Discussion Paper 2

Growing Level 4 and 5 Technical Education

A segmented policy approach

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November 2020

Published by

campaign for learning

Preface

The aim of the Campaign for Learning's Discussion Paper series is to generate debate over an urgent issue in post-16 education, skills and labour market policy and provide fresh perspectives on long-term reforms.

Discussion Paper No.2 considers how the government might achieve growth in participation in Level 4-5 technical education in England. The paper calls for a segmented policy approach based on considering four separate areas: 18-24 year-olds in full-time Level 4-5 technical education, 18-24 year- olds in part-time Level 4-5 technical education; 25 year-olds and over in full-time Level 4-5 technical education, and 25 year-olds and over in part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

To move from a small-scale to a large-scale system of post-18 Level 4-5 technical education, the Department for Education and Whitehall as a whole will need to identify which of these markets or combinations of markets will deliver the growth.

We very much hope that the Discussion Paper will encourage a focused debate in the critical area of Level 4-5 technical education, and assists post-16 stakeholders in their responses to the forthcoming FE/HE White Paper.

Julia Wright, National Policy Director, Campaign for Learning

Summary

A Mass System of Level 4-5 Technical Education

(i) Between academic year 2016/17 and 2018/19, participation on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees in England fell from 106,000 to 35,000. This discussion paper assumes that the long-term aim of the present Government is to move from a small-scale to a large-scale system of post-18 Level 4-5 technical education, well in excess of the 100,000 in AY2016/17.

A Segmented Policy Approach

(ii) All too often discussion relating to increasing participation in Level 4-5 technical education is conducted in very general and vague terms, which impedes the identification of appropriate and specific policy responses. The aim of the discussion paper is not to consider the reform of Level 4-5 technical qualifications or the pinpointing of sectors and occupations to facilitate the movement from a small-scale to a large-scale system of Level 4-5 technical education. Rather the aim of the discussion paper is to provide a framework for debating the shift from a small-scale to a large-scale system of post-18 Level 4-5 technical education. To move from a small-scale to a large-scale system of post-18 Level 4-5 technical education will require a segmented policy approach in terms of students and employers.

Students

(iii) As a way of identifying growth in participation by students in the post-18 further and higher education system, this discussion paper argues that the Department for Education and Whitehall as a whole considers four separate markets as summarised in Diagram I:

Diagram I

Employers

(iv) In addition, the discussion paper argues that a successful growth strategy for post-18 Level 4-5 technical education requires a more nuanced approach to the nature of employer engagement (see Table I and Table II).

Table (I): Level 4-5 - Employer and Student Engagement by Mode		
	Full-Time	Part-Time
Employer	Work Placement Curriculum Design	Sponsored Job Any Job
Student	Attendance Full-Time Maintenance Loans Student Job	Attendance Part-Time Maintenance Loans Sponsored Job Any Job

Table (II): Job Type by Level 4-6 Pathway					
Apprenticeships Level 4-5/6	Part-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Part-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Part-Time First Degree Level 6	Full-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Full-Time First Degree Level 6
Sponsored Job	Sponsored Job	Any Job	Any Job Sponsored Job	Student Job - Any Job - Sponsored Job	Student Job - Any Job - Sponsored Job

(v) Ultimately, employers do not have to offer students participating on full-time Level 4-5 technical education courses a job during their studies. Employers might sponsor an employee to participate on a full-time Level 4-5 technical education course but they are not required to do so. Students might desire an employer to sponsor them to study a full-time Level 4-5 technical course but participate even where they cannot find one. Consequently, they will need to turn to student-jobs in unrelated occupational areas to contribute to their living costs.

Part-Time Higher Technical Education: Sponsored Jobs, Any Job

(vi) By contrast, the level of employer involvement is of a different order with respect to part-time Level 4-5 technical education. To study part-time, students will need to need to earn as well as learn. This means securing employment.

(vii) The ideal form of employment is a sponsored job – i.e. where an employer offers an existing employee or new recruit an opportunity to study a part-time Level 4-5 technical course. The alternative is for students to source any job – to supplement access to part-time maintenance loans – and enable them to live whilst studying part-time.

Part-Time Higher Technical Education and Apprenticeships

(viii) Apprenticeships are the classic example of a sponsored job. A strategic policy question, therefore, is whether part-time Level 4-5 technical education is being designed in the same way as Level 4-5 apprenticeships – i.e. employment taking the form of a sponsored job – or a part-time route requiring any job.

(ix) Either way, employment is required to study part-time Level 4-5 technical education or Level 4-5 apprenticeships. As a result, public policy to grow part-time Level 4-5 technical education should be analysed in the context of growing Level 4-5 apprenticeships.

Participation Data

(x) This discussion paper attempts to bring together data on participation on full-time and part-time Level 4-6 provision by the main publicly funded pathways in the post-18 system. Diagram II is reproduced to facilitate discussion and debate. The order of the day is magnitude rather than exactitude. Only the Department for Education will have the exact figures.

Diagram II

18-24

Full-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	1,081,000
Integrated Foundation Year	c20,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c11,500
Level 4-6: Other	7,000
Total	**1,119,500**

Part-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	47,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c7,250
Level 4-6: Other	7,000
Level 4-6: 19-23 Fee Loan	600
Level 4-5: Apprenticeships	23,250
Level 6: Apprenticeships	10,100
Total	**95,200**

Full Time

Part Time

Full-Time 25+ Level 4-6

Level 6:First Degree	115,000
Integrated Foundation Year	c10,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c9,700
Level 4-6: Other	4,200
Total	**138,900**

Part-Time 25+ Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	88,500
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c6,500
Level 4-6: Other	43,800
Level 4-6: 24+ Fee Loan	3,500
Level 4-5: Apprenticeships	63,500
Level 6: Apprenticeships	7,700
Total	**213,500**

25+

The Main Report

(xi) The first part of the discussion paper analyses participation in Level 4-6 provision between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19. In the context of existing participation on full-time and part-time Level 6 First Degrees and Level 4-6 apprenticeships segmented by age, the second part of the discussion paper provides a policy assessment for growing:

- 18-24 full-time and part-time Level 4-5 technical education;
- 18-24 full-time Level 4-5 technical education;
- 18+ part-time Level 4-5 technical education, and
- 25+ full-time and part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

(xii) The discussion paper is completed by a list of recommendations.

Analysis

Introduction

1 A key aim of post-18 education and skills policy in England is to increase the number of adults aged 18 and over participating in Level 4-5 technical education. The main type of existing Level 4-5 technical education in England is prescribed vocational sub-degrees (VSDs) covering full-time and part-time foundation degrees, HNDs and HNCs. They are supplemented by non-prescribed Level 4-5 vocational qualifications. The Conservative Government is planning to introduce full-time and part-time Level 4-5 higher technical qualifications (HTQs) as part of its reforms of English technical education.

Mode and Age

2 All too often discussion about growing the number of adults aged 18 and over participating in Level 4-5 technical education is conducted in rather vague terms. Sometimes the debate might differentiate between mode – full-time and part-time – and sometimes between age – 18-24 year-olds and 25 year-olds and over – but rarely both together. If, however, the policy aim is to develop a large-scale system of Level 4-5 technical education in England compared to the current low levels of participation, there is a strong case for a more segmented approach to policy development. Specifically, policy makers should consider four separate markets (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1

Identifying the Source of Growth

3 Policy-makers must identify the market or markets which drive higher participation in Level 4-5 technical education. Clearly, the policy considerations and interventions relating to growing participation in the 18-24 full-time Level 4-5 technical education market are fundamentally different, say, to growing participation in the 25+ part-time Level 4-5 technical education market.

Participation on Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees

Overall Participation

4 In AY2016/17, there were 106,180 students on vocational sub-degrees (VSDs) in England (see Table 1). By AY2018/19, the number had fallen to 35,028, equivalent to a 67.0% decline.

