resit policy on colleges

**108.** The scale of accommodating maths and English resits each year—and the strain they put on colleges, resources, staff and students—was made plain to the Committee on a visit to City College Norwich in June 2025. Jerry White, Chief Executive Officer and Principal of the college, and his colleagues in the senior management team described the administration of the maths and English examination series as “a major logistical exercise

115 Department for Education, [Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25](#), April 2025.

116 Education Policy Institute [Time for a resit reset?](#), 31 January 2024.

117 ESFA, [Guidance: 16 to 19 funding: maths and English condition of funding](#), November 2024.

118 Education Policy Institute, [Time for a resit reset?](#), January 2024.

for the college” each year.<sup>119</sup> The Committee heard how the majority of teaching is cancelled on the five mornings of the resit exams, with staff from every role within the college trained to invigilate and provide support. On average, a third of those students resitting maths and/or English require access arrangements which causes “enormous logistical issues” and a further strain on college resources. Table 1 outlines the numbers of students resitting maths and/or English at City College Norwich in 2025 and the number of rooms needed to accommodate them:

**Table 1: Maths and English resits at City College Norwich, Summer 2025.**

Subject (GCSE)	Total number of student entries	Students with access arrangements	Rooms required for exams
English	1685	598 (36%)	162
Maths	1480	451 (30%)	133

Source: City College Norwich, [FES0275](#).

### Response to the resit policy

- 109.** Education consultant Andrew Otty has urged the Government to retain the policy and describes it as “a vital lifeline” for young people who struggled at school.<sup>120</sup> The English and Maths Coalition has argued that the Government should build on the positive trajectory of maths and English attainment. It forecasts that from the current attainment rate, 90% of those aged 19 should achieve level 2 in both subjects by 2030.<sup>121</sup> The National Foundation for Educational Research argued that achieving level 2 maths and English is “crucial for individuals, the economy and society.”<sup>122</sup>
- 110.** However, the majority of evidence received by the Committee is critical of the resit policy. “Expecting students to retake maths and English GCSEs if they fail first time puts immense pressure on these students without any guarantee of success. This post-16 requirement merely condemns many students to successive failures”, said Dame Athene Donald, who is on the Royal Society’s Technical and Vocational Education Sub-Committee.<sup>123</sup> University and College Union general secretary, Jo Grady, said in 2024 that “this should be the last year that students are forced to endure the resit

<sup>119</sup> City College Norwich, [FES0275](#).

<sup>120</sup> “[All parties must commit to keeping the GCSE resit policy](#)”, FE Week, 29 May 2024.

<sup>121</sup> The English and Maths Coalition, [FES0106](#).

<sup>122</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, [FES0187](#).

<sup>123</sup> Dame Athene Donald, [FES0022](#).

nightmare.”<sup>124</sup> The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said that compelling students to retake the exams repeatedly is demoralising and described the process as “a remorseless treadmill of resits.”<sup>125</sup>

- 111.** The Committee put these issues to Baroness Smith of Malvern during the inquiry’s final oral evidence session. Baroness Smith told the Committee that she would not want to see a situation in which a young person, who had not attained grade 4 in maths and/or maths at age 16, is told “that is the end of the road for you.” Baroness Smith continued:

Everything we know is that you will stand a better chance of employment and in all sorts of other ways if you have got to that standard of English and maths, ideally by the age of 16, but if not, you get the opportunity to continue post-16 ... You need high expectations for all students. You need a whole-college approach to it so that it is clear that it is a priority for the college and there is support from senior management and from the other vocational subject areas that students are studying. You need good data to track students’ progress.<sup>126</sup>

**112. CONCLUSION**

The current requirement for all post-16 students who have not achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths to continue to study those subjects alongside their other studies is not working for the majority of post-16 students and the Government must change it. Despite a modest rise in overall attainment over the past ten years, the progression rate from age 16 to 19 remains low, with over 80% of those who did not achieve grade 4 at 16 still not achieving that grade by 19. This policy can be demoralising for students and puts a huge strain on colleges and their staff. Whilst ensuring that students continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy is important, an alternative approach is needed.

**113. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification or employment pathway:

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124 UCU, [UCU congratulates students and calls for an end to ‘resit nightmare’](#), 22 August 2024.

125 ASCL, [ASCL comment on GCSE and VTQ results](#), 22 August 2024.

126 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q135–136](#).

- Route A: Students who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English, should be supported to work towards those qualifications.
- Route B: Vocational courses of study, for which the maths and English content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the curriculum. Students taking courses with embedded maths and English content, which have been rigorously quality assured, may then be considered for exemption from the requirement to resit maths and English GCSE.
- Route C: Students who, based on prior attainment, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English—for example, focused on financial literacy, debt and interest, and household budgeting—should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification.

#### 114.

##### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must take action to address the resit problem at source by ensuring that more children leave school with sufficient levels of numeracy and literacy. As part of its response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the Department must examine the reasons for the low pass rates in GCSE maths and English at age 16 and take steps to improve them.

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## 5 Apprenticeships

- 115.** Apprenticeships offer the opportunity to develop expertise and job-specific skills by working alongside experienced staff. An apprentice is an employee and has the same rights on pay, work conditions and holiday allowance as other employees. What differentiates apprenticeships from other forms of employment is the combination of work and structured training that apprenticeships incorporate, with most apprentices spending 20% of their normal working hours pursuing off-the-job training or study that relates to their role.<sup>127</sup> Apprenticeships are available to those who are aged 16 and over, living in England, and not in full-time education. Around 737,000 people participated in an apprenticeship in 2023–24; participation declined following changes to apprenticeship funding in 2017.
- 116.** The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) had, since 2017, been responsible for working with employers and training providers “to develop, approve, review and revise apprenticeships and technical qualifications.”<sup>128</sup> The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Act 2025 abolished IfATE and transferred its functions to the Secretary of State for Education.<sup>129</sup> The Government has said that the Secretary of State will delegate most of the Institute’s previous functions to Skills England.

### Participation in Apprenticeships

- 117.** In the 2023–24 academic year, there were 736,525 people participating in an apprenticeship in England, with 339,582 apprenticeship starts and 178,224 apprenticeship achievements. In the same year:
- 23.2% of apprenticeship starts were by apprentices aged under 19
  - 28.3% were by apprentices aged between 19 and 24
  - 48.4% were by apprentices aged 25 or older
  - Across all age groups, 52.2% of starts were by female apprentices and 47.8% were by male apprentices.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Department for Education, [Apprenticeships: off-the-job training](#), updated October 2023.

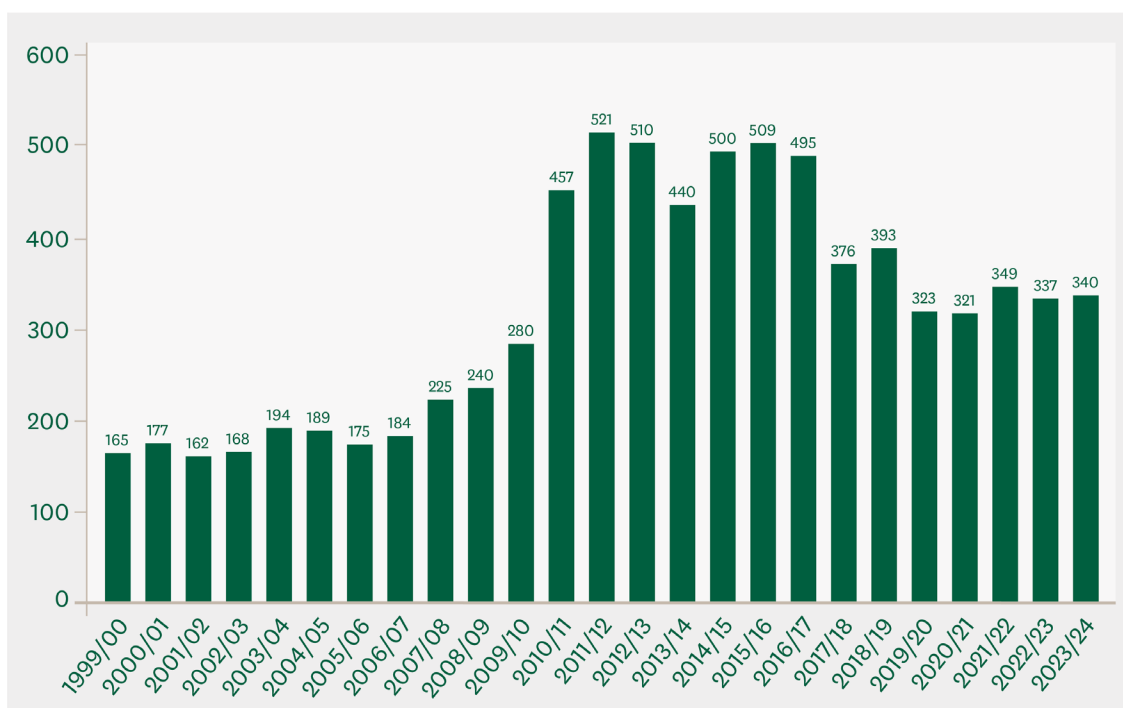
<sup>128</sup> Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, [What we do](#), accessed July 2025.

<sup>129</sup> [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education \(Transfer of Functions etc\) Act 2025](#).

<sup>130</sup> Department for Education, [Apprenticeships](#), July 2025.

## Apprenticeship starts in England

1999/2000 to 2023/24, thousands



Source: [Apprenticeships: Academic year 2023/24](#), (for data 2018/19); [Apprenticeships and traineeships](#) (for data pre-2018/19).

- 118.** The number of apprenticeship starts rose sharply in 2010–11, due to an increase in apprenticeship funding, and remained at around 500,000 a year until 2017–18. The number of starts fell in 2017–18 in response to the introduction of a new apprenticeship funding system in May 2017. The number of starts rose in 2018–19, and then fell again in 2019–20 due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. They have been relatively steady since then. As part of its Industrial Strategy, the Government has said it will increase enrolment in apprenticeships and technical education in order to “reduce skills mismatches and boost higher-paid employment in growth-driving sectors.”<sup>131</sup>
- 119.** Written evidence received by the Committee is clear that the main reason for the drop in apprenticeship starts since 2017 was the complexity and inflexibility of the apprenticeship levy. The UK Fashion and Textile Association told the Committee that the fall in apprenticeship numbers was due to the introduction of “an over complicated and often changing funding system which only serves large, levy-paying companies, even though most companies are SMEs.”<sup>132</sup> The British Chambers of Commerce said that the

<sup>131</sup> Department for Business and Trade, [Invest 2035: the UK’s modern industrial strategy](#), November 2024.

<sup>132</sup> The UK Fashion and Textile Association, [FES0033](#).

“inflexibility of the system has made it difficult [for organisations] to spend their levy funds as they see best”, and that companies should be able to use these funds on any projects that would result in them upskilling their workforce.<sup>133</sup>

- 120.** However, a number of other reasons have been proposed for the fall, and subsequent plateauing, in apprenticeship starts. As noted on page 51, research from Edge Foundation and King’s College London—Young Lives, Young Futures—found there to be “clear inequalities” in the support young people receive in finding apprenticeships compared with ready information on A Levels. Their 2024 report concluded that there is “no clear, common pathway into apprenticeships as there is for higher education through UCAS for either young people or their employers, and levels of support and guidance from schools and colleges was extremely varied.”<sup>134</sup> Similarly, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) made the connection in its written submission between low numbers of agriculture and horticulture apprenticeships and “a failure at school level to inform young people that apprenticeships are an alternative to full-time education.”<sup>135</sup>
- 121.** The King’s Trust told us that low apprentice wage rates can make apprenticeships appear less appealing, as higher rates of pay can be achieved by taking on a job elsewhere—even if it does not offer as many training or progression opportunities.<sup>136</sup> The Workers’ Educational Association also referred to low pay as a deterrent to prospective apprentices. It said that rates of pay for apprenticeships “can fall below the real living wage and this presents a significant barrier, especially for those from low-income backgrounds. Increasing rates of pay to match the real living wage would open this route up to many more adults.”<sup>137</sup>

## The Role of Employers

- 122.** Checkatrade—a membership platform connecting customers with tradespeople—told the Committee that its members, including sole traders and small business owners, face significant barriers to hiring apprentices. It said the current system is “overly complex, disproportionately benefits larger firms, and leaves SMEs under-supported.” It added that “bureaucracy and lack of clarity” deter small businesses from taking on apprentices and that simplifying the process would encourage more SMEs to participate.<sup>138</sup> The St Martin’s Group said that many employers are “put off apprenticeships

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133 British Chambers of Commerce, [FES0232](#).

134 Young Lives, Young Futures, [Apprenticeships in England](#), November 2024.

135 National Farmers’ Union, [FES0054](#).

136 The King’s Trust, [FES0070](#).

137 The Workers’ Educational Association, [FES0044](#).

138 Checkatrade, [FES0032](#).

by the complexity and rigidity within the system.” It said that reducing duplication of regulation and reporting, and allowing employers to decide on 20% of the programme content to meet their specific needs would be welcomed by employers.<sup>139</sup> Emily Rock, Chief Executive of the Association of Apprentices, told the Committee that “employers sometimes go into this not understanding, and that then manifests in a poor experience for the apprentice.” Ms Rock called for targeted support for SMEs on understanding their commitment, and “some flexibility that could be offered up to make things easier.”<sup>140</sup>

- 123.** Some employers have criticised the rule by which at least 20% of an apprentice’s normal working hours (up to an average of 6 hours per week) must be used for off-the-job training.<sup>141</sup> The JGA Group—a national apprenticeship provider—said that many employers see this commitment as a barrier to using funded apprenticeship training to help them develop new, or upskill existing employees, “fearing this means that apprentices will need to spend a lot of time away from the workplace which will have an impact on the productivity of their business.”<sup>142</sup> The Association of Employment and Learning Providers has previously said that the 20% training commitment is “not workable.”<sup>143</sup>

**124. CONCLUSION**

We welcome the Government’s reforms of the apprenticeship system and the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy. The former apprenticeship levy was seen by some organisations—particularly small and medium-sized businesses—as being part of an overly complex and inflexible apprenticeship system. However, for many prospective apprentices and employers, the pathway to an apprenticeship remains unclear, bureaucratic and discouraging. The process must be simplified if the Government is to boost enrolment in apprenticeships and promote higher-paid jobs in key sectors.

139 The St Martin’s Group, [FES0090](#).

140 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q64](#).

141 Department for Education, [How to take on an apprentice](#), updated August 2024.

142 JGA, [20% ‘Off-The-Job’ Training – Barrier or Benefit?](#), accessed April 2025.

143 TES, [Off-the-job training concerns still holding back apprenticeship starts](#), 26 March 2018.



**125. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education simplifies the apprenticeship system for employers and prospective apprentices in order to increase participation. By April 2026, it must create a streamlined application and reporting process tailored for businesses, and provide dedicated support and guidance to help Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) navigate the system. This support and guidance should include information on how to create a good experience for apprentices.

## Growth and Skills Levy

- 126.** In its 2024 General Election manifesto, the Labour Party said it would reform the “broken apprenticeships levy” and that “the current rigid rules” ignore vital skills and training needed to access apprenticeships. In September 2024, the Government announced that it would replace the apprenticeship levy with a new Growth and Skills Levy, with Skills England playing “a crucial role” in determining which training will be eligible for the expanded levy.<sup>144</sup> The Government said the Growth and Skills Levy “will provide greater flexibility to employers and learners and widen the apprenticeship offer, helping more people gain the skills they need, fuelling business innovation, and providing high quality pathways for young people.”<sup>145</sup>
- 127.** Since August 2025, the levy has funded new foundation apprenticeships, which “give young people a route in to careers in critical sectors, enabling them to earn a wage whilst developing vital skills.” The Prime Minister has said that foundation apprenticeships will offer training to young people who are not ready to start at level two or three.<sup>146</sup> Foundation apprenticeships will be shorter in duration—previously, apprenticeships ran for at least 12 months, but the Government is proposing to reduce this to 8 months.
- 128.** Ben Rowland, Chief Executive at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, described the Government’s decision not to use foundation apprenticeships for “everyday sectors” such as hospitality and retail—where the Government “could get tens of thousands of young people supported in their first job”—as “absolutely crazy.” He said it was a mistake for foundation apprenticeships to be used for industrial strategy sectors “that do not have a need for them.”<sup>147</sup>

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144 Department for Education, [Skills England: Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities](#), September 2024, p 19.

145 [Apprenticeships and Skills Training](#), 2 June 2025, [Commons written ministerial statement].

146 FE Week, [Shorter apprenticeships and level 7 restrictions confirmed](#), 24 September 2024.

147 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q61](#).

