

TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION (TPE) REFORMS

We will put in place reforms to simplify the over-complex 16+ skills system and make sure that it meets the needs to employers in the 21st century. This note summarises the case for change, the proposed approach (with detail in the annex), and key questions which we are keen to explore.

The case for change

Sixteen year olds are presented with three main options regarding their education and training: the academic option (typically A-Levels, delivered in school, Sixth Form College or FE College and chosen by around 50% of young people); an apprenticeship; or a full-time FE College course. The academic option is generally considered to be fit for purpose and meet the needs of universities.

The recent reforms to apprenticeships have put employers in the driving seat of setting standards and will, over time, ensure that all apprentices develop the knowledge and skills employers want. But only 7% of 16-18 year olds start on apprenticeships and government modelling suggests this proportion is unlikely to increase significantly because most employers prefer taking on young people at 18 rather than 16. The 46% of 16-year olds who do not choose the academic option or an apprenticeship are currently faced with an overly-complex, confusing landscape of thousands of qualifications many, if not most, of which have not been designed with employer involvement or to meet the needs of industry. Some reforms were begun in the previous parliament, but the government is committed to finishing the job.

We want to learn from the recent apprenticeship reforms and ensure the college-based route is designed to meet standards set by employers, so that an 18 year old completing a two year course has increased their employability prospects because they have learnt knowledge and skills which recruiting employers are looking for.

The UK has a longstanding productivity gap with a range of other countries including France, Germany and the US and has several weaknesses in its skills base that need to be addressed if productivity is to improve, in literacy and numeracy skills, and professional and technical skills. In particular, there are skills shortages which are predicted to worsen over time, especially at levels 4 and 5.

The previous government delivered substantial reforms to apprenticeships, stripped out thousands of low value qualifications from performance tables, increased accountability and tackled poor quality provision. However, compared to other countries, technical and professional education is still too complex, confusing young people and failing to adequately deliver the employees of the future that business needs. For the next stage, the challenge is to deliver a technical and professional education system that is genuinely owned, understood and valued by employers, that helps young people make informed choices about the value of different types of study and the opportunities these bring, and that better integrates classroom-based training and employment-based training like apprenticeships.

The proposed solution

The present government intends to meet this challenge head on. They want to learn from the best systems around the world to put in place a small number of clear, high quality professional and technical routes. These routes will be as easy to understand as academic routes. They will lead young people from compulsory schooling into employment and the highest levels of technical competence. Through the design of the routes, and its governance, they want to increase the level of engagement from employers so that the system delivers the knowledge, skills and behaviours that learners need and employers demand. Annex A sets out more detail about the proposals.

To deliver the reforms, the Government will work closely with an independent expert panel, headed by Lord Sainsbury. Members of the Panel are Professor Baroness Alison Wolf; Bev Robinson – Principal/CEO Blackpool and the Fylde College; Steve West – Vice Chancellor, University of the West of England; and Simon Blagden – Non-executive Chair of Fujitsu.

The Panel will advise Government on the design principles that will underpin the development of new technical and professional routes. It will consider the key policy issues and will make recommendations to government on what the reformed TPE system should look like, to put England on a par with the best in the world.

Key issues for discussion

This meeting is an opportunity to input into the design of these reforms. This roundtable will directly feed into the panel's thinking on the new system.

Simon would like to test the concept of high quality professional and technical routes with you, and seek your views on how officials can work with you going forward.

The Panel welcomes feedback generally about the proposals, but in particular, we are seeking answers to the following questions:

- 1: Can we group occupations together where there is similar demand for knowledge, skills and behaviours to form coherent routes?
- 2: How can we put employers in the lead to shape technical and professional content for each route?
- 3: Should technical and professional education start with a broad curriculum before specialising towards higher level occupations?
- 4: What signals effectively to employers that an individual has secured the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours through a route? How can we translate this achievement into labour market currency (i.e. potentially through qualifications, licences to practice, certificates)?
- 5: How important is experience of work or practical skills in a particular work environment? How can we deliver enough placements?

Annex A – Summary of proposals for the new Technical and Professional education system:

Technical and professional education should ensure that students gain the technical knowledge, practical skills and work-place behaviours they need in order to enter skilled employment. To ensure that is the case, we will put in place reforms to simplify the currently over-complicated system.

We propose to work with employers to put in place an easy to understand and straightforward framework across technical and professional education so that occupations with similar education and training requirements are grouped together. On that basis, we will put in place a small number of technical and professional routes, which extend from the end of compulsory schooling at 16 to skilled employment.

Our current thinking is that the system of TPE routes would be structured around related occupations rather than sectors, as is the case for trailblazer apprenticeships, and a common, easy-to-understand organising framework should be used for both apprenticeships and classroom-based routes. Not all occupations will be appropriate for a TPE route. Unskilled / very low-skilled occupations do not have sufficiently large knowledge requirements to warrant a TPE route. Rather, these occupations can be learnt entirely on-the-job, often within weeks.

We will learn from the approaches taken in leading international systems. For instance, in the Danish system as below students start by following one of 12 broad basic foundations.

Basic courses	Number of programmes
1. Motor vehicle, aircraft and other means of transportation	8
2. Building and construction	15
3. Construction and user service	3
4. Animals, plants and nature	9
5. Body and style	3
6. Human food	10
7. Media production	7
8. Business	7
9. Production and development	31
10. Electricity, management and IT	7
11. Health, care and pedagogy	4
12. Transport and logistics	7

Across each route, employers are best placed to define the knowledge skills and behaviours needed to move into their own occupations. We will therefore put employers in the driving seat to design TPE routes. This will help ensure that young people and adults gain the skills most needed for the 21st century economy.

For each route, we will form a panel of industry professionals who will set the standards. For each route, the panel of professionals will set standards by taking a longer term look at the knowledge, skills and behaviours required in the occupations across the route at the highest levels and trace these back to age 16 when compulsory schooling ends. Education and training provision (including qualifications) will be designed against these standards.

A strong link between trailblazer apprenticeship standards and qualifications and classroom-based routes will be important. For this reason, a TPE route could be followed either through an apprenticeship or in a college where the training would be supported by a substantial work placement. Quality work placements will often be the only way that students in classroom-based provision can gain practical skills and behaviours required for the workplace. We recognise that for many occupations a period in employment will still be necessary to achieve the full set of outcomes required.

Students taking one of the TPE routes will start by covering core content which is transferable across the occupations within a route. Over time, students will then specialise in their chosen field as they progress through to a narrower set of skilled occupations.

A student who completes a route will be awarded a certificate. The certification will be designed by a panel of professionals and will have currency in the labour market. Each certificate will record assessment of individual achievement. It is likely that this will comprise the successful completion of a qualification as well as the work placement and a synoptic assessment of the learning experience carried out by competent professionals.

Above all TPE routes should focus on progression into skilled employment. A TPE route will only enjoy high-status if it is well understood and genuinely valued by employers. Individuals need to be confident that devoting time and effort to succeed on their chosen route will deliver to them significantly improved employment

prospects, and this will only be the case if employers, when recruiting, value route completion sufficiently to give priority to individuals who possess them.

The TPE reforms should be considered part of coherent technical and professional pathways which stretch from pre-16 (e.g. in UTCs) through FE (including Institutes of Technology and National Colleges) to the university sector. For example, 18-year-olds who have completed two years on a TPE route should be encouraged to see progression onto a higher or degree apprenticeship, or into full-time Higher Education, as successful an outcome as progression into full-time employment.