Table 1: Participation on Vocational Sub-Degrees – 2016/17 to 2018/19

	AY2016/17	AY2018/19	Difference
Total	106,180	35,028	-71,152

Source: (1) AY 2016/17: HEFCE Analysis – 18th March 2018; Parliamentary Answer – House of Lords, April 2018.
(2) AY 2018/19, HESA Open Statistics.

Full-Time and Part-Time

5 In AY2016/17, there were 70,535 students on full-time vocational sub-degrees (66.4%) and 35,645 on part-time vocational sub-degrees (33.6%) (see Table 2). Full-time vocational sub-degrees out-numbered part-time vocational sub-degrees by 2 to 1.

Table 2: Participation on Vocational Sub-Degrees – 2016/17 to 2018/19

	AY2016/17		AY2018/19		Difference	
Full-Time	70,535	66.4%	21,274	60.7%	-49,261	-69.8%
Part-Time	35,645	33.6%	13,754	39.3%	-21,891	-61.1%
Total	106,180	100.0%	35,028	100.0%	-71,152	-67.0%

Source: (1) AY 2016/17: HEFCE Analysis – 18th March 2018; Parliamentary Answer – House of Lords, April 2018.
(2) AY 2018/19, HESA Open Statistics.

6 By AY2018/19, the number of students on full-time vocational sub-degrees had fallen to 21,274 compared to two years previously (-69.8%) and the number of students on part-time vocational sub-degrees had fallen to 13,754 compared to two years previously (-61.1%). Despite this dramatic fall in overall participation, full-time sub-degrees out-numbered part-time vocational sub-degrees by 3 to 2.

7 Nevertheless, the larger fall in participation in full-time relative to part-time vocational sub-degrees between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19 meant the share of students studying part-time relative to full-time increased from 33.6% to 39.3%.

Participation by Age and Mode

8 Data is available by age and mode for AY2016/17 (see Table 3). In AY2016/17, there were 38,320 18-24 year-olds studying full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (36.1%) compared to 32,215 aged 25 and over studying full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (30.3%). In addition, 18,800 18-24 year-olds (17.7%) and 16,845 25 year-olds and over (15.9%) were studying part-time vocational sub-degrees.

9 Data was not available on participation on vocational sub-degrees by age and mode for AY2018/19. For the purposes of this discussion note, the same proportions studying full-time and part-time by 18-24 year-olds and 25 year-olds and over in AY2016/17 are applied to AY2018/19. On this assumption:

- 11,552 18-24 year-olds were studying full-time vocational sub-degrees in AY2018/19, a fall of 26,768 compared to AY2016/17;
- 9,722 25 year-olds and over were studying full-time vocational sub-degrees, a fall of 22,493 compared to AY2016/17;
- 7,254 18-24 year-olds were studying part-time vocational sub-degrees, a fall of 11,546 compared to AY2016/17, and
- 6,500 25 year-olds and over were studying part-time vocational sub-degrees, a fall of 10,345 compared to AY2016/17.

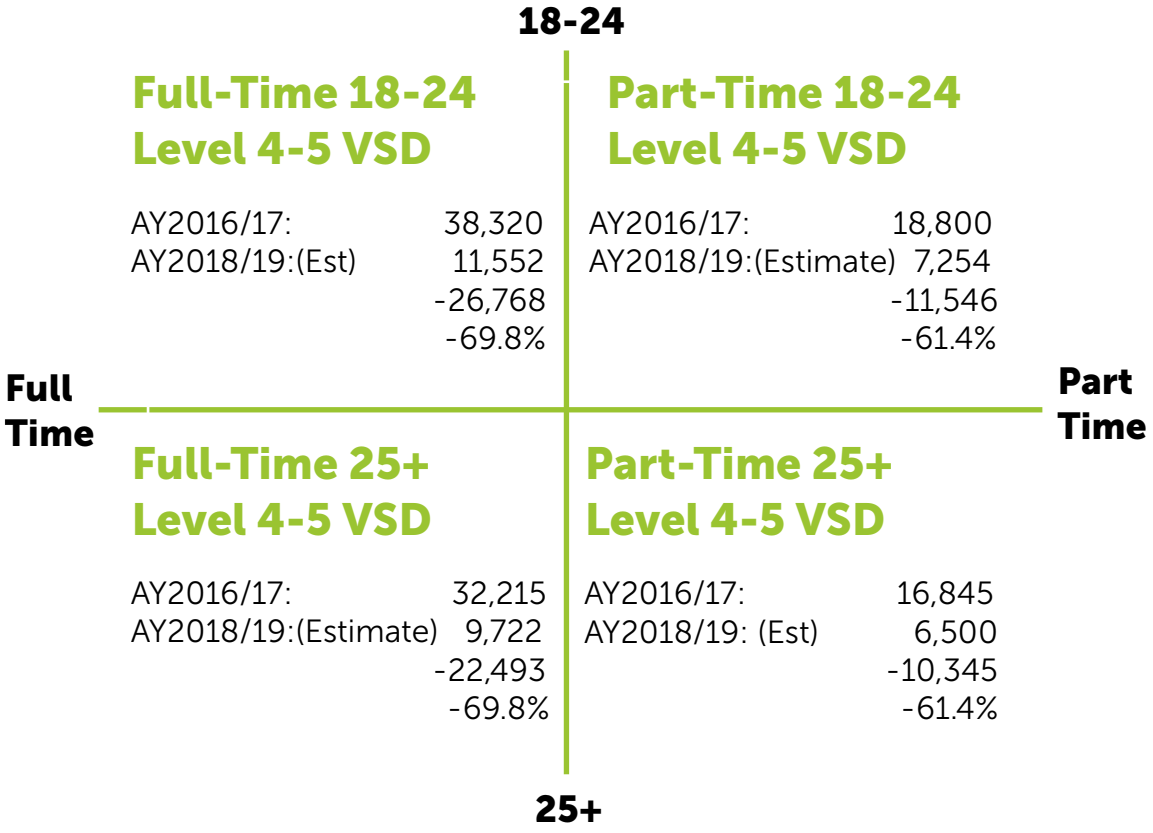
Table 3: Participation on Vocational Sub-Degrees – 2016/17 and 2018/19

	AY2016/17		AY2018/19		Difference	
Full-Time	**70,535**	**66.4%**	**21,274**	**60.7%**	**-49,261**	**-69.8%**
18-24	38,320	36.1%	11,552	33.0%	-26,768	
25+	32,215	30.3%	9,722	27.7%	-22,493	
Part-Time	**35,645**	**33.6%**	**13,754**	**39.3%**	**-21,891**	**-61.1%**
18-24	18,800	17.7%	7,254	20.7%	-11,546	
25+	16,845	15.9%	6,500	18.6%	-10,345	
Total	**106,180**	**100.0%**	**35,028**	**100.0%**	**-71,152**	**-67.0%**

Source: (1) AY 2016/17: HEFCE Analysis – 18th March 2018; Parliamentary Answer – House of Lords, April 2018. (2) AY 2018/19, HESA Open Statistics. (3) Breakdown of AY2018/19 by age and mode, MC Consultancy.

10 The falls by the four separate markets of the post-18 system are depicted in Diagram 2. Each of the four markets suffered contractions of at least 61% between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19.

Diagram 2



Participation by 18-24 Year-Olds by Mode

11 In AY2016/17, there were 57,120 students aged 18-24 studying vocational sub-degrees. By AY2018/19, participation had fallen to 11,552, a fall of nearly 70% (see Table 4).

Table 4: Participation by 18-24 Year-Olds on Vocational Sub-Degrees by Mode – 2016/17 and 2018/19

	AY2016/17		AY2018/19		Difference	
Full-Time	38,320	67.1%	11,552	61.4%	-26,768	-69.9%
Part-Time	18,800	32.9%	7,254	38.6%	-11,546	-61.4%
Total	57,120	100.0%	18,806	100.0%	-38,314	-67.1%

Source: (1) AY 2016/17: HEFCE Analysis – 18th March 2018; Parliamentary Answer – House of Lords, April 2018. (2) AY 2018/19, HESA Open Statistics. (3) Breakdown of AY2018/19 by age and mode, MC Consultancy.