- 129.** Jane Hadfield, Co-Chair of the St Martin’s Group and National Lead for Apprenticeships at NHS England, told the Committee that there is support amongst learners for shorter apprenticeships, but that care must be given to ensure that foundation apprenticeship programmes are “learner-centred” and based on learner progression. Ms Hadfield continued:

There is also something about how long the foundation apprenticeship will take and what it leads to—what is the progression pathway? If you are going to do a foundation apprenticeship, how does that dovetail in with your next apprenticeship? Do we end up seeing exactly what I just mentioned, which is duplication of effort because you might as well have gone straight into that level two shorter apprenticeship perhaps? There is something about how all of that comes together and we need clarity.<sup>148</sup>

**130. CONCLUSION**

Foundation apprenticeships have been welcomed by the sector. However, whilst these shorter apprenticeships rightly aim to help young people enter critical sectors, there are concerns about the Government’s decision not to target “everyday sectors”, such as the hospitality, retail and care sectors, when they were rolled out in August 2025; these sectors are major employers of young people and often serve as entry points into the workforce. Instead, the focus of foundation apprenticeships is on the eight growth-driving sectors identified by the Government in its industrial strategy.

**131. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education expands the foundation apprenticeship scheme to include the hospitality, retail and care sectors—as well as other high-demand sectors for young people—by April 2026. The purpose of foundation and other shorter apprenticeships must be made clear to prospective apprentices and employers, including routes to further progression. Clear communication and guidance must be provided and maintained by the Department for Education and Skills England.

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148 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q62](#).

## Maths and English Requirements for Adult Apprenticeships

- 132.** In February 2025, the Government announced changes to the maths and English requirements for adult apprentices in order to “slash red tape, boost skills and support employers.” Employers are now able to decide whether adult learners (aged 19 or over when they start their apprenticeship course) will need to complete a maths and English qualification in order to pass their apprenticeships. The Government said that this change in policy would mean that more learners can qualify in high-demand sectors such as healthcare, social care and construction, “helping to drive growth and meet Government targets in key areas such as housebuilding.” The Government believes this change could lead to as many as 10,000 more apprentices completing their courses every year.<sup>149</sup> More than 90,000 people over the age of 19 began apprenticeships between August and October 2024. Those who began their apprenticeship training when aged 16–18 will continue to be subject to “the mandatory requirement to study towards and achieve maths and English.”<sup>150</sup>
- 133.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) welcomed the rule change, saying the previous exit requirements for apprenticeships “were having the opposite impact of that intended.” It said the requirements acted as a barrier to learners who were functionally competent in their occupation, including in the relevant maths and English skills, but who were unable to pass “an overly academic qualification.”<sup>151</sup> The AELP has argued that the removal of the maths and English requirements for adult learners will open apprenticeships up to those who need support with their functional skills: “It will increase the number of people getting the English and maths support they so desperately need but in a way that removes the fear and anxiety from the process, not only benefiting the maths and English learning and but also benefiting progress in the apprenticeship.”<sup>152</sup>
- 134.** However, in its written evidence to the Committee, the Learning and Work Institute criticised the Government’s decision to remove maths and English requirements for adult apprentices. It referred to recent OECD research which found that one in five adults in England were defined as having low proficiency in literacy (18%) and numeracy (21%).<sup>153</sup> The Learning and Work

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149 Department for Education, [10,000 more apprentices as government slashes red tape to boost growth](#), 11 Feb 2025.

150 Department for Education, [Apprenticeship funding rules: August 2024 to July 2025](#), February 2025, p 22.

151 AELP, [FES0115](#).

152 AELP, [Mini Commission Functional Skills Qualifications \(FSQS\)](#), December 2024, p 3.

153 Department for Education, [Survey of Adult Skills 2023 \(PIAAC\): National Report for England](#), December 2024, p 13.

Institute has previously described adult literacy and numeracy rates as “woeful” and has suggested a lack of proficiency in these areas holds back people’s career prospects and their ability to access public services.<sup>154</sup> In its written evidence it argued that the gap between the lowest and highest achievers’ skill levels in literacy and numeracy is widening and that the Government’s recent policy change “could make things worse.”<sup>155</sup>

135. Similarly, HOLEX suggested that rather than removing the requirement for maths and English qualifications for adult apprentices, the Government “should focus on making them more accessible, better contextualised, and fully supportive of apprentices’ diverse starting points while still maintaining high aspirations.” HOLEX made the case that maths and English are core skills needed across all sectors and that strong numeracy and literacy boosts confidence, improves employability and long-term earning potential, and supports social mobility.<sup>156</sup>
136. The Federation of Awarding Bodies told the Committee in its written submission that whilst it supports the Government’s intention to provide employers with flexibility, it has concerns about the decision to change the maths and English requirements for one age group but not another. It said that “occupational competence is age agnostic” and that it is not clear why an apprentice who starts their training at 18 must achieve maths and English to a prescribed level to be deemed occupationally competent, but an apprentice who starts their training at 19 does not. “Given the implications of the change, we believe consideration should have been given to a proper consultation on the change to fully understand the risks and clarify the intent.”<sup>157</sup>
137. The Association of Colleges suggested that an unintended consequence of this decision may be that employers looking to take on apprentices choose to recruit those aged 19 and over as opposed to 16-to-18-year-olds due to the reduction of time required away from the workplace. On the other hand, the Association of Colleges warned that adult apprentices may face barriers to progression once they have completed their apprenticeship due to their lack of maths and English qualifications.<sup>158</sup> Jonathan Bourne, Managing Director at Damar Training, warned that removing functional skills requirements for adult apprentices “is bound to deter some employers from hiring younger apprentices and risks diluting the value of apprenticeships.”<sup>159</sup>

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154 FE Week, [Functional skills for adults are too vital to give up on](#), 11 February 2025.

155 Learning and Work Institute, [FES0011](#).

156 HOLEX, [FES0272](#).

157 Federation of Awarding Bodies, [FES0226](#).

158 Association of Colleges, [FES0133](#).

159 FE Week, [Start broad and end narrow as a blueprint for apprenticeships](#), 20 March 2025.

**138. CONCLUSION**

The current apprenticeship system faces inconsistencies as a result of recent changes to maths and English requirements for those aged 19 and over. Whilst removing the requirement for adult apprentices to attain grade 4 maths and English before completing their apprenticeships may increase participation, it also risks widening existing literacy and numeracy gaps, and creating age-based inequalities. Changes to the maths and English requirements based on age increases the likelihood that employers take on adult apprentices, who now have fewer requirements, than apprentices aged 16 to 18. Adult apprentices without a good foundation in literacy and numeracy may also face barriers to their progression.

**139. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for all apprentices who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen apprenticeship:

- Route A: Apprentices who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English should be supported to work towards those qualifications.
- Route B: Apprenticeships, for which the maths and English content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the apprenticeship programme. Apprentices working towards a qualification with embedded maths and English content, which have been rigorously quality assured, may then be considered for exemption from the requirement to resit maths and English GCSE.
- Route C: Apprentices who, based on prior attainment, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification.

## Level 7 Apprenticeships

- 140.** In September 2024, the Prime Minister and the Education Secretary said that the new Growth and Skills Levy would not fund all apprenticeships and that employers would be asked to “rebalance” their funding and invest in younger workers. This, the Government said, would involve businesses

funding more of their level 7 apprenticeships—equivalent to a master’s degree and more likely to be accessed by older or already well qualified employees—outside of the new levy.<sup>160</sup>

- 141.** In May 2025, the Government confirmed that it will no longer fund level 7 apprenticeships for people aged 22 and older from January 2026. Employers will only be able to use the Growth and Skills levy to fund the master’s level courses for existing apprentices and new starters up to the age of 22. Level 7 apprentices who are care leavers or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) can be funded up to age 25. The Government said this decision “will enable levy funding to be rebalanced towards training at lower levels, where it can have the greatest impact.”<sup>161</sup>

**Table 2: Apprenticeship starts at level 7**

Academic year	Total starts (all levels)	Level 7 starts	Level 7 starts by age	
			Under 22	22+
2018–19	393,380	11,650	1,790	9,860
2019–20	322,530	15,410	2,020	13,390
2020–21	321,440	19,570	1,930	17,640
2021–22	349,190	19,690	2,300	17,390
2022–23	337,140	21,760	2,420	19,340
2023–24	339,580	23,860	2,710	21,150

Sources: Department for Education, [Apprenticeships](#), 27 March 2025; [Apprenticeships](#), PQ 49428, 28 May 2025.

- 142.** In 2023–24, 11.3% of those starting a level 7 apprenticeship were under the age of 22 (the age group for which levy funding will be made available) and 88.7% were aged 22 or over.
- 143.** The evidence received by the Committee is largely opposed to the Government’s defunding of most level 7 apprenticeships. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) described the Government’s plans to remove funding for level 7 apprenticeships as “a backward step that will exacerbate skills gaps in key sectors, hurt the apprenticeship

160 Department for Education, [Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity](#), 24 September 2024.

161 Department for Education, [Next generation of builders and carers set to rebuild Britain](#), 27 May 2025.

brand, and limit opportunity.” The AELP argued that this could be avoided if spending on level 7 apprenticeships (£238 million in 2023–24) was covered by the £800m Treasury is “top slicing from the [previous] levy.”<sup>162</sup>

- 144.** The Association of Apprentices heard concerns from its members that the defunding of level 7 apprenticeships may “negatively impact career progression and access to advanced qualifications for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.”<sup>163</sup> Emily Rock, Chief Executive of the Association of Apprentices, told the Committee that the policy risks acting as a deterrent for both prospective and existing apprentices:

There are people currently in the system who are worried about their progression being capped. I spoke to a level three paralegal apprentice who has finished her apprenticeship and is now worried she will not be able to go on and do her level seven. Will that make that young person think, “The apprenticeship is not for me” and go another route? There is a risk not just for employers, but it might deter young people.<sup>164</sup>

- 145.** Jane Hadfield, Co-Chair of the St Martin’s Group and National Lead for Apprenticeships at NHS England, was concerned about the effect the Government’s decision would have on employers:

There is a greater loss that does not get spoken about, in that the apprenticeship model gives us a quality education model set against national occupational standards designed by employers. I have grave concerns that if employers are going to have to pay for something at level 7, they will not choose an apprenticeship. We will go back to modular masters or self-funding or a mixed economy. As you know, the health sector has already had real fears around those very innovative training programmes.<sup>165</sup>

- 146.** NHS Employers, the employers’ organisation for the NHS in England, told us that the NHS relies on training and apprenticeships at all levels to attract a diverse range of individuals into workforce. It described how the 20% off-the-job training requirement for an apprentice increases to 60% for a full-time employee in nursing and midwifery and other clinical degree apprenticeships. In clinical roles, this means the employer pays for the apprentice and another member of staff to cover the clinical duties for the 60% off the job time. It explained that: “Where employers have managed to secure investment locally to support individuals to undertake associate, degree and postgrad level clinical training programmes (levels 4 to 7) via

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<sup>162</sup> AELP, [FES0115](#).

<sup>163</sup> Association of Apprentices, [FES0120](#).

<sup>164</sup> Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q70](#).

<sup>165</sup> Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 23 April 2025, [Q70](#).



apprenticeships, it is essential that the employer can continue to access the education training costs from the apprenticeship levy which they are paying into. The levy deduction is NHS money which the NHS needs to be able to draw on to cover the costs of the education component of the apprenticeship.”<sup>166</sup>

- 147.** In its written submission, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) explained that architects must register with the Architects Registration Board (ARB). To join the architects’ register, the regulator (the ARB), requires completion of a level 7 architectural qualification, which can be achieved through either an academic route or an apprenticeship. The RIBA said that removing funding for level 7 apprentices is directly at odds with this requirement and that the defunding “would likely see the end of most architecture apprenticeships.” For smaller architecture practices that do not pay into the levy, but make use of it, the ability to recruit apprentices would be lost, as the additional cost of tuition would be unaffordable. RIBA recommended that the Government includes funding for level 7 architecture apprenticeships within the Growth and Skills Levy.<sup>167</sup>

**148. CONCLUSION**

The evidence received by the Committee is overwhelmingly opposed to the Government’s decision not to fund level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over through the Growth and Skills Levy. The defunding of these apprenticeships will reduce uptake—particularly in key sectors such as healthcare—widen existing skills shortages, and limit career progression for many.

**149. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education re-introduces levy funding for level 7 apprenticeships for all ages within the eight growth-driving sectors and for regulated professions, such as healthcare.

**150. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department must monitor the impact of defunding all other level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over and be willing to reintroduce levy funding where necessary.

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<sup>166</sup> NHS Employers, [FES0227](#).

<sup>167</sup> Royal Institute of British Architects, [FES0128](#).



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## 6 Supporting further education students

- 151.** It is clear from our written evidence that some further education students face significant challenges as they continue their education and that these have been worsening in recent years. Post-pandemic issues such as serious social anxiety and a lack of social interaction continue to impact children and young people; whilst exploitation, a rise in misogynistic behaviour, serious violence affecting young people and sexual violence are all referenced as significant issues facing further education students today.<sup>168</sup> Four major themes arose from the written evidence, which can broadly be categorised as: the support that is offered to the increasing number of students with mental health difficulties; a lack of funding for disadvantaged students and the consequent effect on their attainment; a number of issues facing further education students with SEND; and a unique set of challenges for further education students with care experience.

### Mental health

- 152.** The Government has said that poor mental health is a significant barrier to learning, and that the difficulty in accessing support is “paralysing” children and young people through their formative years. Prior to the General Election, the Labour Party promised to provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school and college, so that “every young person has access to early support to address problems before they escalate.”<sup>169</sup> The Government has developed eight principles for a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing, including staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of pupils and learners; curriculum teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning; and enabling student voice to influence decisions.<sup>170</sup>
- 153.** Results from NHS Digital’s most recent national Children and Young People’s Mental Health Survey show that:

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168 Kirklees College, [FES0086](#); Association of Colleges, [FES0133](#).

169 Labour Party, [Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), June 2024, p84.

170 Department for Education, [Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges](#), updated March 2025.

- In 2023, almost a quarter (23.3%) of 17-to-19-year-olds had a probable mental disorder—such as depression or anxiety. The figure was closer to one in five (21.7%) for 20-to-25-year-olds
- For those aged 17 to 19, the rates of probable mental disorder increased from 10% in 2017 to 18% in 2020. Between 2020 and 2021 the rates remained similar before increasing again between 2021 and 2022, from 17% to 26%. The spike is widely attributed to the effects of the pandemic.
- Eating disorders were identified in 12.5% of 17-to-19-year-olds, with rates 4 times higher in young women (20.8%) than young men (5.1%)
- The most common sources of help and advice reported by young people aged 17 to 24 years with a probable mental disorder were: friends and family (66.1%), health services (45.1%), online or telephone support (42.9%) and education services (20.9%)<sup>171</sup>

**154.** Qasim Hussain, Vice President at the National Union of Students, told the Committee about “a direct link” between the cost-of-living crisis and mental health problems. He described how some further education students are “very anxious” about the cost of living and how it is having:

a day-to-day impact on them in terms of getting to college, showing up to their lessons and completing their courses. We have seen budget cuts to mental health provision across the country, and that is not great, because what it means is fewer counsellors. There is a conversation to be had about paying young people more because of how hard it is for them to get to college in the first place.<sup>172</sup>

**155.** Clare Howard, Chief Executive at Natspec, said that more needed to be done at secondary school level as students are dropping out due to their mental health problems and often becoming NEET. Ms Howard also said that earlier intervention, a broader curriculum and a less pressured school environment were all necessary to address this crisis at an earlier stage. Turning to the interventions that were needed at post-16 level, Ms Howard said that “when they are 17, 18 or 19, [it’s] about getting them to come out of the house, so it’s very one to one; it’s very personalised. It is about finding the vocational area that they need or the interest that they have so we have colleges working on water sports, skateboarding—a whole range of things.”<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> NHS Digital, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England - wave 4](#), November 2023.

<sup>172</sup> Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q77](#).

<sup>173</sup> Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q78](#).

## Mental Health Support Teams

- 156.** In July 2018, the previous Government committed to taking forward proposals made in the Green Paper on transforming children and young people’s mental health provision to establish and fund new Mental Health Support Teams supervised by NHS children and young people’s mental health staff.<sup>174</sup> The previous Government said that Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) would provide early interventions for those with “mild to moderate needs” and support the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing. The first wave of MHSTs was commissioned in 2018 as part of a pilot programme. However, data released by the Department for Education in May 2025 showed that only 52% of pupils were in settings participating in the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) programme. This number was even lower for post-16 settings, with only 41% of post-16 students pursuing their studies or training in a setting in which the MHST programme was operative.<sup>175</sup>
- 157.** Margaret Mulholland, SEND and Inclusion Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, has described the progress of the MHST rollout as “glacial” and has warned that there needs to be “significant investment in tackling the mental health crisis among children and young people, including the rollout of mental health support teams to all schools and colleges as soon as possible.”<sup>176</sup> The National Union of Students has also called for increased funding to support “patchy” further education mental health provision. It said that mental health first aid training for staff, wellbeing workshops for students, and easy referral pathways to professional help are essential. It said that mental health “underpins attendance and achievement; investment in this area will pay off in better educational outcomes.”<sup>177</sup>
- 158.** The Government has said it is committed to expanding Mental Health Support Teams and that their coverage should increase to 62% of pupils and learners by 31 March 2026.<sup>178</sup> It has also committed to expanding MHSTs in schools and colleges to achieve “100% coverage by 2029–30.”<sup>179</sup> When asked what the Government was doing to address the mental health crisis amongst further education students, Baroness Smith of Malvern

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174 DHSC and DfE, [Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps](#), July 2018.

175 Department for Education, [Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Implementation Programme](#), May 2025, p 12.

176 TES magazine, [‘Glacial’ rollout of mental health support teams ‘unacceptable’, officials told](#), 14 May 2024.

177 National Union of Students, [FES0200](#).

178 Department for Education, [Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Implementation Programme](#), May 2025, p 8.

179 [Mental Health Services: Schools](#), PQ 48881, 8 May 2025.

told the Committee about the need “to get downstream of that” and to expand MHSTs in schools. “Then when we get to colleges ... we recognise the challenges of mental health issues for students in FE and HE, but particularly in FE. We are continuing to work closely with them on a whole-college approach to mental health and wellbeing.”<sup>180</sup>

**159. CONCLUSION**

Poor mental health is a growing crisis for young people, with rising rates of anxiety, depression and eating disorders—particularly for those aged 17 to 19. The Government has pledged specialist mental health support in all schools and colleges, but the rollout of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) has been slow—only 41% of post-16 students are currently covered. There is an urgent need for increased investment, faster implementation of MHSTs, and earlier intervention and personalised support.

**160. RECOMMENDATION**

The Government’s pledge of 100% MHST coverage by 2029–30 must be met and must include all post-16 students and trainees. We recommend that Government accelerates the rollout of Mental Health Support Teams with a particular focus on expanding coverage for post-16 settings, which has not kept pace with coverage for primary and secondary schools. In addition to publishing the number and proportion of schools and post-16 settings with access to MHSTs, the Government must monitor, evaluate and publish the impact of this roll out.

**161. RECOMMENDATION**

The Government must improve access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and adult mental health services for those children and young people with more severe mental health conditions and whose education is often interrupted for months or years at a time by the long waits for services and treatment.

## Disadvantaged students

- 162.** There is evidence that economic disadvantage has a negative effect on young people’s learning and outcomes throughout their time in education and training, including in post-16 settings. Socio-economic disadvantage for young people can be measured in different ways. The Department for Education bases its definition of disadvantaged post-16 learners on whether

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180 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q151](#).

they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, as recorded at the end of key stage 4. Using this benchmark, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) calculates that around a fifth of students are defined as disadvantaged between the ages of 16 and 19.<sup>181</sup>

- 163.** The Department for Education uses “average point scores” to measure and compare outcomes for A Levels, level 3 Applied General Qualifications and T Levels. The number of points depends on the qualification and grade. For example, an A\* at A Level is worth 60 points, and a C grade is worth 30 points. In the 2023–24 academic year the average point score per A Level entry for non-disadvantaged students was 35.1 whilst the average point score for disadvantaged students was 30.2—meaning the A Level cohort had a disadvantage gap of 4.9 points. In the same year, the Applied General Qualification cohort disadvantage gap was 2.4 points, and the T Level disadvantage gap was 2.9 points.<sup>182</sup>

### Student premium

- 164.** The EPI has said that urgent action is needed to prevent disadvantaged young people from falling further behind their peers. It has urged the Government to introduce a student premium for disadvantaged students in 16–19 education, pegged to the rate of the secondary school Pupil Premium.<sup>183</sup> The EPI said this would help address the “cliff edge in funding” for disadvantaged students at age 16. Pupil premium funding is allocated to schools based on the number of pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals (or have been recorded as eligible in the past six years), and the number of children previously looked after by a local authority or other state care.
- 165.** The EPI research estimated that a student premium matched to the secondary school rate would cost £340 million a year, equivalent to £1,035 per student in 2023–24.<sup>184</sup> The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) has also called for an expanded pupil premium that would include 16–19 learners. Pepe Di’Iasio, general secretary of the ASCL, said: “Post-16 education has been persistently underfunded, and it is disadvantaged students who suffer the most as a result of this. It’s clear that schools and colleges need more funding and for this to be targeted in a way that makes it easier to support these students.”<sup>185</sup> Dr Emily Tanner, Programme Head for Post-14 Education and Skills at the Nuffield Foundation, described the case

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181 Education Policy Institute, [Annual Report 2024: Disadvantage](#), July 2024.

182 Department for Education, [A level and other 16 to 18 results](#), February 2025.

183 Department for Education, [Pupil Premium: Overview](#), accessed May 2025.

184 Education Policy Institute, [Closing the Forgotten Gap: Implementing a 16–19 Student Premium](#), July 2024.

185 ASCL, [ASCL comment on EPI report calling for 16–19 student premium](#), July 2024.

for a student premium as “a really interesting idea” but cautioned that, in difficult financial times, the proposal for a student premium needs to be “underpinned by really robust evidence.”<sup>186</sup>

- 166.** A number of bursaries and loans are available to help further education students with day-to-day costs.<sup>187</sup> The 16–19 Bursary Fund is available for items and costs relating to a further education course, such as books, specialist clothing, transport, and food. There are two types of 16 to 19 bursaries:
- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups (including care-experienced students or those claiming certain benefits)
  - Discretionary bursaries which providers award using policies they set, in line with Department for Education funding rules<sup>188</sup>
- 167.** The Department for Education told the Committee that it targets the available funding towards institutions with students in most financial need. It said institutions are free to decide which young people receive discretionary bursaries and to determine the level of finance they offer. Students in defined vulnerable groups i.e. those in care, care leavers and those supporting themselves in receipt of certain social security funds in 16–19 education, may receive annual bursaries of up to £1,200 a year where they need financial support to participate in their education.<sup>189</sup>

### Geographical disadvantage gap

- 168.** A report published by the Education Policy Institute in December 2024 showed significant variation in the 16–19 attainment gap depending on where disadvantaged students and their peers lived in the country. Using 2023 data, the EPI identified local areas that face some of the biggest challenges in supporting their disadvantaged learners, as well as those that stand out as potential areas of best practice. As with other phases of education, London boroughs tended to have the smallest 16–19 disadvantage gaps in the country. Across the period 2019–2023, there were 11 local authorities with consistently small disadvantage gaps in 16–19 education, ten of which are in London: Bexley, Brent, Ealing, Hackney, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Merton, Redbridge, Southwark, Sutton and Wokingham. Meanwhile, the local authorities with consistently large 16–19 gaps over the 2019–2023 period were Barnsley, Derby, Stockton-on-Tees, Swindon and Torbay.<sup>190</sup>

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186 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q80](#).

187 GOV UK, [Further education courses and funding](#), accessed May 2025.

188 GOV UK, [16 to 19 Bursary Fund](#), accessed August 2025.

189 Department for Education, [FES0261](#), p 38.

190 Education Policy Institute, [Local Disadvantage Gaps in England](#), December 2024.

**169. CONCLUSION**

On average, economically disadvantaged students aged 16–19 do not perform as well as their peers or achieve the same educational outcomes. Per-pupil funding drops sharply after the age of 16, creating a cliff edge that limits support for disadvantaged students. Existing bursaries for disadvantaged students aged 16–19 are insufficient and inconsistently distributed. There is compelling evidence for the introduction of a student premium to match secondary school funding levels. Without targeted investment, disadvantaged learners risk falling further behind academically and professionally.

**170. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education introduces a 16–19 student premium for disadvantaged post-16 students. This funding should be pegged to the Pupil Premium and would be a targeted investment for post-16 students who have been eligible for the Pupil Premium in the last six years. The Department should monitor the effectiveness of this premium on education outcomes and publish its findings.

**171. RECOMMENDATION**

We also recommend that the Department utilises local authority-level data to identify and address the unique barriers in areas in which attainment across qualification pathways (including A Levels, T Levels, AGQs) is below the national average.

## Further education for students with SEND

- 172.** Natspec—a membership association of specialist further education colleges—has said that the critical role played by the further education sector to prepare young people with SEND for a fulfilling adulthood is not currently reflected in Government policy. Natspec has argued that the very purpose of further education for those with SEND needs to be reconsidered. It said that current national policymaking “suggests a lack of understanding of the breadth of SEND provision in further education and its purpose and value for students with SEND.” Natspec told the Committee that the central purpose of further education for all young people is to equip them with the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will allow them to succeed in adult life. For most FE students, the main focus will be on future employment,



but for some—especially those with SEND—“maximising independence, leading healthy lives and building and maintaining social and community connections also need to be explicitly taught.”<sup>191</sup>

- 173.** The National Association of Special Schools (NASS)—a membership body of non-local authority maintained special schools—contends that the fundamental purpose of post-16 education for many young people with SEND is to prepare learners for adulthood and “maximising the opportunity for them to live as independent an adult life as is possible.” NASS described the transition into further education as a “crunch point” in a learner’s journey, and it is during this transition period when they see a spike in the number of SEND students leaving education, training and employment altogether.<sup>192</sup> In the Get Britain Working White Paper, the Government described the prevalence of SEND among young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) as “significant”. It said that in 2023, 10.6% of 16-to-24-year-olds who were not in employment, education or training were identified as having learning difficulties, up from around 5.5% in 2020.<sup>193</sup>
- 174.** Natspec has called for specialist further education to have its own ministerial brief to prevent it from falling through the “cracks of ministerial responsibility.” SEND policy is currently overseen by the Minister for School Standards whilst further education policy lies with the Minister for Skills. Natspec believes that this split in ministerial responsibility has led to the “neglect” of FE SEND policy and, as a result, young people with learning difficulties are often overlooked. It said that “failing to co-ordinate across briefs leads to inefficiencies, limited accountability and policy fragmentation. Specialist colleges are under-valued and fall between two stools, with each Department for Education minister wrongly presuming the other is primarily responsible for SEND in FE.” It argued that “clear lines of responsibility” are needed.<sup>194</sup> Clare Howard, Chief Executive at Natspec, told the Committee that this proposed change in ministerial overview was “logical and equitable” and “a no-brainer.” She questioned why the Minister for Skills (Baroness Smith of Malvern) is responsible for all other students aged 16 to 19 and for adult education, yet “30% of 16 to 19-year-olds and 18% of adults are dealt with elsewhere.”<sup>195</sup>

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191 Natspec, [FES0047](#).

192 National Association of Special Schools, [FES0230](#).

193 HM Government, [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), November 2024, p 37.

194 FE Week, [The specialist FE sector should have its own clear ministerial brief](#), 24 March 2024.

195 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q88](#).



**175. CONCLUSION**

SEND policy is currently overseen by the Minister for School Standards whilst further education policy lies with the Minister for Skills. This split in ministerial responsibility has led to the neglect of FE SEND policy, as well as inefficiencies, limited accountability and policy fragmentation. Specialist further education should have its own ministerial brief and be included in the Minister for Skills' portfolio.

**176. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education consolidates FE SEND policy under the Minister for Skills' portfolio.

### Transport provision for further education students with SEND

- 177.** Local authorities in England have a statutory duty to encourage, enable, and assist all young people to participate in education or training who are aged 13 to 19, as well as those aged between 20 and 25 with SEND.<sup>196</sup> This legal duty extends to a local authority's "Transport Policy Statement" and the transport arrangements it provides for children and young people with SEND to travel to and from school or college. The Education Act 1996 states that when developing their post-16 transport policies, local authorities should ensure that young people with SEND are not prevented from participating because of the cost or availability of transport to their education or training.<sup>197</sup>
- 178.** However, different statutory transport duties apply depending on whether a young person with SEND is:
- over compulsory school age and aged 16 to 19 (or 19+ if the student began the course before their nineteenth birthday)
  - an adult learner—aged 19 and over when they began their course.
- 179.** There is no legal duty that requires local authorities to provide free transport for those aged 16 to 19 with SEND and who have completed their compulsory school years. Local authorities are given the discretion to decide what transport and financial support is necessary—from travel allowances to the provision of a shared minibus—to help young people with SEND attend school or college. Young people with an EHC plan will have

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<sup>196</sup> [Education and Skills Act 2008](#).

<sup>197</sup> [Education Act 1996](#).

an institution named in that plan. But there is no entitlement to funded transport to and from this named provider, and transport arrangements are only named in an EHC plan in exceptional circumstances.<sup>198</sup>

- 180.** Local authorities are required to provide free transport for adult learners with the most severe disabilities. They have the discretion to pay some or all of the reasonable costs of transport for other adult learners. The Government’s statutory guidance on post-16 transport states that the intention of this duty is to ensure that “those with the most severe disabilities with no other means of transportation are able to undertake further education and training after their 19th birthday to help them move towards more independent living.”<sup>199</sup>
- 181.** Natspec has said that the absence of a statutory duty to provide home to school or college transport for under 19s with SEND has resulted in “cash-strapped” local authorities reducing their transport support for that age group. It said that some authorities have introduced more restrictive policies with narrower eligibility criteria while others have tightened up their application processes to make it more difficult to obtain transport support. It warns that learners and families “are having to jump through hoops in terms of forms to complete, panels to pass through and lengthy appeals processes to navigate.” As a result, fewer learners are being offered LA-arranged transport and families are being asked to make a greater financial contribution, regardless of their own financial circumstances.<sup>200</sup>
- 182.** Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council announced earlier this year that it will cut the amount of subsidised transport it provides to post 16-year-old students with SEND travelling to and from school or college. The council said it was spending an “unsustainable” amount for 105 students and that costs were expected to rise in the future. It said it costs around £4,700 to provide the travel arrangements for each pupil, a total of about £500,000 a year. As part of the council’s cuts, transport will only be available for students who need to travel more than three miles.<sup>201</sup>
- 183.** In its written evidence, Natspec urged the Government to extend the existing statutory duty on local authorities to provide home-to-school transport so that it covers 4 to 25-year-olds with an EHCP travelling to school or college.<sup>202</sup> The Down’s Syndrome Association made a similar recommendation in its submission to the Committee. It said “there needs

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198 Department for Education, [Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training, Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), January 2019, p 14.

199 Department for Education, [Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training, Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), January 2019, p 7.

200 Natspec, [Are the wheels falling off? Natspec publishes a damning report on post-16 transport support for learners with SEND](#), December 2024.

201 BBC, [Council to cut post-16 school SEND transport](#), 30 April 2025.

202 Natspec, [FES0047](#).

to be legislative change that ensures that learners who have SEND who remain in education are entitled to free transport to enable their ongoing education. This transport must be suitable and based on their assessed capabilities and needs.”<sup>203</sup>

- 184.** Baroness Smith of Malvern declined to commit to extend the statutory duty on local authorities to provide home-to-school transport, saying that it is already the case that local authorities in their post-16 transport policy statements have to include specific arrangements for young people with SEND to ensure that they have the necessary support. Baroness Smith explained that this year the Government had provided £186 million through bursary funding and increased provision for colleges that have a larger proportion of students with SEND and other greater needs.<sup>204</sup>

**185. CONCLUSION**

Local authorities in England are not legally required to provide free transport for the majority post-16 students with SEND, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate support. Financial pressures have caused many councils to restrict eligibility and reduce services, making access to education more difficult for affected students. Families face complex application processes and increasing financial burdens. We have also heard about the benefits of offering young people travel training, including building independent life skills and saving costs of home to school transport.

**186. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education considers extending the statutory duty on local authorities to provide home-to-college transport for further education students with SEND from the age of 16 to 25. Statutory transport provision should be guaranteed based on clear criteria such as distance from education settings, level of need, and other relevant factors to ensure no young person is unfairly disadvantaged.

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203 The Down's Syndrome Association, [FES0059](#).

204 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q152](#).

**187.**

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Department must mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people in this age group, for whom such training is appropriate, to promote independence and safe travel. The Department for Education must work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport as they prepare to introduce a bespoke formula to recognise home to school transport costs. We support the recommendation of the Transport Select Committee with regard to the provision of bus passes for under 22-year-olds.