12 A key observation is that in AY2016/17, full-time study was more prevalent than part-time study amongst the 18-24 year-old age group. Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the largest fall in participation amongst 18-24 year-olds in both absolute and proportionate terms was in full-time study. Even so, with fewer than 12,000 and 7,500 studying full-time and part-time vocational sub-degrees respectively by AY2018/19, the key message is that Level 4-5 technical education is a very small pathway for the 18-24 age group.

Participation by 25 Year-Olds and Over by Mode

13 In AY2016/17, there were 49,060 students aged 25 and over studying vocational sub-degrees. By AY2018/19, participation had fallen to 16,222, a fall of nearly 67% (see Table 5).

Table 5: Participation by 25 Year-Olds and Over on Vocational Sub-Degrees by Mode – 2016/17 and 2018/19

	AY2016/17		AY2018/19		Difference	
Full-Time	32,215	65.6%	9,722	59.9%	-22,493	-69.8%
Part-Time	16,845	34.4%	6,500	40.1%	-10,345	-61.4%
Total	49,060	100.0%	16,222	100.0%	-32,838	-66.9%

Source: (1) AY 2016/17: HEFCE Analysis – 18th March 2018; Parliamentary Answer – House of Lords, April 2018. (2) AY 2018/19, HESA Open Statistics. (3) Breakdown of AY2018/19 by age and mode, MC Consultancy.

14 Another interesting observation is that for older adults, participation in full-time vocational sub-degrees in AY2016/17 was more prevalent than part-time study. Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, however, the largest fall in participation amongst 25 year-olds and over in absolute and proportionate terms was in full-time rather than part-time study. And yet, the key message is that by AY2018/19, fewer than 16,500 older adults were upskilling or reskilling through Level 4-5 technical education in England whether studying full-time or part-time.

Employer and Student Engagement by Mode

15 The debate on increasing participation in Level 4-5 technical education does not in general analyse the nature of engagement by both employers and students in relation to full-time and part-time study.

Full-Time Study

Employer Engagement and Work Placements

16 From the employer perspective, the supply of a work placement rather than a contract of employment is the key requirement with respect to full-time Level 4-5 technical education (see Table 6). Some employers might offer existing employees or new entrants employment alongside full-time study – i.e. a sponsored job – but they are not required to do so.

Table 6: Level 4-5 - Employer and Student Engagement by Mode		
	Full-Time	Part-Time
Employer	Work placement Curriculum Design	Sponsored Job Any Job
Student	Attendance Full-Time Maintenance Loans Student Job	Attendance Part-Time Maintenance Loans Sponsored Job Any Job

Student Engagement and Any Student Job

17 From the student perspective, the key requirement is to attend the full-time course including the work placement. Some students might need to supplement their income over and above access to maintenance loans through employment. Students might ideally wish to have an employer offering a sponsored job with full-time study but cannot find one. As an alternative, they might seek additional income from a student-job – i.e. any job - which is unrelated to their area of study.

Part-Time Study

Employer Engagement: Sponsored Jobs v Any Job

18 By contrast, the nature of employer engagement from the perspective of employment is of a different order with respect to part-time Level 4-5 technical education. Earning and learning is the most common form of part-time study. A wage from employment is required to study part-time, even though wages from employment can be supplemented by access to part-time maintenance loans.

19 Given that employment is generally required as a source of income to pay for living costs, a contract of employment rather than just a work placement is critical to part-time Level 4-5 technical education. There is, however, a fundamental difference between:

- a sponsored job – where an employer offers an existing employee or a new entrant a job alongside part-time Level 4-5 technical education, and
- any job – where a part-time student is studying Level 4-5 technical education and secures full-time or part-time employment and/or self-employment to secure an income to support their studies.

Student Engagement: Sponsored Jobs v Any Job

20 Equally, the nature and appeal of part-time Level 4-5 technical education is quantumly different between a sponsored job – where an employer has a role which includes part-time study – and any job – where adults take any job to secure an income to support their part-time studies.

Sponsored Job, Any Job

21 Table 7 compares job types according to different forms and modes of vocational education and training. Part-time Level 4-5 technical education could be combined with sponsored jobs

or any job, and the same is true for part-time Level 6 First Degrees. Students in full-time Level 4-5 technical education who are also in employment are more likely to have any job rather than a sponsored job, and the same is true for full-time Level 6 First Degrees.

Table 7: Job Type by Level 4-6 Pathway					
Apprenticeships Level 4-5/6	Part-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Part-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Part-Time First Degree Level 6	Full-Time Technical Education Level 4-5	Full-Time First Degree Level 6
Sponsored Job	Sponsored Job	Any Job	Any Job Sponsored Job	Student Job - Any Job - Sponsored Job	Student Job - Any Job - Sponsored Job

Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education and Level 4-5 Apprenticeships

22 From an employment perspective, there is a need to consider participation in part-time Level 4-5 technical education alongside participation on Level 4-5 apprenticeships. Employment is almost always a precondition for studying part-time Level 4-5 technical education. Apprenticeships are the classic example of a sponsored job with Level 4-5 training.

23 Policy-makers should **not** compare participation in Level 4-5 technical education alongside Level 4-5 apprenticeships. The correct comparison is between **part-time Level 4-5 technical education and Level 4-5 apprenticeships.** A key issue going forward is the capacity of employers to offer jobs with part-time Level 4-5 technical education simultaneously alongside jobs with Level 4-5 apprenticeships if part-time Level 4-5 technical education is identified as one of the main pathways for large-scale additional participation.

Level 4-5 Part-Time Vocational Sub-Degrees and Level 4-5 Apprenticeships

24 Data is available on enrolments on existing vocational sub-degrees in providers in England for AY2016/17 and AY2018/19. The comparable measure for apprenticeships is overall participation rather than the number of starts.

Estimated Participation on Level 4-5 Apprenticeships

25 Table 8, 9 and 10 provide official data on both participation and starts on higher level apprenticeships, and starts on Level 6 and Level 7 apprenticeships. A number of assumptions are made to estimate total participation on Level 4-5 apprenticeships and Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships.

26 Firstly, we assume that the DfE data in Table 8 defined as higher level apprenticeships refers to Level 4, 5, 6 and 7 and not just Level 4-5. Second, we assume that all under 19 year-olds starting Level 4+ apprenticeships are actually aged 18 rather than 16 or 17. Third, we add the under 25 age boundary used in DfE statistics to the under 26 age boundary used in OfS statistics and define them as 18-24 year-olds. And fourth, in order to turn data referring

to starts into participation estimates we scale-up start figures by 1.65 (which represents the difference between starts and participation in Table 9 and Table 10).

27 Noting these assumptions, Table 11 estimates in AY2018/19 there were 23,300 18-24 year-olds and 63,600 25 year-olds and over on Level 4-5 Apprenticeships.

Comparing Part-Time Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees and Apprenticeships

28 Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the decline in 18-24 year-olds on part-time vocational sub-degrees (-11,500) was partially offset by a rise in the number on Level 4-5 apprenticeships (+7,400) (see Diagram 3). More strikingly, however, is that the decline in 25 year-olds and over on part-time vocational sub-degrees (-10,400) was more than offset by a rise in the number on Level 4-5 Apprenticeships (+21,400).