## Further education for students with care experience

- 188.** Local authorities collect data about young people who were previously looked after and who turned 17 to 21 in the year the information is gathered. Information is then collated by the Department for Education on the activity that most accurately reflects a young person's education or employment status on or around their birthday. The below figures capture the main activities of care leavers aged 17 to 21 in England during the twelve months up to March 2024:

### **17-year-old care leavers**

- 40% were in education
- 6% were in training, employment or an apprenticeship
- 24% were not in education, employment or training (NEET)

### **18-year-old care leavers**

- 51% were in education
- 14% were in training, employment or an apprenticeship
- 30% were not in education, employment or training (NEET)

### **19-to-21-year-old care leavers**

- 27% were in education (6% higher education, 21% education other than higher education)
- another 27% were in training, employment or an apprenticeship

- 39% were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This final figure compares to an estimated 13% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years old who are recorded as NEET.<sup>205</sup>

**189.** In the Government’s Get Britain Working White Paper, care leavers were identified as particularly vulnerable to being out of education, employment or training. The White Paper highlighted the above statistic that care leavers aged 19–21 are three times more likely to be NEET than their peers.<sup>206</sup> The Department for Education has said that care leavers up to the age of 25 are entitled to a personal advisor who works with them to develop a pathway plan. This includes advice and guidance to support career aspirations and further education, training or employment. It has said that it also funds the Care Leaver Covenant—an offer of support from private, public or third sector organisations to care leavers—and that over 600 organisations have signed the Covenant, offering pre-employment training, job opportunities and practical support.<sup>207</sup>

**190.** Beyond the headline figures, there is little official data on the specific qualification levels or courses being taken by care leavers at post-16 level. The Department for Education does not hold information on the number of care leavers who pursue their studies at Key Stage 5, for example.<sup>208</sup> There is little official information on care leavers’ attainment levels compared to that of their peers, the type of settings they attend, or their completion and drop-out rates. The think tank Civitas has said there is not enough official data on what happens to young people growing up in care beyond their GCSEs—“something that needs to change if we ever want to increase the pipeline of looked after children able to apply to university.”<sup>209</sup>

**191.** However, in 2023 the University of Oxford, University of York and the University of Exeter published a report into care leavers’ experiences of transitioning into the labour market. Their analysis focused on the main activity being pursued by young people in England at the age of 20 years and 7 months—that is, five months before much support for care leavers ends at the age of 21. The research found stark disparities in employment status and qualification outcomes between care leavers and all other young people at that age:

- although care leavers made extensive use of further education, with 67.9% engaging at some point up to 20 years and 7 months, for many this was for functional skills rather than specific vocational pathways

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205 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), November 2024.

206 HM Government, [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), November 2024, p 37.

207 [Education and Employment: Care Leavers](#), PQ 48603, 6 May 2025.

208 [Further Education: Care Leavers and Children in Care](#), PQ HL6747, 5 April 2023.

209 Civitas, [Breaking the care ceiling](#), September 2023.

- care leavers were significantly less likely to attain a level 4 qualification or above—13.3% of care leavers, compared to 46.2% for the general population
- 74.3% of care leavers had not achieved level 3 by the age of 21 compared with 28.1% of the general population

**192.** The research suggested that, because of the educational disruption they experience during Key Stages 3 and 4, it is vital that care leavers have strong routes into—and back into—post-16 education and training. The researchers said this could be achieved by a funded extension of the role of the virtual school to 25; an extension of the Pupil Premium Plus funding until at least 18; and a statutory equivalent to designated teachers in further education.<sup>210</sup>

**193.** The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) has previously told the Committee of the “black hole of further education” for care leavers. It said that while many further education colleges have developed excellent local offers for their care-experienced students, there has been “a lack of progress between 16 and 18 for this group.” NNECL believes that further education represents a critical “second chance” pathway for many care-experienced people, but whilst the pipeline from school to college remains unaddressed “it is unlikely we will see a decrease in the number of NEETS, nor an increase the numbers of care experienced people going to university.”<sup>211</sup>

**194.** Denise Rawls, Executive Director at NNECL, relayed to the Committee the findings her organisation had received from its student voices network surveys. Responses to those surveys suggested that the three principal reasons for care experienced students dropping out of their studies and training are finances, lack of accommodation and a lack of mental health support.<sup>212</sup> Ms Rawls added that “where local authorities, virtual schools and colleges work together, sitting in the same room and discussing things, great outcomes for those young people are much higher. When we keep operating in silos and we don’t provide supported transitions for young people, they drop out and fall through the cracks.”<sup>213</sup>

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210 Dr Neil Harrison, Jo Dixon, David Sanders-Ellis, Jade Ward and Poppy Asker, [‘Care leavers’ transition into the labour market in England](#), January 2023.

211 National Network for the Education of Care Leavers, [CSC0029](#).

212 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q92](#).

213 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q92](#).

**195. CONCLUSION**

Care leavers face significant challenges transitioning into further education, employment or training. Care leavers aged 19–21 are three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training than their peers. There is insufficient support for those transitioning into further education or training. There is also a lack of official data on post-16 education pathways, attainment and outcomes for those with care experience.

**196. RECOMMENDATION**

As set out in our Children’s Social Care report, the Department for Education must develop a National Care Offer to harmonise the postcode lottery in entitlements and ensure that care leavers receive a minimum level of support, wherever they live. The Department for Education must also develop a strategy to support all those with care experience as they transition from secondary school level to further education or training. The Department should create a transition programme for students including mentoring and orientation for care leavers entering further education, building on existing best practice.

**197. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department must record data on post-16 pathways and attainment for those with care experience—including detailed data on qualifications, course types and completion rates. The Department should also monitor long-term outcomes—employment quality, income levels, and higher education progression for those with care experience—and take steps to address existing disparities through the National Care Offer.

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## 7 Funding

- 198.** Further education providers receive funding from a range of different sources depending on the type of courses they provide and on the age of their students and learners. For 16–19 programmes of study, a national funding formula is used to calculate the allocation of funding that each provider receives each academic year.<sup>214</sup> Several additional elements that are not part of the formula, including high-needs funding and student support schemes, contribute to the total funding amount awarded to an institution. A provider’s total funding is therefore largely determined by funding rates per learner and the number of learners in their establishment. Depending on local arrangements, providers may include further education colleges, sixth form colleges, school sixth forms, 16–19 academies, higher education institutions and independent training providers.

### Funding trends

- 199.** The further education sector has experienced a prolonged period of reduced funding. In its latest annual report on education spending in England, the Institute for Fiscal Studies concluded that 16–19 education funding had experienced substantial cuts during the 2010s and that recent increases to per student funding had done little to reverse the earlier cuts. It found that between the 2010–11 and 2019–20 financial years, funding per student aged 16–18 fell in real terms by 14% in colleges and 28% in school sixth forms.<sup>215</sup> For colleges, this left spending per student at around its level in 2004–05, while spending per student in school sixth forms was lower than at any point since 2002.
- 200.** Imran Tahir, Research Economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told the Committee that the Government would need to allocate an additional £200 million in today’s prices in order to sustain 16-to-18 education funding in real terms between 2025 and 2027.<sup>216</sup> A significant factor in the IFS’s calculations is that the number of 16-to-18-year-olds in England has been increasing since 2017. Between 2018 and 2024, this age group grew by 230,000—a 13% increase. Projections suggest a further increase of 110,000 (5%) by 2028, when the population of 16-to-18-year-olds is expected to peak. Between 2018 and 2028, this would amount to a total increase of around

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214 Department for Education, [Funding Rates and Formula](#), accessed August 2025.

215 IFS, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2024–25](#), January 2025, p 57.

216 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q20](#).



340,000 (18%). This demographic growth is creating additional demands on further education providers who must accommodate the rising number of students.<sup>217</sup>

**201.** The IFS has modelled three post-16 funding scenarios facing the Government:

- To maintain spending per student in real terms at current levels, adjusting for inflation, the Government would need to increase total funding by £290 million in today's prices by 2028–29. This would keep spending per pupil constant in real terms at its current level, which would be around 9% lower than in 2009–10.
- Freeze the overall 16-to-18 education budget at the current rate. Factoring in the growth in student numbers, this would see per-student funding rates drop by 5% over the current Parliament. That would mean per-student funding would be 14% lower in real terms than in 2010.
- Freeze 16-to-18 education spending in cash terms, meaning it would not rise with inflation. Under this scenario, per-student funding would fall by 11% by 2028 and be 19% lower than in 2010.<sup>218</sup>

**202.** During the Financial Statement on 30 October 2024, the Chancellor announced that an additional £300 million would be spent on further education.<sup>219</sup> The Government said that £50 million of this funding would be made available to FE colleges and sixth-form colleges for the period April to July 2025. The Government explained that this one-off grant would enable colleges “to respond to current priorities and challenges”, including workforce pressures and that the remaining £250 million would be made available through 16 to 19 funding rates for the 2025–26 academic year.<sup>220</sup>

**203.** On 11 June 2025, the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, announced the outcome of the 2025 Spending Review and the planned funding levels for each Government department over the next four years. The Department for Education was allocated a £7.4 billion cash-terms increase in day-to-day spending between 2025–26 and 2028–29. As part of this settlement, the Chancellor pledged an extra £1.2 billion a year for the further education sector by 2028–29.<sup>221</sup> The IFS has said that, after accounting for inflation, this will see the overall budget rise by just over £400 million (in today's prices) between 2025–26 and 2028–29.<sup>222</sup> Spending Review documents do

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217 IFS, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2024–25](#), January 2025, p 58.

218 IFS, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2024–25](#), January 2025, p 59.

219 HC Deb, 30 October 2024, [col 811](#).

220 ESFA, [ESFA Update further education](#), 15 January 2025.

221 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), June 2025, p 35.

222 FE Week, [What does the Spending Review really mean for FE?](#), 12 June 2025.

not provide details on how the extra funding will be allocated, aside from references to accommodating 65,000 more 16–19 year olds and training up to 60,000 skilled construction workers.

**204. CONCLUSION**

The further education sector faces significant funding challenges due to prolonged real-terms cuts since 2010, with per-student funding still below 2009–10 levels. A rise in the number of 16–18-year-olds over the coming years will continue to increase pressure on colleges and other providers, yet per-student funding has not kept pace with the consequences of this population bulge. Although the Chancellor promised additional investment in the 2025 Spending Review, this is only a modest increase after adjustment for inflation, and details about how the extra money will be allocated are unclear. Without substantial investment, per-student funding will fall further, undermining the Government’s reliance on the further education sector to achieve its national missions.

**205. RECOMMENDATION**

It is crucial that the Government increases per-student funding across all post-16 funding streams, based on a detailed assessment of need. We welcome the Chancellor’s pledge of £1.2 billion a year for the further education sector, which will see the overall budget rise by £400 million (in today’s prices) between 2025–26 and 2028–29. However, the Government must ensure this extra funding is sufficient to meet the needs of this crucial sector which has suffered long-term underfunding. Increased funding should be adjusted annually for inflation and for the rise in FE student numbers.

## Capital funding

- 206.** Capital funding is allocated by the Department for Education to further education providers in order for them to maintain, upgrade and expand their estates. A number of funding streams are available depending on the work that is needed, including upgrading spaces that are in an unsatisfactory condition, acquiring specialist equipment, improving training facilities, and creating extra capacity to accommodate the rising number of further education students.<sup>223</sup> In the Autumn Budget 2024, Chancellor Rachel

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223 Department for Education, [Further education capital funding](#), accessed March 2025.

Reeves announced she was allocating the Department for Education £950 million for “skills capital”, including an additional £300 million in capital funding for colleges in 2025–26.<sup>224</sup>

- 207.** Kirklees College—an FE college in West Yorkshire—described in its written submission the challenges it faces due to “limited access to capital funding which restricts its ability to implement long-term plans.” The college said that recent funding, secured in 2023 through the FE reclassification capital allocation and the Condition Improvement Fund, had helped address some of the major backlog maintenance issues. However, it said that these funds were time-limited and will expire in March 2026, meaning there is an ongoing need for a long-term investment plan: “without ongoing investment, the college will struggle to make strategic improvements to its estate.”<sup>225</sup>
- 208.** Asked how the Government’s £300 million capital funding grant should be prioritised, Bill Watkin, Chief Executive at the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said that “it would be nice if sixth form colleges could have access to that funding, because at the moment they are not eligible for it.” Mr Watkin described how sixth form colleges have not had the opportunity to bid for any capital funds since 2022. He explained that granting eligibility to these colleges was a more efficient use of public money: “If we are going to accommodate all the extra 16-to-19-year-olds in the population, we are faced with a choice of whether to increase the capacity of existing provision or build new provision. It is much more cost-effective to increase the capacity of existing provision.”<sup>226</sup>
- 209.** David Hughes Colleges, Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges, had concerns that “£300 million is not an enormous amount of money.” Mr Hughes said that colleges operate about 4,500 buildings on 800 sites, and what FE colleges need is “£1.5 to £2 million for an average college” each year. “If we want cutting-edge technology that matches industry and an industrial strategy that is really going to push us ahead in terms of productivity, colleges need to have the kit, the equipment and the premises to match that; this [£300 million] does not do that.”<sup>227</sup>
- 210.** Natspec told the Committee that the Government had failed to support specialist colleges by excluding them from Post-16 capacity funding and the FE capital transformation programme. This, it said, had led to “a decline in the fabric of existing facilities, reduced capacity for growth to meet demand, and inability to adapt buildings to meet increasing complexity

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224 HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2024](#), 30 October 2024.

225 Kirklees College, [FES0086](#).

226 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q22](#).

227 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q22](#).

of need.”<sup>228</sup> Clare Howard, Chief Executive Officer at Natspec, told the Committee that buildings are “falling apart” and learners are missing out: “Colleges are not able to change their environment if there is a new cohort of need—they are not able to adapt buildings and so on. Colleges are looking at fundraising and private loans, and it is very difficult for them.”<sup>229</sup> Ms Howard explained that the reason for this situation is that specialist colleges are not part of the statutory FE sector. She noted that there was, however, precedent for Government support for these colleges:

[Specialist colleges] are a defined group, so it will not open up DfE funding to a whole range of providers. The precedent is that in 2012 there was a £15 million capital pot just for that group, so it cannot have been a legal reason then. Every year, specialist colleges get small amounts of condition funding as part of the school conditions allowance—they are treated as schools for that, so there is no legal reason there, either. I don’t think that the legal reason adds up, and I think we need to bring specialist colleges into the FE sector ... and make them part of FE estate condition planning and the FE capital grant.<sup>230</sup>

## 211. **CONCLUSION**

Colleges face significant challenges due to limited and short-term capital funding. Whilst recent allocations have addressed urgent maintenance needs, the lack of sustained capital investment prevents long-term improvements. The £300 million allocated for 2025–26 is insufficient given the scale of need across thousands of college buildings. Furthermore, access to capital funding is inequitable, with specialist colleges and sixth form colleges often being excluded from capital funding streams. Without ongoing and increased investment across the sector, colleges and other providers risk falling behind in providing modern, industry-aligned facilities which are essential for skills development and for delivering the ambitions of the Government’s Industrial Strategy.

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228 Natspec, [FES0047](#).

229 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q89](#).

230 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q89](#).

**212. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education increases capital funding significantly to support further education providers with modernisation and expansion. The increase in post-16 student numbers will be temporary, however, and therefore in some cases funding should be allocated to allow for a temporary expansion to the college estate to avoid ‘white elephant’ buildings as the impact of the fall in the birth rate comes through to the FE sector. The Department must also expand eligibility for capital funding programmes—including FE Capital Transformation and the Post-16 Capacity Fund—to specialist colleges and sixth form colleges.

**213. RECOMMENDATION**

We also recommend that the Department for Education provides a one-off capital grant for specialist SEND colleges to address serious and urgent concerns around the condition of buildings and facilities. Furthermore, the Department must create a ring-fenced High Needs Fund for specialist SEND colleges at the national level to reduce reliance on local authority discretion, which currently leads to additional administrative costs, duplication and waste.

## VAT and further education

- 214.** Section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 makes provision for local authorities and specified bodies to recover VAT incurred on goods and services purchased in relation to non-business activities. The section also sets out the type of public bodies which are eligible to recover VAT; for example, academies may recover VAT through section 33B.<sup>231</sup> However, FE colleges and standalone sixth form colleges are not included in the VAT refund scheme, despite being classified as part of the public sector since November 2022. Whilst colleges must comply with Managing Public Money guidelines, they cannot reclaim VAT, unlike schools and academies. As Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, James Murray MP, explained in answer to a parliamentary question on the VAT status of FE colleges in October 2024, “no VAT is charged on supplies of education made by further education colleges, nor are further education colleges able to recover the VAT they have incurred on their expenditure.”<sup>232</sup>

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231 [Value Added Tax Act 1994](#).

232 [Further Education: VAT](#), PQ 8846, 17 October 2024.

- 215.** Responding to a Westminster Hall debate on Public Bodies and VAT in May 2023, then-Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Victoria Atkins MP, explained the reasons for not including FE colleges and sixth form colleges within the VAT refund scheme:

Like many other providers of public services, FE colleges and sixth-form colleges are expected to cover their VAT costs from their funding allocations. Sixth-form colleges have the choice to restructure as academies, enabling the recovery of VAT under the refund scheme, but many choose not to. That is their decision... FE colleges are different from schools and academies in that they provide a range of different services for a broader range of students. Because FE colleges have a different, more autonomous way of operating, they benefit as eligible bodies from an advantageous VAT exemption when competing with commercial providers of higher levels of training.<sup>233</sup>

- 216.** The Committee heard a stark example of the impact the imposition of VAT is having on colleges during its visit to City College Norwich, which has recently seen the completion of a £5m Construction Skills Hub to provide greater capacity for teaching young people construction skills. Of this cost, £4m was secured from the Department for Education via the 2023–24 Post 16 Capacity Fund, with the college funding the balance. This fund was open to FE Colleges, sixth form colleges, 16–19 academies, free schools, and schools with sixth forms. Of the provider types eligible, only FE colleges and most sixth form colleges are required to pay VAT.

- 217.** Jerry White, Chief Executive Officer and Principal of the City College Norwich, told the Committee that “this immediately means that any bid from a college such as ours, has to be 20% less cost than a bid that could be made by an academy, free school or LA maintained school. Had City College Norwich not had to pay 20% VAT, we could have used the full £4m DfE grant to deliver additional spaces for students, which could have involved extending the physical footprint of the building or even adding a further storey.”<sup>234</sup> Mr White continued:

Outside of capital projects, City College Norwich has an annual VAT bill of around £1.5m per year, around 2.5% of total turnover. This is public money provided to fund education that returns immediately to the Treasury and which the school sixth form ‘down the road’ can spend on its students. Colleges spend an estimated £210 million a year on VAT that they cannot reclaim. This is a tax on FE students—the beneficiaries of college activity—and uses up 3% of college income nationally.<sup>235</sup>

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233 HC Deb, 17 May 2023, [col 392WH](#).

234 City College Norwich, [FES0275](#).

235 City College Norwich, [FES0275](#).

**218.** The Committee described the example of City College Norwich to Baroness Smith of Malvern and the “clear and undeniable” impact the inability to reclaim VAT was having on the FE sector. Baroness Smith of Malvern told the Committee that although the Department for Education had discussed the matter with the Treasury, it had “not yet come to a conclusion that would be satisfactory for colleges like Norwich.”<sup>236</sup>

**219. CONCLUSION**

Whilst academies and schools with sixth forms do not have to pay VAT, FE colleges and standalone sixth form colleges are not eligible for refunds in the VAT they incur on their expenditure. As colleges were reclassified as public bodies in 2022, this arrangement is unjustifiable and FE colleges and sixth form colleges should now benefit from a VAT exemption, which would align them with other post-16 education providers.

**220. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must make the case to the Treasury that all FE providers—including FE colleges and sixth form colleges—be exempt from paying VAT on expenditure. The Department must update this Committee in writing on the outcome of these discussions by April 2026.

## Staff pay

**221.** Pay awards for teachers at local authority-maintained schools in England—including maintained school sixth forms—are decided by the Government. The Government bases its decisions for pay awards on the recommendations made by the independent School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB).<sup>237</sup> In July 2024, the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson announced teachers at maintained schools and academy sixth forms would receive £1.2 billion to fund a 5.5% pay increase for 2024–25, following the recommendation of the STRB.<sup>238</sup> Currently, academy schools (run by trusts rather than local authorities) can set their own pay and conditions,<sup>239</sup> but many will follow the STRB recommendations.

**222.** The Government does not set pay levels for the college sector. Further education and sixth form colleges make their own decisions on pay and conditions, using block funding from the Government to fund awards. Many

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236 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q116](#).

237 School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB), [About Us](#), accessed March 2025.

238 HC Deb, 29 July 2024, [col 41WS](#) (Commons written ministerial statement).

239 The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill would take this freedom away.



colleges follow recommendations made by the Association of Colleges (AoC), which negotiates with the trade unions. For sixth form colleges, pay is negotiated with the Sixth Form Colleges Association. The AoC made a formal pay recommendation for the 2024–25 academic year of 2.5% or £750, whichever is greater.<sup>240</sup>

### Pay disparity

- 223.** In 2010–11, the median salary (in 2024–25 prices) for a school teacher was around £51,000, whilst the median salary for a college teacher was around £46,000. Since 2010, both school teachers and college teachers have seen their pay fall in real terms, with particularly sharp declines in 2021–22 and 2022–23 due to high inflation. This drop, however, has been sharper for college teachers. The median salary for a school teacher is currently around £44,000 and that for college teachers is around £38,000. The gap in median salary between school and college teachers in 2023–24 was around £5,500 or 15%. Furthermore, the difference between the two pay increases for school and college staff this academic year means the existing gap is set to widen. The IFS forecasts that the salary gap in 2024–25 will increase to almost £7,000 or 18%—the largest salary gap on record.<sup>241</sup>
- 224.** Jo Grady, General Secretary at the University and College Union, told the Committee that there is not a fit-for-purpose collective bargaining framework for colleges in England. “We have collective bargaining—we meet with David [Hughes] and the AoC—but any outcomes from that collective bargaining are not binding on college employers.” Ms Grady said fully funded and equitable pay offers were needed across the board “that do not just give us 2% or 3% in one year but allow for that pay gap to be closed. Anything less than this will mean that our further education sector—our colleges—continue to haemorrhage really good staff.”<sup>242</sup>
- 225.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) described the “anger” felt by some college teachers at the perceived two-tier workforce between “those who are paid significantly more because they work in schools, and those who are paid significantly less because they work in colleges.”<sup>243</sup> However, David Hughes, Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges, disagreed with Jo Grady’s call for bargaining outcomes to be made binding on colleges. He said “I do not want a binding system on colleges when they cannot afford it. If they are not going to be funded to close that pay gap, they cannot be forced to do it;

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240 Association of Colleges, [AoC pay recommendation 2024/25](#), 10 October 2024.

241 IFS, [The state of college finances in England](#), October 2024.

242 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q24](#).

243 FE Week, [Government must look again at college teacher pay](#), 1 August 2024.



they just would not be able to make that work. But there is a real argument for a pay review body in this sector backed by the Government that gets supported to close the gap.”<sup>244</sup>

- 226.** In November 2024, the Sixth Form Colleges Association launched a judicial review of the Government’s decision to exclude its members from the 5.5% pay award. Chief Executive, Bill Watkin, said the Government needed “to redress the imbalance its decision has created by immediately extending the 5.5% pay award to colleges to match the arrangements in schools.”<sup>245</sup> Mr Watkin told the Committee in oral evidence that the FE sector is made up of very different provider types, and it is not necessarily the case that it would work to have one body represent all elements of the FE sector. “We have a very different mechanism in the sixth form college world. It works, and there is very strong support from teaching unions and employers to continue to make that work.”<sup>246</sup>

**227. CONCLUSION**

There is a growing pay disparity between school and college teachers in England, with college staff earning significantly less—on average college teachers earn 15% less. This issue has led to staff dissatisfaction and has contributed to the recruitment and retention crisis. Whilst school-teacher pay is centrally reviewed and funded, college teacher pay decisions can be fragmented and underfunded, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate pay increases. Although recent Government funding has been welcomed, it has been described as a temporary fix rather than a structural solution to the long-standing inequity in pay.

**228. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education establishes a statutory pay review body for colleges comparable to the School Teachers’ Review Body. This body should provide independent, evidence-based pay recommendations for teachers and staff and help to ensure equity of pay across the post-16 education sector. The Department for Education must commit to closing the gap in pay between college teachers and their school counterparts within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period. The Department must keep the Committee regularly updated on its progress in meeting this commitment.

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244 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q24](#).

245 SFCA, [Statement on Judicial Review Proceedings](#), 14 November 2024.

246 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q25](#).

## Recruitment and retention of college teachers

- 229.** There is a high rate of staff turnover in colleges. Around 25% of college teachers leave the profession after one year compared with 15% of school teachers. After three years, almost half of college teachers have left compared with around a quarter of school teachers. Ten years after beginning teaching, less than a quarter of college teachers remain in the profession compared with over 60% of school teachers.<sup>247</sup>
- 230.** A key contributing factor for the disproportionately high turnover rate in colleges is the disparity in staff pay. However, there are other documented reasons for the low retention rates amongst college teachers. The Committee received written evidence describing how high workloads and insufficient time for Continuing Professional Development are driving further education professionals to leave the sector.<sup>248</sup> One submission from an experienced FE worker explained that “burnout, lack of support from senior management, disillusionment with large class sizes and ever-decreasing budgets” also contribute to staff leaving.<sup>249</sup> Weston College talked about “change fatigue” for the FE sector. It said that in the last decade colleges have been the subjects of the Wolf Review, Whitehead Review, Sainsbury Review and the Augar Review. Additionally, new initiatives and qualification reforms including diplomas, RQF/QCF, T-Levels, AAQs and frameworks to standards have led to staff burnout and teachers leaving “to go back into industry where there is more stability.”<sup>250</sup>
- 231.** The University and College Union (UCU) described job insecurity as “rife across further education.” The UCU’s 2022 report *On the Breadline* said that over half of teaching staff are employed on some form of insecure contract. It said that some staff in the further education sector experience a lack of financial security that directly impacts their mental health and their relationships with family and friends, and that “workers are being pushed to breaking point.”<sup>251</sup> Bill Watkin, Chief Executive at the Sixth Form Colleges Association, told the Committee that the SFCA had conducted research into what it is that keeps people in the teaching profession and attracts them to it in the first place. He said the most important factor of all was “the moral purpose of the job, the variability and the opportunity to really

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247 IFS, [What has happened to college teacher pay in England?](#) March 2023, p 11.

248 London South East Colleges, [FES0035](#); Chesterfield College, [FES0051](#).

249 Site Librarian at Chichester College Group, [FES0019](#).

250 Weston College, [FES0162](#).

251 UCU, [On the Breadline: The cost of living crisis for England’s college workers](#), July 2022, p 18.

make a difference to young people's lives. There is something about making sure that people in the profession feel that they have value and are doing something that is worth it.”<sup>252</sup>

- 232.** The Government has continued its predecessor's levelling up premium payment scheme as “targeted retention incentive payments.” Further education teachers, who are in the first five years of their FE careers and teaching programmes in early years, building and construction, digital, engineering, manufacturing, maths and physics, are eligible for payments of up to £6,000.<sup>253</sup> However, Natspec—a membership association of specialist further education—is critical of the scheme for not including specialist FE colleges. It says there are no government-funded recruitment drives equivalent to ‘Share Your Skills’ to help attract teachers with a SEND specialism into FE.<sup>254</sup>

### Previous Education Committee inquiry

- 233.** The previous Education Committee conducted an inquiry into teacher recruitment, training and retention in order to investigate the issues causing difficulties in these areas. The then Schools Minister, Damian Hinds MP, told the previous committee that there were particular challenges in further education because “there are more things that young people are doing in FE colleges than in schools. There is a bigger range of industrial sector expertise and experience that you are looking for and some can be quite hard to find because you are competing against really well-remunerated jobs in the private sector economy.”<sup>255</sup>
- 234.** In its 2024 report, the previous Committee concluded that issues with recruitment and retention affected every stage of education, from primary school through to further education; “However, the challenge increases as we move up the phases with more vacancies and a greater retention challenge in secondary than in primary and again in post 16”. The Committee urged the Government to “ensure that efforts are being made to improve recruitment and retention throughout all stages of education.”<sup>256</sup>

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252 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 25 March 2025, [Q27](#).

253 Department for Education, [Targeted retention incentive payments for FE teachers](#), Sep 2025.

254 Natspec, [FES0047](#).

255 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2023–24, [Teacher recruitment, training and retention](#), HC 119, p 14.

256 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2023–24, [Teacher recruitment, training and retention](#), HC 119, p 14.

**235. CONCLUSION**

College teacher retention rates are significantly lower than in schools, with less than a quarter of college teachers remaining in the profession after ten years. Pay disparities, excessive workloads, limited professional development and job insecurity are causing burnout and undermining teachers' confidence and contentment in their jobs. Whilst the Government offers targeted retention payments for those in the first five years of their careers and teaching select subjects, more experienced college teachers and specialist colleges are excluded.

**236. RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must address the underlying and unresolved reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis amongst school and college teachers, which include pay disparities, excessive workloads, limited professional development and job insecurity. In so doing, it must develop incentives for all post-16 teaching staff to remain in the profession. It must include specialist colleges within the targeted retention incentive payments scheme and consider alternatives to that scheme for mid- and late-career teachers.

**237. RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Education develops and publishes a strategy for working with employers to secure a pipeline from skilled trades into vocational teaching, including staff who are retiring and secondments from larger organisations.

## Adult education funding

- 238.** Public funding on adult education and skills can be understood in three broad categories: provider-based learning (including basic skills and qualifications at multiple levels); subsidies for work-based learning (such as apprenticeships); and loans for further education courses (known as Advanced Learner Loans). The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that overall public funding for adult education and skills has declined “significantly since its peak in the early 2000s.” In 2023–24, spending stood at approximately £4.3 billion, meaning it has fallen by a third compared to its inflation-adjusted high of £6.3 billion in 2003–04. The IFS said the decline has been particularly steep in classroom-based learning, where expenditure has fallen by two-thirds, from £5.1 billion in the early 2000s to £1.7 billion in 2023–24.<sup>257</sup>

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257 IFS, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2024–25](#), January 2025, p 64.

- 239.** In March 2025, the Government announced that from the 2025–26 academic year it would apply a 6% reduction to adult education and skills funding “to ensure that the allocations are affordable within the overall budget.” The Government said it will continue to reduce allocations to account for devolution to new areas.<sup>258</sup> Hoxex policy director Sue Pember criticised the Government’s decision, describing the cut as “shortsighted.” She said funding that goes into adult education and skills “actually reduces spend in other departments such as health and work and pensions. If we are serious about getting the 9 million inactive [people] back to work, we actually need to spend more.”<sup>259</sup>
- 240.** In a letter to the Education Secretary following the Government’s funding announcement, Hoxex said the 6% cut “directly threatens the Government’s ability to achieve its five national missions and undermines cross-departmental initiatives that depend on a skilled, adaptable adult workforce to succeed.”<sup>260</sup> Asked how much funding would be needed to ensure that the adult education sector is properly supported, Sue Pember replied that a £5 billion uplift is essential.<sup>261</sup> She said that without this investment, “the Government’s ambition for a highly skilled nation will not be realised, and the success of recently launched strategies such as the Migration Strategy, Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Work and Pensions’ Connect to Work strategy will be severely undermined.”<sup>262</sup>
- 241.** Baroness Smith of Malvern told the Committee that “given the need to make that cut”, the Government has tried to ensure that funding for adult education and skills as effectively as possible to maintain the entitlements that adults continue to have. Baroness Smith said that, in order to achieve this, the Government had devolved a significant proportion of that funding: 62% overall, but 100% to where there are mayoral combined authorities. Baroness Smith said: “I don’t sit here and say that this is something that we wanted to do. We did not, but the devolution is particularly important in helping us to make sure that that money is still being used as effectively as possible.”<sup>263</sup>
- 242.** In September 2025, the Government announced that adult education and skills funding would be transferred from the Department for Education to the Department for Work and Pensions, along with apprenticeship policy and funding. Baroness Smith said that moving skills policy to the

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258 Department for Education, [Adult education and skills funding allocations: update for 2025 to 2026](#), updated April 2025.

259 FE Week, [DfE announce 6% cut to national adult skills budgets](#), 18 March 2025.

260 Hoxex, [Hoxex writes a second letter responding to Adult Skills Fund cuts](#), accessed May 2025.

261 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 3 June 2025, [Q112](#).

262 Hoxex, supplementary written evidence, [FES0272](#).

263 Education Committee, FE and Skills Inquiry, 24 June 2025, [Q120](#).

Department for Work and Pensions was the “logical next step” and that it would ensure that skills are “integrated into all of the labour market work on the ground and the work that Job Centres and job services are doing nationally.”<sup>264</sup>

**243. CONCLUSION**

Funding for adult education and skills has declined sharply since the early 2000s, particularly in classroom-based learning. The Government’s reduction in adult education funding for 2025–26 will further undermine efforts to upskill the existing workforce and to support those who are out of work or struggling to progress. Reduced investment in adult education threatens the Government’s broader social and economic goals on employment, health and digital inclusion.