Table 8: Participation on Higher Level Apprenticeships

	AY2016/17	AY2018/19	Difference
Under 19	2,800	5,100	+2300
19-24	15,100	38,100	+23,000
25+	42,900	80,800	+37,900

Source: Further Education and Skills, DfE, November 2019

Table 9: Higher Level Apprenticeship Starts

	AY2016/17	AY2018/19	Difference
Under 19	2,100	4,000	+1,900
19-24	7,600	20,400	+12,800
25+	26,900	50,700	+23,800
Total	36,600	75,100	+38,500

Source: Further Education and Skills, DfE, November 2019

Table 10: Level 6 and Level 7 Apprenticeship Starts

	AY2016/17	AY2018/19	Difference
Under 25: Level 6	1,185	6,125	+4,940
Under 25: Level 7	0	5,915	+5,915
26+ : Level 6	460	4,700	+4,240
26+: Level 7	0	5,740	+5,740
Total	1,645	22,480	+20,835

Source: Analysis of Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships, Office for Students, May 2020

Table 11: Estimated Apprenticeship Participation at Level 4-5 and Level 6 and Level 7			
	AY2016/17	AY2018/19	Difference
Under 25: Level 4-5	15,945	23,335	+7,390
Under 25: Level 6	1,955	10,106	+8,151
Under 25: Level 7	0	9,759	+9,759
Total : Under 25	17,900	43,200	+25,300
25+: Level 4-5	42,141	63,574	+21,433
25+: Level 6	759	7,755	+6,996
25+: Level 7	0	9,471	+9,471
Total: 25+	42,900	80,800	+37,900
Total	60,800	124,000	+63,200

Source: (1) Further Education and Skills, DfE, November 2019. (2) Analysis of Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships, Office for Students, May 2020. (3) Author's Calculations.

Diagram 3

18-24

Full Time

Part Time

25+

Full-Time 18-24 Level 4-5 VSD

AY2016/17:	38,320
AY2018/19:(Est)	11,552
	-26,768

Part-Time 18-24

18-24: Vocational Sub-Degrees

AY2016/17:	18,800
AY2018/19:(Est)	7,254
	-11,546

18-24: Level 4-5 Apprenticeships

AY2016/17:(Est)	15,945
AY2018/19:(Est)	23,335
	+7,390

18-24: Level 6-7 Apprenticeships

AY2016/17: (Est)	1,955
AY2018/19: (Est)	19,865
	+17,910

Full-Time 25+ Level 4-5 VSD

AY2016/17:	32,215
AY2018/19:(Est)	9,722
	-22,493

Part-Time 25+

25+: Vocational Sub-Degrees

AY2016/17:	16,845
AY2018/19:(Est)	6,500
	-10,345

25+: Level 4-5 Apprenticeships

AY2016/17:(Est)	42,141
AY2018/19:(Est)	63,574
	+21,433

25+: Level 6-7 Apprenticeships

AY2016/17:(Est)	759
AY2018/19:(Est)	17,226
	+16,467

Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees and Apprenticeships

29 Table 12 estimates the number and characteristics of full-time and part-time students on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees, alongside Level 4-5 Apprenticeships. In AY2018/19, a total of 141,000 students and learners were on Level 4-5 provision.

30 In general terms, the stand-out points are that:

- the main type of participation on Level 4-5 vocational education and training is Level 4-5 apprenticeships (75.1%) rather than vocational sub-degrees (24.9%);
- participation on Level 4-5 apprenticeships and part-time vocational sub-degrees combined (84.9%) far outweighs participation in full-time vocational sub-degrees (15.1%), and
- participation on Level 4-5 apprenticeships (75.1%) is more than seven times greater than participation on part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (9.8%).

Table 12: Level 4-5 Participation AY2018/19

	Level 4-5 Full-Time VSD	**Share**	**Share**
Under 25	11,552		
25+	9,722		
Total	21,274	15.1%	
	Level 4-5 Part-Time VSD		
Under 25	7,254		
25+	6,500		
Total	13,754	9.8%	
	Level 4-5 Apprenticeships		
Under 25	42,141		
25+	63,574		
Total	105,715	75.1%	
Total	**140,743**	**100.0%**	
	All Pathways		
Under 25	**60,947**	**43.3%**	100.0%
Full-Time VSD	11,552		19.0%
Part-Time VSD	7,254		11.9%
Apprenticeships	42,141		69.1%
25+	**79,796**	**56.7%**	100.0%
Full-Time VSD	9,772		12.2%
Part-Time VSD	6,500		8.1%
Apprenticeships	63,574		79.7%

31 In relation to age, the stand-out points are that:

- slightly more learners aged 25 and over participate on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees and apprenticeships (56.7%) than under 25s (43.3%), and
- for both 18-24 year-olds and 25 year-olds and over participation is heavily concentrated in the form of Level 4-5 apprenticeships rather than Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees.

Part-Time Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees: Wider Comparisons

32 Comparisons between Level 4-5 technical education and Level 4-5 apprenticeships might be useful for education policy makers but employers and students could be less concerned about the difference between Level 4-5 and Level 4-6. As a consequence, a wider set of comparisons are useful when considering strategies for growth in Level 4-5 technical education.

Part-Time Level 4-5 VSDs and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

33 Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, participation on Level 4-6 apprenticeships by 18-24 year-olds increased by 15,500, more than offsetting the 11,500 fall in part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (see Diagram 4). Similarly, participation on Level 4-6 apprenticeships by 25 year-olds and over increased by 28,500, nearly three times the fall in part-time vocational sub-degrees (-10,400).

Diagram 4

18-24

Full Time | **Part Time**

Part-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

18-24: Vocational Sub-Degrees	
AY2016/17:	18,800
AY2018/19:(Est)	7,254
	-11,546
18-24: Level 4-5 Apprenticeships	
AY2016/17:(Est)	15,945
AY2018/19:(Est)	23,335
	+7,390
18-24: Level 6 Apprenticeships	
AY2016/17: (Est)	1,955
AY2018/19:(Est)	10,106
	+8,151
18-24: Level 6 First Degrees	
AY2016/17:	41,745
AY2018/19:	46,890
	+5,145

Part-Time 25+ Level 4-6

25+: Vocational Sub-Degrees	
AY2016/17:	16,845
AY2018/19: (Est)	6,500
	-10,345
25+: Level 4-5 Apprenticeships	
AY2016/17:(Est)	42,141
AY2018/19:(Est)	63,574
	+21,433
25+: Level 6 Apprenticeships	
AY2016/17:(Est)	759
AY2018/19:(Est)	7,755
	+6,996
25+: Level 6 First Degrees	
AY2016/17:	93,350
AY2018/19:	88,550
	-4,800

25+

Part-Time Level 4-5 VSDs and Part-Time Level 6 First Degrees

34 In AY2018/19, seven times as many 18-24 year-olds participated on part-time Level 6 First Degrees (47,000) than part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (c7,000). Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the number of 18-24 year-olds participating on part-time Level 6 First Degrees (+5,000) partially offset the fall in those on part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (-11,000).

35 In AY2018/19, twelve times as many adults aged 25 and over participated on part-time Level 6 First Degrees (88,500) than part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (c6,500). Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the number of 25 year-olds and over on part-time Level 6 First Degrees fell by a fewer number (-4,800) than those on part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (-10,300).

Part-Time Level 4-6 Education and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

36 In AY2018/19, part-time vocational sub-degrees accounted for 5% of Level 4-6 part-time education and apprenticeships, compared to 50% for part-time Level 6 First Degrees and 45% for Level 4-6 apprenticeships (see Table 13).

Table 13: Part-time Level 4-6 Education and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

	Part-Time Level 4-5 VSD	Part-Time Level 6 First Degrees	Apprenticeships Level 4-6	Total
18-24	7,254	46,890	43,200	97,344
25+	6,500	88,500	80,800	175,800
Total	13,754	135,390	124,000	273,144

Source: Further Education and Skills, DfE, November 2019

Full-Time Level 4-5 VSDs and Level 6 Degrees

Overall Participation

37 Participation on full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees fell by 50,000 between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19 (see Diagram 5). Critically, however, the entire fall was not attributable to 18-24 year-olds. Although participation amongst 18-24 year-olds fell by 27,000, there were also 23,000 fewer older adults on full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees.

18-24 Year-Olds

38 Between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the number of 18-24 year-olds on full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees fell by 27,000. The fall was partially offset by a rise in 18-24 year-olds on full-time Integrated Foundation Year courses (+4,000) – which lead onto a Level 6 First Degree – and Level 6 First Degrees (+15,000).