**244. RECOMMENDATION**

Funding for adult education and skills must increase to meet demand and to ensure that those over the age of 19 are able to participate in, and benefit from, the Government’s national missions. The Government must assess demand for adult education and increase funding over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review to align with the Government’s missions. We expect Skills England to set out a clear articulation of the resources that are needed and to advocate within Government for increased funding.

**245. RECOMMENDATION**

As adult education policy and funding transitions to the Department for Work and Pensions, the Government must ensure that learning and training opportunities remain accessible to anyone seeking to enhance their skills, broaden their knowledge, or take incremental steps toward personal development. Adult learning must not be narrowly framed as a pathway to employment alone—it also serves as a vital tool for social inclusion, personal fulfilment, and lifelong learning. Adult education and skills policy should reflect the diverse motivations of adult learners and safeguard opportunities for education at every stage of life.

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264 FE Week, [DWP will take over apprenticeships, minister confirms](#), 12 September 2025.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

## Skills England

1. Given the primacy of the Government's economic growth mission, and the emphasis the Government has placed on a high-functioning and forward-looking skills system to deliver that mission, the comparison between the status of Skills England on the one hand and organisations such as the Met Office and the DVLA on the other is a weak one. Skills England has been given the crucial role of transforming skills opportunities and driving growth and it is vital that it is able to work impartially and, if necessary, challenge Government policy. We were concerned, therefore, by the reluctance of the Chairs and CEOs of Skills England to comment on the adequacy of funding for the FE sector when they gave oral evidence. Furthermore, without a statutory foundation, Skills England may be altered or abolished by this or any future Government and without the consent of Parliament. (Conclusion, Paragraph 17)
2. As an Executive Agency, Skills England is accountable to the Department for Education and therefore answerable to Parliament through this Committee. We will hold Skills England to account through annual accountability sessions and urge subsequent Education Committees to continue this practice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 18)
3. We recommend that the Department for Education commits to an independent review of Skills England within two years of it becoming fully operational—by June 2027—with a commitment to legislate further to ensure full independence if necessary. (Recommendation, Paragraph 19)
4. We have heard serious concerns that the role of Chief Executive Officer at Skills England is too junior within the civil service hierarchy. The director-level status given to the holders of that position may limit their ability to influence those working across Government and undermine the authority they need to perform their duties effectively. Whilst the joint CEOs said the role aligns with equivalent positions in similar agencies, we believe that the Chief Executive Officers' strategic leadership and the responsibility they have been given to oversee the Government's national skills policies demand greater seniority. (Conclusion, Paragraph 24)



5. We recommend that the Department for Education reviews the status of Skills England’s Chief Executive Officers in June 2026—twelve months after Skills England became fully operational—to ensure they have been given the right level of seniority and that they have been able to perform their cross-departmental duties freely and effectively. The CEO position must be regraded if it is clear that seniority issues have prevented them from performing their duties constructively. (Recommendation, Paragraph 25)
6. Skills England has been broadly welcomed by the further education and skills sectors. We agree with the Government’s priorities for Skills England, including identifying national and local skills needs, simplifying access to training, and collaborating with employers and training providers to develop mutually beneficial solutions. However, Skills England must address the issues our evidence has raised, including a lack of data collection and information sharing, a complex levy system that disadvantages SMEs, and a lack of urgency and clear communication over the training programmes to be funded by the Growth and Skills Levy. (Conclusion, Paragraph 30)
7. To meet its priorities, Skills England must within a year of becoming fully operational—by June 2026—enhance data collection and sharing through a centralised platform that tracks skills gaps and training outcomes. Within two years—by June 2027—Skills England should deliver reform of the complex levy system to ensure SMEs can access funding, with simplified processes and tailored support. Skills England must also provide clear communication about Growth and Skills Levy-funded programmes for employers and learners. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)

## Devolution

8. We welcome the Government’s plans to deepen and widen the devolution of skills and employment support in England. Devolving further powers to Strategic Authorities will help to drive growth, encourage the co-ordinated delivery of education and training services across the country, and meet the unique needs of local communities. It is disappointing, however, that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, as introduced, limits the devolution of skills and employment support to those aged 19 and over and does not make provision for the devolution of 16–19 education and training. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that every part of the country benefits from further devolution and that no area is left behind, regardless of its status within the devolution process. (Conclusion, Paragraph 41)
9. The Government should broaden its commitment to “devolution by default” by devolving appropriate 16–19 education and training, skills programmes and funding streams to each Strategic Authority. We recommend that the



Government amends the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to make provision for the devolution of 16–19 education and training. (Recommendation, Paragraph 42)

10. The Government should consider utilising the trailblazer model to pilot a more comprehensive skills devolution programme and report back to the Committee. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)
11. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) have been effective in aligning employer needs with education and training provision, and in utilising and developing local partnerships. LSIPs are a relatively new initiative and will need time to become fully established. However, those most closely involved in their production and facilitation have already identified some potential challenges which the Government should address. It can be difficult for employers and providers to navigate LSIPs in a crowded landscape of overlapping initiatives and there is a perception that local partnerships are not always balanced. (Conclusion, Paragraph 50)
12. We recommend that the Department for Education conducts a policy audit to identify overlaps between LSIPs and other skills initiatives in order to streamline LSIPs and make them more coherent and easier to navigate. We also recommend that the Department for Education considers how local partnerships between Employer Representative Bodies, FE providers, local authorities, Skills England and others can be rationalised and strengthened. The Department must set out within a year how it will ensure that there are formal criteria for each of these groups to follow when contributing towards their Local Skills Improvement Plans and that transparent decision-making processes are in place. (Recommendation, Paragraph 51)
13. The number of young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England is unacceptable both for the life chances of young people and for economic growth. The Government's Youth Guarantee goes some way to support 18–21-year-olds to access education, training and employment opportunities. However, it will only benefit those in the narrow 18–21 age group, excluding young people aged 16–17 and 22–24. (Conclusion, Paragraph 56)
14. We recommend that the Government expands eligibility for the Youth Guarantee to include all 16–24-year-olds so that all young people are given the same opportunities to re-enter education or access employment. (Recommendation, Paragraph 57)
15. Funding for adult education programmes has largely been devolved over the last decade which has provided local areas with more control, but it has also led to a disparate and uneven adult skills landscape. Some authorities have more powers than others, co-ordination between areas is not always smooth, and employers can find it difficult to get

involved. On top of this, differences in funding rules and course approvals make it difficult for providers to run consistent, scalable programmes. (Conclusion, Paragraph 63)

16. We recommend that the Department for Education and Skills England create a Skills Co-ordination Board by April 2026. Local areas must be given the flexibility to develop and implement their own tailor-made strategies on adult education and training; the purpose of the Skills Co-ordination Board therefore would be to oversee and co-ordinate regional strategies with national sector needs across the increasingly devolved skills landscape. The Skills Co-ordination Board would be responsible for driving quality of skills services in each region and ensuring there is consistency of effectiveness across local areas and no area is left behind. (Recommendation, Paragraph 64)

## Post-16 qualifications and pathways

17. There is a stark disparity between how post-16 technical and vocational education and training pathways are presented to pupils and how academic pathways are presented, and fundamental differences in the levels of support and guidance that students receive about each. The Baker Clause and the provider access legislation are meant to ensure that school pupils are introduced to a diverse range of post-16 options, yet compliance with these statutory requirements is inconsistent. The support and intervention measures that already exist to ensure compliance with these provisions should be strengthened if levels of compliance do not improve. (Conclusion, Paragraph 73)
18. We recommend that Department for Education publishes an annual report on the number and proportion of schools that are complying with the Baker Clause and provider access legislation, and assesses the reasons for non-compliance. The proposed work to be carried out by the Careers and Enterprise Company to map compliance should be comprehensive, transparent, it must consider pupils' experiences, and it should be published. The Department should report annually on the action that has been taken to intervene to ensure compliance with the Baker Clause and provider access legislation, and should consider whether the threshold for intervention should be lowered. (Recommendation, Paragraph 74)
19. Information about post-16 pathways can be fragmented, with no single platform covering both academic and vocational options. Apprenticeship applications are particularly complex due to the absence of a national framework and regional inconsistencies. Additionally, vocational application timelines are misaligned with university admissions, making it difficult for

young people to consider all options equally. These issues contribute to a lack of parity of esteem, with academic routes appearing more accessible and structured than vocational alternatives. (Conclusion, Paragraph 75)

- 20.** We recommend that the remit of UCAS be expanded to offer a single source of information for all routes, including academic and vocational pathways. Application timelines for vocational courses, including apprenticeships, should better align with those for university admissions. Apprenticeship applications can be complex, and the availability of vacancies is not standardised. To address this, the Government should consider developing regional portals that integrate with the national admissions service. This would enable students to consider and compare their options simultaneously, rather than being influenced by staggered deadlines. (Recommendation, Paragraph 76)
- 21.** T Levels are a relatively new programme of study, and they should be given adequate time to develop and gain traction. However, if T Levels are to become the “gold-standard technical qualification” the Government must urgently address a number of challenges. T Level programmes have low retention rates compared to A Level and Applied General Qualification courses; the ineffectiveness of the T Level transition programmes; responses to student surveys suggest there can be poor levels of student satisfaction; there is limited understanding and awareness of the purpose and value of T Levels among students, parents and employers. (Conclusion, Paragraph 89)
- 22.** We recommend that the Department for Education launches a national awareness campaign for T Levels, targeting students, parents and employers. The purpose and benefits of T Levels should be set out clearly from secondary school stage onwards. Parity of esteem between A Levels and T Levels should run through all communications, guidance and advice to schools, teachers, parents and students. The Department for Education should consider overhauling the T Level transition programme. (Recommendation, Paragraph 90)
- 23.** We recommend the introduction of modular or smaller-sized T Level qualifications (e.g. equivalent to one A Level) to enable students to study a blend of academic and technical qualifications and allow more flexible entry and exit points. Employers should be involved more closely at the curriculum-design stage of these modular qualifications to ensure T Level programmes align with industry needs. (Recommendation, Paragraph 91)
- 24.** There remains uncertainty for both students and colleges around the long-term availability of level 3 qualifications that had previously been earmarked for defunding. Despite a temporary extension of funding until 2027, the sector remains in limbo, without the clarity it needs to plan ahead. Level 3 qualifications which provide an alternative to A Levels and T Levels are

essential. The Government's review into level 3 qualifications reform lacked transparency and an appropriate level of consultation with stakeholders. (Conclusion, Paragraph 99)

25. Level 3 qualifications—including Applied General Qualifications—which provide students with a popular and respected alternative to both A Levels and T Levels must remain an option for all young people. The Government must publicly commit to the long-term retention of these qualifications and to providing sustained funding for them. We hope this will go some way to address the extreme instability the sector has endured during the recent reviews by the current and previous Government. (Recommendation, Paragraph 100)
26. The Department for Education should ensure that post-16 students are able to pursue a mixture of A Levels, Applied General Qualifications and T Levels in order to support more tailored and inclusive educational pathways. Providing students with the flexibility to combine different forms of post-16 qualifications would better reflect individual learner needs and open up a wider range of future pathways. (Recommendation, Paragraph 101)
27. The Department for Education must improve the way in which it communicates with the FE sector about any future reform of qualifications, for example by ensuring that the terms of reference are published and that there is open and transparent engagement. Timescales for any future reforms should be set specifically to avoid uncertainty and disruption for providers and students. The Government should evaluate the impact its review into level 3 qualifications reform had on students and colleges and be more transparent in the way it conducts such reviews in future. (Recommendation, Paragraph 102)
28. The current requirement for all post-16 students who have not achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths to continue to study those subjects alongside their other studies is not working for the majority of post-16 students and the Government must change it. Despite a modest rise in overall attainment over the past ten years, the progression rate from age 16 to 19 remains low, with over 80% of those who did not achieve grade 4 at 16 still not achieving that grade by 19. This policy can be demoralising for students and puts a huge strain on colleges and their staff. Whilst ensuring that students continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy is important, an alternative approach is needed. (Conclusion, Paragraph 112)
29. We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification or employment pathway:

- Route A: Students who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English, should be supported to work towards those qualifications.
  - Route B: Vocational courses of study, for which the maths and English content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the curriculum. Students taking courses with embedded maths and English content, which have been rigorously quality assured, may then be considered for exemption from the requirement to resit maths and English GCSE.
  - Route C: Students who, based on prior attainment, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English—for example, focused on financial literacy, debt and interest, and household budgeting—should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification. (Recommendation, Paragraph 113)
- 30.** The Department for Education must take action to address the resit problem at source by ensuring that more children leave school with sufficient levels of numeracy and literacy. As part of its response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the Department must examine the reasons for the low pass rates in GCSE maths and English at age 16 and take steps to improve them. (Recommendation, Paragraph 114)

## Apprenticeships

- 31.** We welcome the Government’s reforms of the apprenticeship system and the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy. The former apprenticeship levy was seen by some organisations—particularly small and medium-sized businesses—as being part of an overly complex and inflexible apprenticeship system. However, for many prospective apprentices and employers, the pathway to an apprenticeship remains unclear, bureaucratic and discouraging. The process must be simplified if the Government is to boost enrolment in apprenticeships and promote higher-paid jobs in key sectors. (Conclusion, Paragraph 124)
- 32.** We recommend that the Department for Education simplifies the apprenticeship system for employers and prospective apprentices in order to increase participation. By April 2026, it must create a streamlined application and reporting process tailored for businesses, and provide dedicated support and guidance to help Small and Medium-sized

Enterprises (SMEs) navigate the system. This support and guidance should include information on how to create a good experience for apprentices. (Recommendation, Paragraph 125)

- 33.** Foundation apprenticeships have been welcomed by the sector. However, whilst these shorter apprenticeships rightly aim to help young people enter critical sectors, there are concerns about the Government’s decision not to target “everyday sectors”, such as the hospitality, retail and care sectors, when they were rolled out in August 2025; these sectors are major employers of young people and often serve as entry points into the workforce. Instead, the focus of foundation apprenticeships is on the eight growth-driving sectors identified by the Government in its industrial strategy. (Conclusion, Paragraph 130)
- 34.** We recommend that the Department for Education expands the foundation apprenticeship scheme to include the hospitality, retail and care sectors—as well as other high-demand sectors for young people—by April 2026. The purpose of foundation and other shorter apprenticeships must be made clear to prospective apprentices and employers, including routes to further progression. Clear communication and guidance must be provided and maintained by the Department for Education and Skills England. (Recommendation, Paragraph 131)
- 35.** The current apprenticeship system faces inconsistencies as a result of recent changes to maths and English requirements for those aged 19 and over. Whilst removing the requirement for adult apprentices to attain grade 4 maths and English before completing their apprenticeships may increase participation, it also risks widening existing literacy and numeracy gaps, and creating age-based inequalities. Changes to the maths and English requirements based on age increases the likelihood that employers take on adult apprentices, who now have fewer requirements, than apprentices aged 16 to 18. Adult apprentices without a good foundation in literacy and numeracy may also face barriers to their progression. (Conclusion, Paragraph 138)
- 36.** We recommend the introduction of a three-route model for all apprentices who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen apprenticeship:
- Route A: Apprentices who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English should be supported to work towards those qualifications.

- Route B: Apprenticeships, for which the maths and English content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the apprenticeship programme. Apprentices working towards a qualification with embedded maths and English content, which have been rigorously quality assured, may then be considered for exemption from the requirement to resit maths and English GCSE.
  - Route C: Apprentices who, based on prior attainment, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification. (Recommendation, Paragraph 139)
- 37.** The evidence received by the Committee is overwhelmingly opposed to the Government’s decision not to fund level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over through the Growth and Skills Levy. The defunding of these apprenticeships will reduce uptake—particularly in key sectors such as healthcare—widen existing skills shortages, and limit career progression for many. (Conclusion, Paragraph 148)
- 38.** We recommend that the Department for Education re-introduces levy funding for level 7 apprenticeships for all ages within the eight growth-driving sectors and for regulated professions, such as healthcare. (Recommendation, Paragraph 149)
- 39.** The Department must monitor the impact of defunding all other level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over and be willing to reintroduce levy funding where necessary. (Recommendation, Paragraph 150)

## Supporting further education students

- 40.** Poor mental health is a growing crisis for young people, with rising rates of anxiety, depression and eating disorders—particularly for those aged 17 to 19. The Government has pledged specialist mental health support in all schools and colleges, but the rollout of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) has been slow—only 41% of post-16 students are currently covered. There is an urgent need for increased investment, faster implementation of MHSTs, and earlier intervention and personalised support. (Conclusion, Paragraph 159)
- 41.** The Government’s pledge of 100% MHST coverage by 2029–30 must be met and must include all post-16 students and trainees. We recommend that Government accelerates the rollout of Mental Health Support Teams with a particular focus on expanding coverage for post-16 settings, which has not kept pace with coverage for primary and secondary schools. In addition to



publishing the number and proportion of schools and post-16 settings with access to MHSTs, the Government must monitor, evaluate and publish the impact of this roll out. (Recommendation, Paragraph 160)

42. The Government must improve access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and adult mental health services for those children and young people with more severe mental health conditions and whose education is often interrupted for months or years at a time by the long waits for services and treatment. (Recommendation, Paragraph 161)
43. On average, economically disadvantaged students aged 16–19 do not perform as well as their peers or achieve the same educational outcomes. Per-pupil funding drops sharply after the age of 16, creating a cliff edge that limits support for disadvantaged students. Existing bursaries for disadvantaged students aged 16–19 are insufficient and inconsistently distributed. There is compelling evidence for the introduction of a student premium to match secondary school funding levels. Without targeted investment, disadvantaged learners risk falling further behind academically and professionally. (Conclusion, Paragraph 169)
44. We recommend that the Department for Education introduces a 16–19 student premium for disadvantaged post-16 students. This funding should be pegged to the Pupil Premium and would be a targeted investment for post-16 students who have been eligible for the Pupil Premium in the last six years. The Department should monitor the effectiveness of this premium on education outcomes and publish its findings. (Recommendation, Paragraph 170)
45. We also recommend that the Department utilises local authority-level data to identify and address the unique barriers in areas in which attainment across qualification pathways (including A Levels, T Levels, AGQs) is below the national average. (Recommendation, Paragraph 171)
46. SEND policy is currently overseen by the Minister for School Standards whilst further education policy lies with the Minister for Skills. This split in ministerial responsibility has led to the neglect of FE SEND policy, as well as inefficiencies, limited accountability and policy fragmentation. Specialist further education should have its own ministerial brief and be included in the Minister for Skills’ portfolio. (Conclusion, Paragraph 175)
47. We recommend that the Department for Education consolidates FE SEND policy under the Minister for Skills’ portfolio. (Recommendation, Paragraph 176)
48. Local authorities in England are not legally required to provide free transport for the majority post-16 students with SEND, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate support. Financial pressures have



caused many councils to restrict eligibility and reduce services, making access to education more difficult for affected students. Families face complex application processes and increasing financial burdens. We have also heard about the benefits of offering young people travel training, including building independent life skills and saving costs of home to school transport. (Conclusion, Paragraph 185)

49. We recommend that the Department for Education considers extending the statutory duty on local authorities to provide home-to-college transport for further education students with SEND from the age of 16 to 25. Statutory transport provision should be guaranteed based on clear criteria such as distance from education settings, level of need, and other relevant factors to ensure no young person is unfairly disadvantaged. (Recommendation, Paragraph 186)
50. The Department must mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people in this age group, for whom such training is appropriate, to promote independence and safe travel. The Department for Education must work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport as they prepare to introduce a bespoke formula to recognise home to school transport costs. We support the recommendation of the Transport Select Committee with regard to the provision of bus passes for under 22-year-olds. (Recommendation, Paragraph 187)
51. Care leavers face significant challenges transitioning into further education, employment or training. Care leavers aged 19–21 are three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training than their peers. There is insufficient support for those transitioning into further education or training. There is also a lack of official data on post-16 education pathways, attainment and outcomes for those with care experience. (Conclusion, Paragraph 195)
52. As set out in our Children’s Social Care report, the Department for Education must develop a National Care Offer to harmonise the postcode lottery in entitlements and ensure that care leavers receive a minimum level of support, wherever they live. The Department for Education must also develop a strategy to support all those with care experience as they transition from secondary school level to further education or training. The Department should create a transition programme for students including mentoring and orientation for care leavers entering further education, building on existing best practice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 196)
53. The Department must record data on post-16 pathways and attainment for those with care experience—including detailed data on qualifications, course types and completion rates. The Department should also monitor long-term outcomes—employment quality, income levels, and

higher education progression for those with care experience—and take steps to address existing disparities through the National Care Offer. (Recommendation, Paragraph 197)

## Funding

54. The further education sector faces significant funding challenges due to prolonged real-terms cuts since 2010, with per-student funding still below 2009–10 levels. A rise in the number of 16–18-year-olds over the coming years will continue to increase pressure on colleges and other providers, yet per-student funding has not kept pace with the consequences of this population bulge. Although the Chancellor promised additional investment in the 2025 Spending Review, this is only a modest increase after adjustment for inflation, and details about how the extra money will be allocated are unclear. Without substantial investment, per-student funding will fall further, undermining the Government’s reliance on the further education sector to achieve its national missions. (Conclusion, Paragraph 204)
55. It is crucial that the Government increases per-student funding across all post-16 funding streams, based on a detailed assessment of need. We welcome the Chancellor’s pledge of £1.2 billion a year for the further education sector, which will see the overall budget rise by £400 million (in today’s prices) between 2025–26 and 2028–29. However, the Government must ensure this extra funding is sufficient to meet the needs of this crucial sector which has suffered long-term underfunding. Increased funding should be adjusted annually for inflation and for the rise in FE student numbers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 205)
56. Colleges face significant challenges due to limited and short-term capital funding. Whilst recent allocations have addressed urgent maintenance needs, the lack of sustained capital investment prevents long-term improvements. The £300 million allocated for 2025–26 is insufficient given the scale of need across thousands of college buildings. Furthermore, access to capital funding is inequitable, with specialist colleges and sixth form colleges often being excluded from capital funding streams. Without ongoing and increased investment across the sector, colleges and other providers risk falling behind in providing modern, industry-aligned facilities which are essential for skills development and for delivering the ambitions of the Government’s Industrial Strategy. (Conclusion, Paragraph 211)
57. We recommend that the Department for Education increases capital funding significantly to support further education providers with modernisation and expansion. The increase in post-16 student numbers will be temporary, however, and therefore in some cases funding should be allocated to allow for a temporary expansion to the college estate to avoid

‘white elephant’ buildings as the impact of the fall in the birth rate comes through to the FE sector. The Department must also expand eligibility for capital funding programmes—including FE Capital Transformation and the Post-16 Capacity Fund—to specialist colleges and sixth form colleges. (Recommendation, Paragraph 212)

58. We also recommend that the Department for Education provides a one-off capital grant for specialist SEND colleges to address serious and urgent concerns around the condition of buildings and facilities. Furthermore, the Department must create a ring-fenced High Needs Fund for specialist SEND colleges at the national level to reduce reliance on local authority discretion, which currently leads to additional administrative costs, duplication and waste. (Recommendation, Paragraph 213)
59. Whilst academies and schools with sixth forms do not have to pay VAT, FE colleges and standalone sixth form colleges are not eligible for refunds in the VAT they incur on their expenditure. As colleges were reclassified as public bodies in 2022, this arrangement is unjustifiable and FE colleges and sixth form colleges should now benefit from a VAT exemption, which would align them with other post-16 education providers. (Conclusion, Paragraph 219)
60. The Department for Education must make the case to the Treasury that all FE providers—including FE colleges and sixth form colleges—be exempt from paying VAT on expenditure. The Department must update this Committee in writing on the outcome of these discussions by April 2026. (Recommendation, Paragraph 220)
61. There is a growing pay disparity between school and college teachers in England, with college staff earning significantly less—on average college teachers earn 15% less. This issue has led to staff dissatisfaction and has contributed to the recruitment and retention crisis. Whilst school-teacher pay is centrally reviewed and funded, college teacher pay decisions can be fragmented and underfunded, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate pay increases. Although recent Government funding has been welcomed, it has been described as a temporary fix rather than a structural solution to the long-standing inequity in pay. (Conclusion, Paragraph 227)
62. We recommend that the Department for Education establishes a statutory pay review body for colleges comparable to the School Teachers’ Review Body. This body should provide independent, evidence-based pay recommendations for teachers and staff and help to ensure equity of pay across the post-16 education sector. The Department for Education must commit to closing the gap in pay between college teachers and their school counterparts within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period. The Department must keep the Committee regularly updated on its progress in meeting this commitment. (Recommendation, Paragraph 228)

- 63.** College teacher retention rates are significantly lower than in schools, with less than a quarter of college teachers remaining in the profession after ten years. Pay disparities, excessive workloads, limited professional development and job insecurity are causing burnout and undermining teachers' confidence and contentment in their jobs. Whilst the Government offers targeted retention payments for those in the first five years of their careers and teaching select subjects, more experienced college teachers and specialist colleges are excluded. (Conclusion, Paragraph 235)
- 64.** The Department for Education must address the underlying and unresolved reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis amongst school and college teachers, which include pay disparities, excessive workloads, limited professional development and job insecurity. In so doing, it must develop incentives for all post-16 teaching staff to remain in the profession. It must include specialist colleges within the targeted retention incentive payments scheme and consider alternatives to that scheme for mid- and late-career teachers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 236)
- 65.** We recommend that the Department for Education develops and publishes a strategy for working with employers to secure a pipeline from skilled trades into vocational teaching, including staff who are retiring and secondments from larger organisations. (Recommendation, Paragraph 237)
- 66.** Funding for adult education and skills has declined sharply since the early 2000s, particularly in classroom-based learning. The Government's reduction in adult education funding for 2025–26 will further undermine efforts to upskill the existing workforce and to support those who are out of work or struggling to progress. Reduced investment in adult education threatens the Government's broader social and economic goals on employment, health and digital inclusion. (Conclusion, Paragraph 243)
- 67.** Funding for adult education and skills must increase to meet demand and to ensure that those over the age of 19 are able to participate in, and benefit from, the Government's national missions. The Government must assess demand for adult education and increase funding over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review to align with the Government's missions. We expect Skills England to set out a clear articulation of the resources that are needed and to advocate within Government for increased funding. (Recommendation, Paragraph 244)
- 68.** As adult education policy and funding transitions to the Department for Work and Pensions, the Government must ensure that learning and training opportunities remain accessible to anyone seeking to enhance their skills, broaden their knowledge, or take incremental steps toward personal development. Adult learning must not be narrowly framed as a pathway to employment alone—it also serves as a vital tool for social inclusion, personal fulfilment, and lifelong learning. Adult education

and skills policy should reflect the diverse motivations of adult learners and safeguard opportunities for education at every stage of life.  
(Recommendation, Paragraph 245)

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# Formal minutes

**Tuesday 16 September 2025**

## Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Darren Paffey

Caroline Voaden

## Further Education and Skills

Draft Report (*Further Education and Skills*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 245 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

## Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 14 October 2025 at 9.30am]

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# Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Tuesday 25 March 2025

**Darren Hankey**, Principal and CEO of Hartlepool College of Further Education, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL); **Robert Nitsch CBE**, Chief Executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies; **Alice Gardner**, Chief Executive, Edge Foundation; **David Robinson**, Director of Post 16 and Skills, Education Policy Institute [Q1–17](#)

**Bill Watkin CBE**, Chief Executive, Sixth Form Colleges Association; **Mr Imran Tahir**, Research Economist, Institute for Fiscal Studies; **Jo Grady**, General Secretary, University and College Union; **David Hughes CBE**, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges [Q18–29](#)

## Wednesday 23 April 2025

**Phil Smith CBE**, Chair, Skills England; **Sir David Bell**, Vice Chair, Skills England; **Sarah Maclean CBE**, Joint CEO, Skills England; **Tessa Griffiths CBE**, Joint CEO, Skills England [Q30–57](#)

**Ben Rowland**, Chief Executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP); **Dr Katerina Kolyva**, Chief Executive, Education and Training Foundation (ETF); **Emily Rock**, Chief Executive, Association of Apprentices; **Jane Hadfield**, Co-Chair, The St Martin's Group and National Lead, Apprenticeships, NHS England [Q58–70](#)

## Tuesday 3 June 2025

**Qasim Hussain**, Vice President (Further Education), National Union of Students; **Denise Rawls**, Executive Director, The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL); **Dr Emily Tanner**, Programme Head for Post-14 Education and Skills, Nuffield Foundation; **Clare Howard**, CEO, Natspec [Q71–97](#)

**Dr Fiona Aldridge**, Chief Executive Officer, The Skills Federation; **David Gaughan**, Head of Employer Services, West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA); **Jane Gratton**, Deputy Director of Public Policy, British Chambers of Commerce; **Dr Susan Pember CBE**, Policy Advisor, HOLEX [Q98-112](#)

## Tuesday 24 June 2025

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern**, Minister for Skills, Department for Education; **Julia Kinniburgh**, Director General for Skills, Department for Education [Q113-158](#)



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# Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FES numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Activate Learning	<a href="#">FES0075</a>
2	Airbus	<a href="#">FES0169</a>
3	Aldermore Bank	<a href="#">FES0267</a>
4	Allan, Dr David (Reader in Professional Education and Learning, Edge Hill University)	<a href="#">FES0167</a>
5	Anonymised	<a href="#">FES0201</a>
6	Anonymised	<a href="#">FES0150</a>
7	Anonymised	<a href="#">FES0001</a>
8	Anonymised	<a href="#">FES0037</a>
9	Anonymised	<a href="#">FES0073</a>
10	Aptem Ltd	<a href="#">FES0182</a>
11	Association for Project Management	<a href="#">FES0152</a>
12	Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)	<a href="#">FES0193</a>
13	Association of Apprentices	<a href="#">FES0120</a>
14	Association of Colleges	<a href="#">FES0276</a>
15	Association of Colleges	<a href="#">FES0133</a>
16	Association of Employment and Learning Providers	<a href="#">FES0115</a>
17	Atkins, Professor Liz (Professor Emeritus, University of Derby)	<a href="#">FES0176</a>
18	BPP Education Group; and Sector Skills Boards	<a href="#">FES0154</a>
19	Barnsley College	<a href="#">FES0121</a>
20	Bauer Academy	<a href="#">FES0224</a>
21	Beck, Prof Vanessa (Professor in Employment Studies, University of Bristol); Magnus, Dr Levana (Research Associate, University of Bristol); Warren, Prof Tracey (Professor of Sociology, University of Nottingham);	

	Kamerade, Prof Daiga (Professor of Work and Wellbeing, University of Salford); Fuertes, Dr Vanesa (Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Sociology, University of the West of Scotland); and Torres, Dr Luis (Associate Professor in Organisational Behaviour, Business and Society, University of Nottingham)	<a href="#">FES0055</a>
22	Bishop Burton College	<a href="#">FES0031</a>
23	Bolt Burdon Kemp LLP	<a href="#">FES0042</a>
24	Bradford Council	<a href="#">FES0191</a>
25	Brain	<a href="#">FES0013</a>
26	British Association of Landscape Industries	<a href="#">FES0147</a>
27	British Chambers of Commerce	<a href="#">FES0232</a>
28	British Film Institute	<a href="#">FES0244</a>
29	British Meat Processors Association	<a href="#">FES0065</a>
30	British Printing Industries Federation	<a href="#">FES0257</a>
31	Buckinghamshire Council	<a href="#">FES0080</a>
32	Business Board Network	<a href="#">FES0072</a>
33	CBI	<a href="#">FES0168</a>
34	CMI	<a href="#">FES0113</a>
35	Cambridgeshire PSHE Service	<a href="#">FES0027</a>
36	Capital City College Group	<a href="#">FES0186</a>
37	Career Development Institute	<a href="#">FES0098</a>
38	Career Development Policy Group; and Careers Research Advisory Centre	<a href="#">FES0015</a>
39	Careers England	<a href="#">FES0021</a>
40	Carers Trust	<a href="#">FES0251</a>
41	Catholic Education Service	<a href="#">FES0143</a>
42	Central YMCA	<a href="#">FES0207</a>
43	Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)	<a href="#">FES0236</a>
44	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)	<a href="#">FES0111</a>
45	Checkatrade	<a href="#">FES0032</a>
46	Chesterfield College	<a href="#">FES0051</a>
47	City & Guilds	<a href="#">FES0110</a>