Diagram 5

18-24

Full Time | **Part Time**

Full-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	
AY2016/17	1,066,000
AY2018/19	1,081,000
	+15,000
Integrated Foundation Year	
AY2016/17:	c16,000
AY2018/19:	c20,000
	+4,000
Level 4-5 FDs/HNDs/HNCs:	
AY2016/17	38,300
AY2018/19	11,500
	-26,800

Full-Time 25+ Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	
AY2016/17	107,000
AY2018/19	115,000
	+8,000
Integrated Foundation Year	
AY2016/17:	c8,000
AY2018/19:	c10,000
	+2,000
Level 4-5 FDs/HNDs/HNCs:	
AY2016/17	32,200
AY2018/19	9,700
	-23,200

25+

39 Around 90% of participation in full-time Level 4-6 higher education is by 18-24 year-olds. Throughout the 2010s, the population of 18-24 year-olds declined. Even so, total participation amongst 18-24 year-olds across the three main pathways in full-time Level 4-6 provision was broadly the same between AY2016/17 (1.12m) and AY2018/19 (1.11m).

40 A key policy debate concerns 18-24 year-olds opting for three-year full-time Level 6 first degrees relative to two-year full-time Level 4-5 vocational-sub degrees. There has certainly been a decline in participation on full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees but nearly half of the fall is attributable to adults.

Upskilling and Reskilling at Level 4-5

Definitions

Upskilling

41 Upskilling can be defined as moving from a Level 2 to a Level 3, and from a Level 3 to a Level 4, and so on. The form of the initial highest qualification can be academic or vocational and the next level up can also take the form of an academic or vocational qualification. And so, for example, the following are possible:

- first full Level 3 (academic L3) – first full Level 5 (academic L5)
- first full Level 3 (academic L3) – first full Level 5 (vocational L5)
- first full Level 3 (vocational L3) – first full Level 5 (vocational L5)
- first full Level 3 (vocational L3) – first full Level 5 (academic L5)

42 A specific form of upskilling is jumping. This is where the move is, say, from a Level 3 to a Level 5.

Reskilling

43 Reskilling can be defined as studying at an equal or lower level of qualification. For example:

- first full Level 6 to a second full L2-6 (academic or vocational)
- first full Level 5 to a second full L2-5 (academic or vocational)
- first full Level 4 to a second full L2-4 (academic or vocational)
- first full Level 3 to a second full L2-3 (academic or vocational)
- first full Level 2 to a second full L2 (academic or vocational)

Learners and Qualifications

44 A fundamental distinction emerging in post-18 education and skills policy is between defining adults with a first full qualification – say, for example, at Level 3 – and whether attainment of a first full qualification is through a single qualification or units, credits and modules. Typically, the idea of achieving a full qualification at any level through units, credits and modules has been viewed in terms of reskilling, although going forward the idea could extend to upskilling especially at lower levels such as Level 2 and 3.

Level 4-5: Highest Qualification Held and Reskilling

45 As an average across the three-year period 2016-18, an estimated 10% of the population aged 22-64 held a Level 4-5 as their highest qualification (see Table 14), split between 7% with a vocational Level 4-5 and 3% with an academic Level 4-5.

Table 14: Highest Qualification Held by 22-64 Population (2015/18)	
Level 7+	12%
Level 6	22%
Level 4/5 Vocational	7%
Level 4/5 Academic	3%
Level 3 Vocational	13%
Level 3 Academic	8%
Level 2 Vocational	5%
Level 2 Academic	14%
Below Level 2	4%
None	8%
Other	6%

Source: Pick up the pace, Resolution Foundation, March 2019

46 The highest qualification held is a measure of upskilling. There might be a larger group of the 22-64 population in numerical terms with a vocational Level 4-5 because they have a Level 6, Level 7 or Level 8. In other words, for example, adults with a first Level 6 might have also reskilled at Level 4-5 through a vocational sub-degree.

Public Funding: Upskilling and Reskilling at Level 4+

Post-18 Higher Education and Post-19 Further Education

47 Entitlements to fee and maintenance loans for full-time and part-time Level 4, 5, 6 and 7 provision is linked to upskilling and the achievement of a first full Level 4, 5, 6 and 7.

48 Fee-loans for reskilling is heavily restricted in the prescribed higher education sector which, other than for selected STEM subjects – rules out fee and maintenance loan support for a second Level 4, 5, and 6. This is the so-called ELQ – equal and lower qualification – rule.

49 Fee-loans for reskilling at Level 4-6 are available for non-prescribed higher education. That said, the total number of adult learners taking out fee-loans for first or second Level 4-6 is relatively small (c5,000) and so only a proportion of them will be reskilling at Level 4-6.

Apprenticeships

50 Unlike post-18 higher education and post-19 further education, restricting apprenticeship funding to upskilling does not apply. Both levy and non-levy paying employers in England choose the level of apprenticeship and the age of the employee – new recruit or existing worker – to be trained, more or less, irrespective of whether they have an existing qualification and the same level of the apprenticeship. Indeed, employers can decide to retrain a worker through a Level 6 apprenticeship even if they have an existing Level 6 – typically a **First Degree** – so long as it is in a new occupational area.

Level 4-5 Reskilling After Age 24

51 A fair assumption is that most 18-24 year-olds participating on Level 4, 5 and 6 degrees are seeking their first Level 4, 5 and 6, whether as an academic Level 6 (full-time or part-time), vocational sub-degree (full-time or part-time) and Level 4-6 apprenticeships. Starting a Level 4-5 at 18/19 could mean completing a course by age 20/21 and although some might seek a second Level 4-5 by age 23/24 a more likely scenario is that they would seek to upskill at Level 6 by age 23/24. In general, therefore, reskilling at Level 4-5 is more likely in the 25 and over age category.

Policy Discussion

Strategies for Growth

52 Diagram 6 provides a snapshot of participation in terms of the main Level 4-6 pathways by age and mode 4-6 in AY2018/19. We use these broad estimates to discuss possible strategies for growing participation in Level 4-5 technical education. Crucially, the DfE and Whitehall as a whole must be clear over whether participation growth in Level 4-5 technical education will be in one, two, three or all four markets and identify which will do the heavy lifting.

Diagram 6

18-24

Full Time

Full-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	1,081,000
Integrated Foundation Year	c20,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c11,500
Level 4-6: Other	7,000
Total	**1,119,500**

Part-Time 18-24 Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	47,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c7,250
Level 4-6: Other	7,000
Level 4-6: 19-23 Fee Loan	600
Level 4-5: Apprenticeships	23,250
Level 6: Apprenticeships	10,100
Total	**95,200**

Part Time

Full-Time 25+ Level 4-6

Level 6:First Degree	115,000
Integrated Foundation Year	c10,000
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c9,700
Level 4-6: Other	4,200
Total	**138,900**

Part-Time 25+ Level 4-6

Level 6: First Degree	88,500
Level 4-5: FDs/HNDs/HNCs	c6,500
Level 4-6: Other	43,800
Level 4-6: 24+ Fee Loan	3,500
Level 4-5: Apprenticeships	63,500
Level 6: Apprenticeships	7,700
Total	**213,500**

25+

18-24 Year-Olds

This is where the 'politics' is

53 A glance at Diagram 6 shows that nearly 72% of all post-18 students participating on Level 4-6 programmes are aged 18-24. Radical change to 18-24 Level 4-6 education and training will have an impact on the lives of over 1.2m 18-24 year-olds in England, who in turn constitute 26% of the age group.

54 Crucially, the demographics are on the turn. The population of 18-24 year-olds is expected to grow throughout the 2020s. Policy makers with radical ideas for the reform of 18-24 Level 4-6 education and training should tread extremely carefully.

Predominance of Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees

55 The stand-out feature of participation on Level 4-6 programmes by 18-24 year-olds is that full-time participation (1.1m) dwarfs part-time and apprenticeship participation (0.1m). And, of course, participation on full-time Level 6 First Degrees (1.08m) overshadows all other forms of full-time study at Level 4-6 (0.04m).

Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees and Preventing Youth Unemployment

56 Labour market economists do not want to emphasise it and higher education does not want to say it, but participation in full-time Level 6 First Degrees reduces youth unemployment. Every 18-24 year-old on a full-time Level 6 First Degree is an 18-24 year-old who does not have to look for work or claim Universal Credit if they are unemployed.

Replacing Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees with Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

57 A potentially seductive skills reform is to cut participation in full-time Level 6 First Degrees from 1m to 0.5m and replace it with part-time Level 4-5 technical education. As Diagram 6 indicates, participation in part-time Level 4-6 education is not the norm for 18-24 year-olds. Less than 65,000 18-24 year-olds study part-time on Level 4-6 courses, representing 5% of 18-24 in total Level 4-6. To avoid a commensurate rise in youth unemployment, either employers would have to offer 0.5m sponsored jobs with part-time Level 4-5 technical education opportunities or 18-24 year-olds would have to find any job to support their part-time education.

Replacing Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees with Level 6 Apprenticeships

58 A similar potentially seductive skills reform is to cut participation on full-time Level 6 First Degrees from 1m to 0.5m and expand Level 6 Degree Apprenticeships. In effect, 0.5m 18-24 year-olds would flood the labour market searching for a sponsored job with a Degree Apprenticeship. Even prior to the pandemic, employers only offered 10,000 Level 6 Apprenticeships to 18-24 year-olds. Growth can be expected but the danger of a replacement strategy on this scale even over the long-term is rising youth unemployment.

Jobs with Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships are too Risky

59 Age 18 is the peak year for recruitment into full-time higher education. The next highest year for recruitment is age 19. What 18 and 19 year-olds want above all else after completing their Level 3 course is certainty. Entry into full-time higher education offers that certainty. The government can guarantee places in full-time higher education and at times of mass youth unemployment has every incentive to do so. By contrast, the government cannot guarantee a job with an apprenticeship or a job with a part-time Level 4-5 technical degree. For 18 and 19 year-olds in particular, the prospect of finding a job with a part-time Level 4-5 technical

degree or a Level 4-6 apprenticeship is too risky compared to full-time higher education. Jobs with part-time Level 4-5 technical education and Level 4-6 apprenticeships are subject to the economic cycle which when severe presents itself as boom and bust. Full-time study is a safe haven and a more secure bet when so young.

Expanding Participation by 18-24 Year-Olds Across All Pathways

60 The obvious point is that with an expanding cohort of 18-24 year-olds the government should seek to increase participation in full-time Level 4-5 technical education and Level 6 First Degrees, as well as employment combined with part-time Level 4-5 technical education, part-time Level 6 First Degrees and jobs with Level 4-6 apprenticeships.

18-24 Full-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

Going with the grain

61 Expanding full-time Level 4-5 technical education relative to part-time Level 4-5 technical education for the 18-24 year-old age group would go with the grain of the choices made by of young people. At present, however, the difference between 18-24 year-olds on full-time Level 6 First Degrees (1.081m) and full-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees (c11,500) is similar to the difference between an elephant and a mouse.

Policy Aim: Additionality

62 Aiming for a step-change in full-time participation on Level 4-6 technical qualifications is possible in the context of an increasing population of 18-24 year-olds but is challenging. There are three policy reforms which could start the process to increasing participation.

Policy Reforms

63 Firstly, the government could place an overall cap on student numbers for full-time Level 6 First Degrees and earmark growth in full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees. Although the cap would apply to students of any age, the fact that 90% of students on full-time Level 6 First Degrees are aged 18-24 means the cap would bite on the younger age group most.

64 Second, the cost of full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees should reflect the funding required to deliver quality provision rather than a cheap option for students. Full-time Level 4-5 technical degree provision should be funded comparable to full-time Level 6 First Degrees in STEM subjects. To keep the value of the fee-loan lower than £9,250 per year, grant funding from the Office for Students could be distributed to providers.

65 Third, the government should not rely on lower fee-loans per year to encourage further participation on full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees relative to full-time Level 6 First Degrees. Afterall, total borrowing for a two-year full-time Level 4-5 technical degree with a fee loan of £9,250 per year (£18,500) would be lower than a three-year Level 6 First Degree (£27,750). Instead, the government should look to 'maintenance' to achieve the desired effect. As a consequence, the government should look to increase the level of maintenance support in

the form either of an extra amount of loan or a separate grant to 18-24 year-olds opting for full-time Level 4-5 technical education courses. Maintenance loans take the form of cash and support living costs. Full-time students are more worried about the level of their maintenance loan than the level of the tuition loan.

Student Choice

66 Student choice, and parental influence, however will determine whether there is an increase in demand for full-time two-year, Level 4-5 technical education relative to full-time three-year, Level 6 first degree places. For example:

- students might wish to study for three rather than two years especially at a time of mass youth unemployment, and
- the desire to leave the parental home and move away to study could outweigh the prospect of living at home for another two-years to attend the local FE college.

The Future Pipeline: Full-Time Level 3 T Levels for 19-24 Year-Olds

68 The government intends the expansion of full-time Level 3 T-levels within the 16-18 cohort to act as a pipeline for increased participation in full-time Level 4-5 technical education (made possible through access to full-time fee and maintenance loans). Progression to full-time Level 4-5 courses is not appropriate for every 18-24 year-old. For some: achieving a Level 3 is enough. Equally, opportunities to achieve a Level 3 in the form of a T-level should not end at age 18 or 19: they should be available for 19-24 year-olds.

69 Participation in full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees could be fueled by 19-24 year-olds enrolling and achieving a T-level. For 19-24 year-olds without a first full Level 3, the cost of provision is free. To make full-time study possible, this group of 19-24 year-olds needs access to full-time maintenance loans.

Policy Aim: Zero Sum Game

70 Concerns about the growth of participation on full-time Level 6 First Degrees and the cost to taxpayer (c£17bn and rising), has led to the proposition of a zero-sum policy, expanding full-time Level 4-5 technical education at the expense of Level 6 First Degrees. Roughly speaking, 50% of students on full-time Level 6 First Degrees study humanities and 50% the sciences.

71 If the aim of such a zero-sum policy is to bear down significantly on the number of full-time places at universities offering humanity degrees and replace them with full-time local FE college Level 4-5 technical degrees instead, the implications for the 16-18 system will be dramatic.

72 Humanity A-levels fuel the demand for full-time humanity degrees. As a consequence, the DfE would need to inform 16-18 providers – especially schools with sixth forms – that sometime in the near future public funding for certain A level courses – such as sociology, psychology, politics, history, geography and so on – would no longer be available. And there could be a danger that 16-18 year-olds might not have the aptitude or inclination to study Level 4-5 technical degrees even though these are where places are available.

18+ Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

Competition from Level 4-6 Apprenticeships and Part-Time Level 6 Degrees

73 There is no getting away from the fact that between AY2016/17 and AY2018/19, the number of 18 year-olds and over on part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees fell by c22,000 whilst the number on Level 4-6 apprenticeships increased by c45,000 and those on part-time Level 6 First Degrees remain broadly flat.

74 At the same time, growth in the numbers of 18 year-olds and over on part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees start from a lower base (c14,000) than Level 4-6 apprenticeships (124,000) and part-time Level 6 First Degrees (c135,000).

Apprenticeship Levy-Paying Employers

75 The fall in part-time Level 4-5 technical education has coincided with the introduction of placing apprenticeship funding into the hands of each employer through digital accounts in England funded through the UK-wide Apprenticeship Levy. Levy-paying employers might be inclined to maximise the use of levy in their digital accounts by training Level 4-6 apprentices before they lose funds in their accounts after 24 months. As individual organisations, each levy-paying employer might not have demand for both apprentices and employees studying part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications.

Non-Levy Paying Employers seeking Apprenticeship Funding

76 Non-levy paying employers seeking apprenticeship funding will soon be required to register for a digital account. Recent announcements indicate that the government intends to find additional funding so non-levy paying employers – primarily SMEs – can access funding to train apprentices. As individual organisations, non-levy paying employers receiving funding to train apprentices might not have the need for employees studying part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications as well.