48	City College Norwich	<a href="#">FES0275</a>
49	City of Bristol College	<a href="#">FES0009</a>
50	City of London Corporation	<a href="#">FES0171</a>
51	Clayton, Professor Carmen (Professor of Family and Cultural Dynamics, Leeds Trinity University)	<a href="#">FES0089</a>
52	Code First Girls	<a href="#">FES0213</a>
53	Cogent Skills	<a href="#">FES0166</a>
54	Coleman, AE	<a href="#">FES0248</a>
55	Construction Industry Training Board	<a href="#">FES0223</a>
56	Corndel Limited	<a href="#">FES0140</a>
57	Coulson, Dr Brendan (Head of Technical Education, Nottingham Trent University); and Everson, John (School Standards and Quality Manager, Nottingham Trent University)	<a href="#">FES0198</a>
58	Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre	<a href="#">FES0239</a>
59	Davies, Gareth	<a href="#">FES0156</a>
60	DCG	<a href="#">FES0134</a>
61	Donald, Professor Dame Athene	<a href="#">FES0022</a>
62	Down's Syndrome Association	<a href="#">FES0059</a>
63	Drive Forward Foundation	<a href="#">FES0161</a>
64	East Coast College	<a href="#">FES0082</a>
65	Edge Foundation	<a href="#">FES0137</a>
66	Education Development Trust (EDT)	<a href="#">FES0114</a>
67	Education Endowment Foundation	<a href="#">FES0060</a>
68	Education and Training Foundation (ETF)	<a href="#">FES0268</a>
69	Education and Training Foundation (ETF)	<a href="#">FES0043</a>
70	Education, Department for	<a href="#">FES0261</a>
71	Electrical Contractors' Association	<a href="#">FES0066</a>
72	Energy & Utility Skills Ltd	<a href="#">FES0192</a>
73	Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	<a href="#">FES0183</a>
74	Engineering Professors' Council	<a href="#">FES0194</a>
75	EngineeringUK	<a href="#">FES0109</a>
76	Enginuity	<a href="#">FES0094</a>
77	Etio	<a href="#">FES0104</a>

78	Federation of Awarding Bodies	<a href="#">FES0226</a>
79	Federation of Greater Lincolnshire Colleges	<a href="#">FES0136</a>
80	Financial Services Skills Commission	<a href="#">FES0131</a>
81	First Intuition	<a href="#">FES0053</a>
82	First Intuition's	<a href="#">FES0170</a>
83	Floyd, Professor Alan (Professor of Education, University of Reading); Graham, Professor Suzanne (Professor, University of Reading); and Fuller, Professor Carol (Professor, University of Reading)	<a href="#">FES0007</a>
84	Forestry Skills Forum; University of Cumbria; Forestry Commission; Royal Forestry Society; Institute of Chartered Foresters; Confederation of Forest Industries (UK); and Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College	<a href="#">FES0210</a>
85	Freitas, Jessica (Relationships and Engagement Officer, Fumble)	<a href="#">FES0058</a>
86	Future Skills Think Tank - the London School of Architecture	<a href="#">FES0088</a>
87	GTA England; and GTA England is the membership and representative organisation for a group of Group Training Associations (GTAs), ITPs, Employer-providers, and employers who invest in technical training	<a href="#">FES0105</a>
88	Gateshead Council Learning and Skills	<a href="#">FES0126</a>
89	Gatsby Charitable Foundation	<a href="#">FES0211</a>
90	Get Further	<a href="#">FES0057</a>
91	Gilmour, Mr Jonathan (Teacher FE, The Manchester College, Openshaw Campus, Ashton Old Road, Manchester, M11 2WH.)	<a href="#">FES0123</a>
92	Goldsmith, Mr Richard (Trainer/Assessor, Warwickshire College Group)	<a href="#">FES0017</a>
93	Gratton, Jane (British Chambers of Commerce, British Chambers of Commerce)	<a href="#">FES0269</a>
94	Greater London Authority (GLA)	<a href="#">FES0264</a>
95	Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)	<a href="#">FES0206</a>
96	Greene King	<a href="#">FES0146</a>
97	GuildHE	<a href="#">FES0175</a>
98	HOLEX	<a href="#">FES0272</a>
99	HOLEX	<a href="#">FES0178</a>

100	Harrison, Professor Neil (Professor of Education and Social Justice, University of Exeter)	<a href="#">FES0077</a>
101	Homefield College	<a href="#">FES0129</a>
102	Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)	<a href="#">FES0085</a>
103	Horticulture and Landscaping Trailblazer Apprenticeship Group; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Chartered Institute of Horticulture; Royal Botanic Gardens Kew; Lantra; Capel Manor College; Parks for London; and Groundcare & Landscaping Services Ltd	<a href="#">FES0229</a>
104	Institute for the Future of Work	<a href="#">FES0205</a>
105	Institute for the Future of Work	<a href="#">FES0084</a>
106	Institute of Directors	<a href="#">FES0160</a>
107	Institute of Physics	<a href="#">FES0219</a>
108	Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM)	<a href="#">FES0087</a>
109	Institute of Student Employers (ISE)	<a href="#">FES0125</a>
110	Institution of Civil Engineers	<a href="#">FES0036</a>
111	Institution of Engineering and Technology	<a href="#">FES0222</a>
112	Institution of Occupational Safety and Health	<a href="#">FES0091</a>
113	JISC	<a href="#">FES0149</a>
114	Jones, Charlotte (Operations / Project Manager, Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network (GMLPN)); and Ramsden, Chloe (Partnership Manager, Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network (GMLPN))	<a href="#">FES0049</a>
115	JTL	<a href="#">FES0243</a>
116	KFC UK & Ireland	<a href="#">FES0096</a>
117	KPMG UK	<a href="#">FES0124</a>
118	Kaplan	<a href="#">FES0241</a>
119	Kimber, Mrs Kathleen (College Principal (retired) and governor/trustee of national specialist college, Derwen College)	<a href="#">FES0010</a>
120	Kirklees College	<a href="#">FES0086</a>
121	Kitching, Ms Carole (College Governor, retired College Principal/CEO, Lead for Higher Education Review for Swindon Borough Council, Self-employed)	<a href="#">FES0189</a>
122	Lambert, Dr Steve (Associate Professor, University of Chester)	<a href="#">FES0083</a>

123	Landex	<a href="#">FES0245</a>
124	Learning Curve Group	<a href="#">FES0255</a>
125	Learning and Work Institute	<a href="#">FES0011</a>
126	Lee Marley Group	<a href="#">FES0012</a>
127	Lifelong Education Institute	<a href="#">FES0163</a>
128	LinkedIn	<a href="#">FES0259</a>
129	Logistics UK	<a href="#">FES0050</a>
130	London South Bank Univeristy	<a href="#">FES0101</a>
131	London South East Colleges	<a href="#">FES0035</a>
132	Lowe, (Site Librarian , Chichester College Group; and Site Librarian, Chichester College Group)	<a href="#">FES0019</a>
133	Luminate Education Group	<a href="#">FES0184</a>
134	MEI	<a href="#">FES0148</a>
135	Make UK	<a href="#">FES0246</a>
136	Make it Mandatory; EAW ( End Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition); The Sex Education Forum (SEF); and Brook	<a href="#">FES0076</a>
137	Manchester City Council	<a href="#">FES0122</a>
138	Maritime Skills Alliance	<a href="#">FES0190</a>
139	McNally, Sandra (Education and Skills Programme Director, Centre for Economic Performance); and Bahl, Aadya (Policy Officer, Centre for Economic Performance)	<a href="#">FES0014</a>
140	McQuade, Mrs Linda (Trainer/Assessor, Wolverhampton College)	<a href="#">FES0006</a>
141	MillionPlus, The Association for Modern Universities	<a href="#">FES0151</a>
142	Milton Keynes College Group	<a href="#">FES0074</a>
143	Mitie	<a href="#">FES0250</a>
144	Morris, Dr Rebecca (Associate Professor, University of Warwick); and Perry, Dr Thomas (Associate Professor, University of Warwick)	<a href="#">FES0249</a>
145	Multiverse	<a href="#">FES0052</a>
146	NAHT	<a href="#">FES0028</a>
147	NASS (National Association Special Schools)	<a href="#">FES0230</a>
148	NCFE	<a href="#">FES0108</a>

149	Neary, Dr Katherine (Lecturer in International Management, Liverpool John Moores University); and Skritsovali, Dr Konstantina (Principal Lecturer in Strategic Management, Liverpool John Moores University)	<a href="#">FES0119</a>
150	NFU	<a href="#">FES0054</a>
151	NHS Employers	<a href="#">FES0227</a>
152	NNECL Quality Mark	<a href="#">FES0271</a>
153	NOCN Group	<a href="#">FES0038</a>
154	Nacro	<a href="#">FES0138</a>
155	National Bodyshop Repair Association (NBRA)	<a href="#">FES0218</a>
156	National Education Union (NEU)	<a href="#">FES0188</a>
157	National Engineering Policy Centre; and Royal Academy of Engineering	<a href="#">FES0177</a>
158	National Federation of Roofing Contractors	<a href="#">FES0179</a>
159	National Foundation for Educational Research	<a href="#">FES0187</a>
160	National Home Decarbonisation Group	<a href="#">FES0197</a>
161	National House Building Council (NHBC)	<a href="#">FES0209</a>
162	National Institute of Teaching; South Farnham SCITT; and The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers	<a href="#">FES0204</a>
163	National Network Institutes of Technology	<a href="#">FES0079</a>
164	National Numeracy	<a href="#">FES0225</a>
165	National Skills Academy for Rail	<a href="#">FES0008</a>
166	National Society of Apprentices	<a href="#">FES0203</a>
167	National Star	<a href="#">FES0063</a>
168	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)	<a href="#">FES0260</a>
169	National Union of Students	<a href="#">FES0200</a>
170	Natspec	<a href="#">FES0047</a>
171	New City College	<a href="#">FES0216</a>
172	Norfolk County Council	<a href="#">FES0097</a>
173	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority; Sellafield Ltd; Nuclear Restoration Services; Nuclear Transport Solutions; and Nuclear Waste Services	<a href="#">FES0174</a>
174	Nuffield Foundation	<a href="#">FES0270</a>
175	Observatory for Mathematical Education	<a href="#">FES0142</a>

176	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	<a href="#">FES0159</a>
177	Offshore Energies UK (OEUK)	<a href="#">FES0135</a>
178	One Dance UK	<a href="#">FES0202</a>
179	Open Awards	<a href="#">FES0030</a>
180	Pearson	<a href="#">FES0240</a>
181	Prisoners' Education Trust	<a href="#">FES0139</a>
182	Professional Assessment Ltd	<a href="#">FES0024</a>
183	Professional Skills Academy	<a href="#">FES0016</a>
184	Pullen, Charlynnne (Principal Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University)	<a href="#">FES0061</a>
185	QA	<a href="#">FES0252</a>
186	RHA	<a href="#">FES0233</a>
187	Rooke, Holly (PhD researcher , School of Geography and Planning, University of Sheffield); Miri, Mir Abdullah (Lecturer and PhD researcher, Department of Education, University of Bath); and Squire, Corinne (Chair in Global Inequalities , School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol)	<a href="#">FES0103</a>
188	RWE	<a href="#">FES0107</a>
189	Refugee Education UK	<a href="#">FES0118</a>
190	Ren, Professor (Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice , Newcastle University)	<a href="#">FES0212</a>
191	Royal Academy of Engineering	<a href="#">FES0195</a>
192	Royal Horticultural Society	<a href="#">FES0237</a>
193	Royal Institute of British Architects	<a href="#">FES0128</a>
194	Royal Society of Chemistry	<a href="#">FES0228</a>
195	Royal Statistical Society	<a href="#">FES0092</a>
196	Royal Town Planning Institute	<a href="#">FES0040</a>
197	SSE	<a href="#">FES0231</a>
198	SUEZ recycling and recovery UK Ltd	<a href="#">FES0116</a>
199	Scarborough TEC ( TEC Partnership)	<a href="#">FES0045</a>
200	ScreenSkills	<a href="#">FES0266</a>
201	Scullion, Mr Kevin (Post Graduate Researcher, Huddersfield University)	<a href="#">FES0029</a>



202	Sherwood, Dr Dennis (Managing Director , The Silver Bullet Machine Manufacturing Company Limited (own consulting business))	<a href="#">FES0002</a>
203	Sixth Form Colleges Association	<a href="#">FES0153</a>
204	Skills Builder Partnership	<a href="#">FES0132</a>
205	Skills Federation	<a href="#">FES0217</a>
206	Skills Federatoin	<a href="#">FES0273</a>
207	Skills for Care	<a href="#">FES0242</a>
208	Smith, Dr Rob (Professor of Education, Birmingham City University)	<a href="#">FES0064</a>
209	Solihull College & University Centre; City of Bristol College; DN Colleges Group; Barnet and Southgate College; Birmingham Metropolitan College; Chichester Colleges Group; Waltham Forest College; and United Colleges Group	<a href="#">FES0099</a>
210	South & City College Birmingham	<a href="#">FES0208</a>
211	South West Institute of Technology	<a href="#">FES0018</a>
212	Speakers for Schools	<a href="#">FES0056</a>
213	Spectra (Care Leaver Covenant)	<a href="#">FES0247</a>
214	St Mary's Ukrainian School	<a href="#">FES0253</a>
215	Supporting Education Group	<a href="#">FES0234</a>
216	Sutton Trust	<a href="#">FES0258</a>
217	Tahir, Mr Imran (Research Economist, Institute for Fiscal Studies)	<a href="#">FES0215</a>
218	Terry, Dr Rachel (Senior Lecturer in TESOL, University of Huddersfield)	<a href="#">FES0185</a>
219	Thatcham Research	<a href="#">FES0130</a>
220	The Bell Foundation	<a href="#">FES0173</a>
221	The British Academy	<a href="#">FES0144</a>
222	The British Art Market Federation	<a href="#">FES0100</a>
223	The British Psychological Society	<a href="#">FES0069</a>
224	The Careers & Enterprise Company	<a href="#">FES0039</a>
225	The Chartered Institution for Further Education (CIFE)	<a href="#">FES0256</a>
226	The Duke of Edinburgh's Award	<a href="#">FES0158</a>
227	The English Association	<a href="#">FES0020</a>
228	The English and Maths Coalition	<a href="#">FES0106</a>

229	The Geographical Association	<a href="#">FES0041</a>
230	The Institute of the Motor Industry	<a href="#">FES0155</a>
231	The Isle of Wight College	<a href="#">FES0235</a>
232	The King's Trust	<a href="#">FES0070</a>
233	The MCS Foundation	<a href="#">FES0095</a>
234	The Mixed Economy Group of Colleges	<a href="#">FES0004</a>
235	The Nuffield Foundation	<a href="#">FES0093</a>
236	The Open University	<a href="#">FES0067</a>
237	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education	<a href="#">FES0081</a>
238	The Skills Network	<a href="#">FES0214</a>
239	The St Martin's Group	<a href="#">FES0090</a>
240	Thomas Pocklingt Trust	<a href="#">FES0034</a>
241	UK Fashion And Textile Association Ltd. (UKFT)	<a href="#">FES0033</a>
242	UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy	<a href="#">FES0220</a>
243	UK Jewellery, Silverware, Allied Crafts (JSAC) sector	<a href="#">FES0263</a>
244	UK Screen Alliance	<a href="#">FES0127</a>
245	UNISON	<a href="#">FES0221</a>
246	Unite the Union	<a href="#">FES0112</a>
247	Universities UK	<a href="#">FES0068</a>
248	University College Union (UCU)	<a href="#">FES0078</a>
249	University of the Arts London	<a href="#">FES0164</a>
250	Voice 21	<a href="#">FES0199</a>
251	WEA (Workers Educational Association)	<a href="#">FES0044</a>
252	WMG, University of Warwick	<a href="#">FES0196</a>
253	Wagh, Colin	<a href="#">FES0048</a>
254	West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)	<a href="#">FES0265</a>
255	West Of England - Institute Of Technology	<a href="#">FES0062</a>
256	West Thames College (on behalf of West London Principals' Group WLPG); and West Thames College	<a href="#">FES0023</a>
257	West Yorkshire Combined Authority	<a href="#">FES0180</a>
258	West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges; Bradford College; Calderdale College; Kirklees College; Leeds College of Building; Heart of Yorkshire Education Group; Luminate Education Group; and Shipley College	<a href="#">FES0145</a>

259	Weston College	<a href="#"><u>FES0162</u></a>
260	White Rose Education	<a href="#"><u>FES0026</u></a>
261	Wonder Learning Partnership	<a href="#"><u>FES0157</u></a>
262	Woodage, Simon	<a href="#"><u>FES0181</u></a>
263	WorldSkills UK	<a href="#"><u>FES0141</u></a>
264	YoungMinds	<a href="#"><u>FES0238</u></a>
265	Youth Employment UK	<a href="#"><u>FES0165</u></a>
266	techUK	<a href="#"><u>FES0262</u></a>

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# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Session 2024–26

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5th	Solving the SEND Crisis	HC 492
4th	Children's social care	HC 430
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627