Different Employers: A Weak Defence

77 The possibility exists that the growth in Level 4-6 apprenticeships and the fall in part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees reflects demand from a different rather than the same employers. This may be the case but it is hard to substantiate in general terms that the fall in part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees of 61% is totally down to a decline in demand from a different set of employers.

Simultaneous Growth of Part-Time Level 4-6 Technical Education and Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

78 Be that as it may, if 18+ part-time Level 4-5 technical education is identified as a significant growth market in the move from a small to a large-scale Level 4-5 technical education system, participation in part-time Level 4-5 technical education will have to simultaneously grow alongside more employers – especially non-levy payers – demanding and receiving funding for apprenticeships including Level 4-6 apprenticeships.

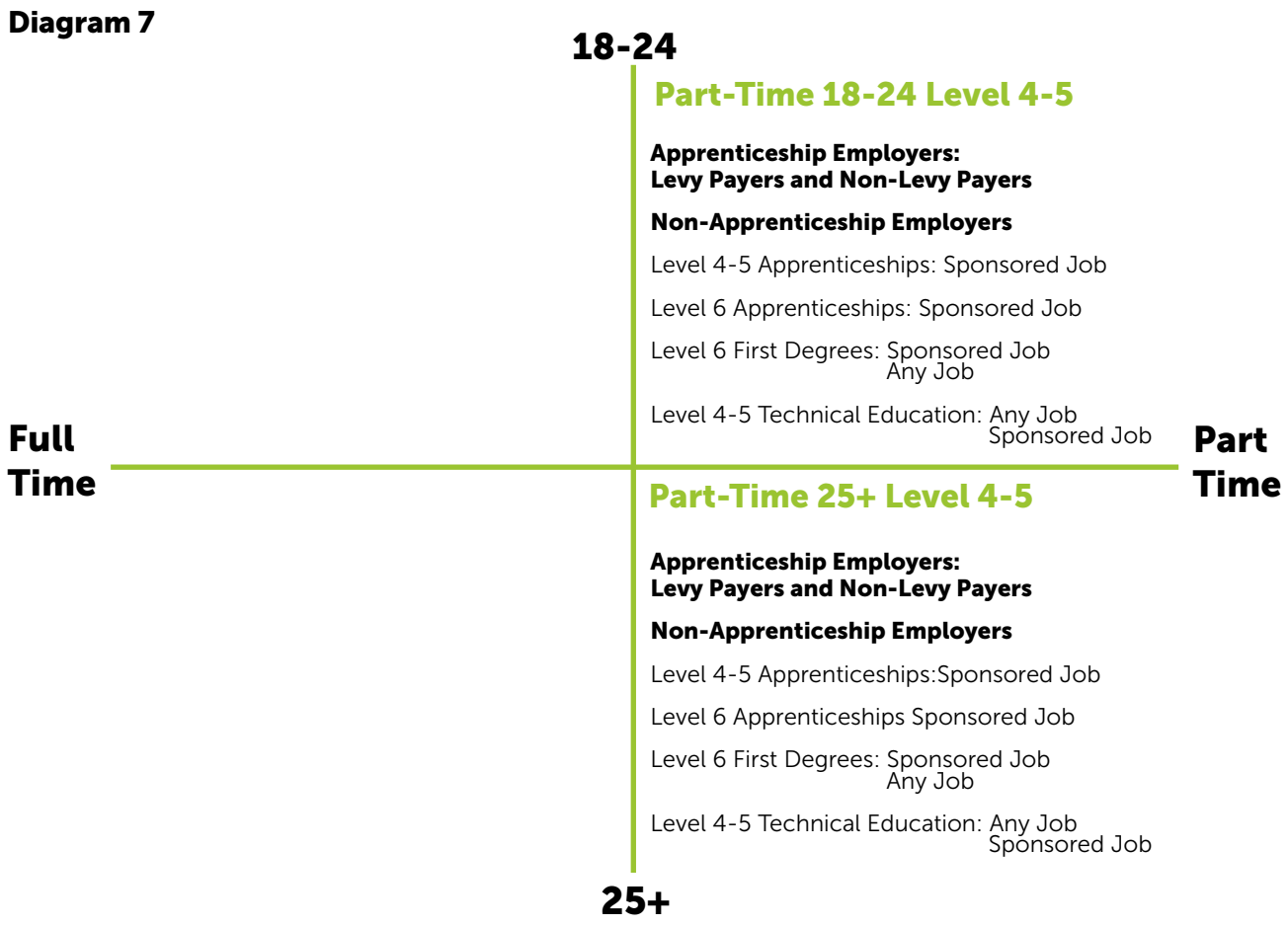
Mapping Employer and Student Demand for Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education Alongside Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

79 A key challenge for the DfE is to map employer and student demand for part-time Level 4-5 technical education by 18-24 year-olds and 25 year-olds and over (see Diagram 7) in the context of Level 4-6 apprenticeships.

80 From the employer perspective, there is a need to distinguish between (a) levy and non-levy paying employers demanding public funding for Level 4-6 apprenticeships and whether they can also support employees on part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications and (b) non-apprenticeship employers who are prepared to support their employees to study part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications.

81 From the student perspective, the DfE needs to assess how many part-time students will need to find any job relative to employers offering them a job alongside part-time study.

Diagram 7



Increasing Sponsored Jobs with Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

82 The government should consider two policies to increase the number of employers offering sponsored jobs with the opportunity to study part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

- Firstly, wage subsidies should be offered to employers not in receipt of public funding for apprenticeships to support roles for existing employees and new entrants with opportunities to study part-time Level 4-5 technical education.
- Second, the DfE should work closely with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to analyse sectors where employers would be willing to support employment with part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

Increasing Worker Demand for Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

83 The DfE will need to clarify where the heavy lifting for growth in part-time Level 4-5 technical education is to be done through workers studying independently of their current employer. In AY2018/19, maintenance loans became available for part-time students on Level 6 First Degrees where the course was at least 25% of a full-time programme. In AY2019/20, part-time maintenance loans became available to part-time students on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees. To enable workers to combine earning with part-time Level 4-5 technical education, the government should promote the availability of part-time maintenance loans for vocational sub-degrees and extend them to Level 4-5 higher technical qualifications as they become available.

25+ Level 4-5 Technical Education

Backing Part-Time Technical Education

84 In relation to participation in education rather than apprenticeships, the number of full-time students (c138,900) and part-time students (c138 ,800) on Level 4-6 degrees is the same. The truth of the matter is that participation on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees is small beer in both full-time and part-time 25+ markets (see Diagram 6). But what increases participation for the part-time 25+ market is the inclusion of Level 4-5 apprenticeships (c44,000) and Level 6 apprenticeships (c7,700). This suggests the most substantive growth will come from the part-time 25+ market, with the caveat over competition from Level 4-6 apprenticeships.
Upskilling and Reskilling through Level 4-5 Part-Time Technical Education

85 Participation on part-time Level 4-5 technical education could assist adults to upskill to Level 4-5 and help adults with a Level 6 to re-skill at Level 4-5.

86 In reality, reskilling at Level 4 and Level 5 is probably undertaken by adults aged 25 and over as most 18-24 year-olds are seeking to achieve a first Level 4, 5 or 6.

87 Under present rules, eligibility for fee-loans to support participation on a second Level 4, 5 and 6 is extremely limited. And so most adults aged 25 and over on full-time and part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees are upskilling as well.

88 The Prime Minister recently announced a Flexible Lifelong Loan Entitlement (FLLE) worth four years of a full-time higher education course. Assuming a fee of £9,250 per year, the total entitlement could be worth £37,000. The forthcoming FE/HE white paper should outline how the FLLE will assist adults to reskill as well as upskill by participating in part-time Level 4-5 technical education studying through whole qualifications or modules.

Recommendations

GENERAL

Recommendation 1: A Segmented Policy Approach

The DfE should develop Level 4-5 technical education policy according to four markets: 18-24 year-olds in full-time Level 4-5 technical education; 18-24 year-olds in part-time Level 4-5 technical education; 25 year-olds and over in full-time Level 4-5 technical education, and 25 year-olds and over in part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

Recommendation 2: Publication of Baseline Data

The DfE should publish baseline data by both mode - full-time and part-time – and age – 18-24 and 25+ - for existing participation on Level 6 First Degrees, Integrated Foundation Year Programmes, Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees, Level 4-6 non-prescribed Higher Education courses, and Level 4-5 and Level 6 Apprenticeships.

Recommendation 3: Identification of Growth Markets

To move from a small-scale to a large-scale system of Level 4-5 technical education, DfE must clarify which of the four markets or combinations of markets will deliver the growth in participation.

Recommendation 4: Compare Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education with Apprenticeships

The DfE should compare participation in Level 4-5 and Level 6 Apprenticeships with part-time Level 6 First Degrees and part-time Level 4-5 technical for the 18-24 and 25+ age groups.

Recommendation 5: Define the Jobs Model for Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education Students

Apprenticeships are an example of a sponsored job – where an employer recruits an existing employee or new entrant to train them as an apprentice. The DfE should make clear whether growth in part-time Level 4-5 technical education will be akin to the employment position of apprentices or whether it expects students to take any job to increase their income to live off over and above part-time maintenance loans.

18-24 YEAR-OLDS

Recommendation 6: Do Not Look to Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education to Significantly Grow Participation

The DfE should be wary of identifying the 18-24 part-time Level 4-5 technical education market as a major contributor to expanding participation in Level 4-5 technical education or Level 4-6 apprenticeships for that matter. Less than 10% of 18-24 year-olds are in part-time Level 4-6 education and Level 4-6 apprenticeships.

Recommendation 7: Be Wary of Replacing Full-Time Level 6 First Degrees with Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

In the 18-24 market, full-time education reduces youth unemployment. Around 1.1m 18-24 year-olds study in full-time Level 4-6 higher education and 97% of them participate on three-year full-time Level 6 First Degrees. Proposals to reduce participation on full-time Level 6 First Degrees by 500,000 and replace them with either jobs with part-time Level 4-5 technical education or jobs with Level 4-6 apprenticeships should be rejected out of hand. The state can guarantee places in full-time education. It cannot guarantee jobs. Switching from full-time education to part-time education and/or apprenticeships will result in youth unemployment.

Recommendation 8: Expand Participation across all Level 4-6 Pathways

Bearing in mind a growing cohort of 18-24 year-olds, the DfE should seek to expand participation across all Level 4-6 pathways, including full-time Level 4-5 technical education and Level 6 First Degrees, part-time Level 4-5 technical education and Level 6 First Degrees and Level 4-6 apprenticeships.

18-24 FULL-TIME LEVEL 4-5 TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Recommendation 9: Additional Participation not a Zero-Sum Policy

Seeking to expand full-time Level 4-5 technical education relative to part-time Level 4-5 technical education for 18-24 year-olds would go with the grain of the choices of young people. But the government must clarify whether expansion of full-time Level 4-5 technical education is in additional to the 1.1m 18-24 year-olds on full-time Level 6 First Degrees or at the expense of such provision, especially the 0.5m young people on full-time humanity degrees.

Replacing a significant proportion of full-time Level 6 First Degrees with full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees would have profound implications for the shape and output of the 16-18 education system. The main source of fuel for full-time Level 6 humanity degrees is humanity A levels. Presumably, the Department for Education would be required to withdraw public funding for a range of humanity A levels and their delivery especially in secondary schools with sixth forms.

In light of an increasing cohort of 18-24 year-olds, the forthcoming FE/HE White Paper should rule out a zero-sum policy and seek to expand participation in full-time Level 4-5 technical education whilst maintaining participation in full-time Level 6 which should continue to be driven by student choice.

Recommendation 10: Higher Maintenance Loans or Grants for Full-Time Students on Level 4-5 Technical Degrees

To provide financial incentives to encourage 18-24 year olds to choose full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees over full-time Level 6 First Degrees – including humanity degrees – the government should look to increase maintenance support rather than necessarily charge lower fees to students. 18-24 year-olds on full-time Level 4-5 technical degrees should receive an increase in maintenance above full-time Level 6 First Degrees either in the form of a higher loan and a national entitlement to a grant.

18+ PART TIME LEVEL 4-5 TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Recommendation 11: A Strategy to Grow Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education in the Context of Increasing Employer Demand for Level 4-6 Apprenticeships

Access to apprenticeship funding is being extended to levy and non-levy payers. As organisations, employers demanding funding for Level 4-6 apprenticeships – levy and non-levy funding – might not have a simultaneous need for employees to study part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications. The DfE must identify large numbers of employers who are increasing demand in public funding for apprenticeships – including SMEs – which have a demand for both Level 4-6 apprenticeships and part-time Level 4-5 technical education.

Recommendation 12: Wage Subsidies to Employers Supporting Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

The Treasury should consider offering wage subsidies to employers – especially SMEs – which are not seeking public funding for apprenticeships but wish to encourage their employees to study part-time Level 4-5 technical qualifications.

Recommendation 13: Promote existing Maintenance Loans for Part-Time Students on Level 4-5 Vocational Sub-Degrees

Part-time maintenance loans became available to students on Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees from AY2019/20. The Department for Education should develop a marketing strategy to boost awareness of their availability to adults wishing to study part-time Level 4-5 vocational sub-degrees.

25+ FULL-TIME and PART-TIME LEVEL 4-5 TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Recommendation 14: Back Part-Time Study by Older Adults

Only 11% of students on full-time Level 4-6 degrees are aged 25 and over. Substantial growth in Level 4-5 technical education by adults aged 25 and over is more likely through part-time study.

Recommendation 15: Upskilling and Reskilling through Part-Time Level 4-5 Technical Education

The forthcoming FE/HE white paper should outline how the proposed Flexible Lifelong Loan Entitlement will assist adults to reskill as well as upskill by participating in part-time Level 4-5 technical education studying whole qualifications or modules.

A PIPELINE for 24+ LEVEL 4/5 TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Recommendation 16: Full-Time Maintenance Loans for 19-24 Year olds on Level 3 T-Levels

19-23 year olds without a first full Level 3 can receive free education through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to fund participation on Level 3 T-levels. 19-23 year-olds could commit to two-year full-time T levels if the Department for Education commits to funding full-time maintenance loans for this group of young adults.

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Past Campaign for Learning Discussion Papers

- COVID-19 and Post-16 Education: Planning for a Different September, April 2020, Contributors Susan Pember and Mark Corney, Editor Julia Wright

Past Campaign for Learning Policy Pamphlets

- Earn or Learn for 18-21 year olds: New Age Group, New Policies, November 2015, Mark Corney
- University or Apprenticeships at 18: Context, Challenges and Concerns, April 2016, Mark Corney
- Reforming Technical and Professional Education: Why should it work this time? February 2017, Mick Fletcher
- Mending the Gap: Are the needs of 16-18 year olds being met? January 2018, John Widdowson
- Shaping the new National Retraining Scheme, March 2018, Susan Pember
- T-Levels for 19-23 Year Olds – The value of maintenance loans, August 2018, Mark Corney
- The Post-18 Review of Education and Funding – A Review of a Lifetime, December 2018, Editors Michael Lemin, Julia Wright and Mark Corney
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- No 16-18 Left Behind – as the cohort grows, February 2020, Editor, Michael Lemin and Julia Wright
- Making a Success of the National Skills Fund – Adult Training and Retraining for All in the 2020s, March 2020, Editor Julia Wright
- Revolutionary Forces – Shaping the Post-16 White Paper, July 2020, Editor Julia Wright
- Reforms for a 'Revolutionary' Post-16 White Paper, September 2020, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney

The Campaign for Learning works for social and economic inclusion through learning. The Campaign is a specialist in engaging people in learning. We work with partners to research, design and deliver innovative programmes and approaches that support people wherever they are to access life-changing learning opportunities.

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