

News story: Education Secretary outlines plans to get more people into skilled jobs

Britain must drop its 'snobby' attitude to technical and vocational education or risk being left behind after Brexit, Education Secretary Damian Hinds warned in a keynote [speech](#) to business leaders today, Thursday 6 December.

As the government marks the one year anniversary of its [modern Industrial Strategy](#) which aims to boost the nation's productivity and put the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution, the Education Secretary set out his plans to get more people into skilled jobs that command higher wages.

These include:

- A new generation of Higher Technical Qualifications – an alternative to a university degree to help more people get on in their careers and so employers can access the skills they need. These qualifications at "Level 4 and 5" – like Diplomas of Higher Education and Foundation Degrees sit in between A Levels and a degree in subjects like engineering and digital. The kind of training that helps someone step up from being a healthcare support worker to a nursing associate or a bricklayer to a construction site supervisor.
- Reforming the pupil destination measure – the information published in school and college performance tables about what higher study or training pupils go on to do after they leave – to create one measure that shows how many young people are doing higher training of any type. The new destination measure will show separately how many young people go on to study degrees, higher technical apprenticeships or Higher Technical Qualifications like a Higher National Diploma.
- Matching skills to jobs – [new guidance](#) and a [package of support for Skills Advisory Panels](#) – local partnerships between public and private sector employers, local authorities, colleges and universities – to assess what skills are needed in their local area.

During his speech, Mr Hinds argued that the default route and measure of success for young people should no longer just be an academic one, and unless Britain drops that mind-set it will never close the productivity gap with its European neighbours – an ambition that is more crucial as we leave the European Union. Underlining the importance of closing that gap, he highlighted that Germany, France, and the US all produce over 25% more per hour than the UK. He also stated that if Britain matched these productivity levels it could boost taxes available for public services by tens of billions more a year.

The Education Secretary also set out his 10 year ambition to upgrade the nations' skills so more young people have the same high quality training opportunities with clear pathways to skilled jobs as those in top performing technical education countries like Germany. He pointed out that just 65% of the working population in the UK have completed a qualification at A-level or equivalent. In Germany this figure rises to almost 90%. [New figures](#) published by the Department for Education reveal that by getting as many 25 year olds qualified to Level 3 as in Germany, around 86,000 people could earn on average an extra £2,270 a year.

He said:

As a nation I'm afraid we've been technical education snobs. We've revered the academic but treated vocational as second class – when we do it well, law, engineering, medicine – then we don't even call it vocational.

Why has this has been tolerated for so long? I think the reason is the "O.P.C" problem. For so many opinion formers, commentators and, yes, politicians: vocational courses are for 'other people's children'.

Young people not on the A-level route have two years of government funded education when they turn 16...precious time, precious investment... And all too often it's time and money used to train them to a low level in a skill the economy doesn't need.

Today, Germany, France, the US – all produce over 25% more per hour than the UK. And, actually, this productivity gap with Germany and France first opened up in the late 1960s, further back still with the US. This gap matters. In terms of our public services – matching German productivity would allow government to spend tens of billions of pounds a year more.

The government has already kick-started a technical education revolution, working with employers to introduce new, gold standard T Levels from 2020 – the technical equivalent to A Levels – and to create more high quality apprenticeship opportunities. These will help put Britain's technical education system on a par with the best in the world, like Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland.

To build on this work, the Education Secretary also published the latest [T Level action plan](#) which outlines:

- The next seven T Level programmes to be taught from 2021: Health, Healthcare Science, Science, Onsite Construction, Building Services Engineering, Digital Support and Services and Digital Business Services.
- UCAS points will be awarded for new T Levels with each programme carrying the same UCAS points as three A Levels – so young people, parents and employers know they are as stretching as their academic equivalents and will act as a stepping stone to progress to the next

level whether that is a degree, higher level technical training or an apprenticeship.

He said:

We also need to make clear to young people, and their parents – that a degree is not the only path to a great job. I'm clear that the school that gets a young person onto a higher apprenticeship deserves as much praise as when it gets someone to university.

To be clear, the message here is not don't do a degree – the message is you don't have to do a degree. We want young people to acquire the higher qualifications that lead to high skilled, more rewarding jobs – whether through a degree, a higher apprenticeship or higher technical qualifications.

I want us to break down some of the false barriers we've erected between academic and technical routes. I don't see any reason why higher technical training shouldn't be open to certain A-level students as long as they have the prerequisite knowledge and practical skill.

Equally, I want T Level students that want to, to be able to go to university to do relevant technical degrees.

Today's announcements are the latest step in the government's work to overhaul the technical education and vocational training system.

T Levels will be the technical equivalent of A Levels, combining classroom theory, practical learning and an industry placement. The first T Level courses in education, construction and digital will be taught in around 50 further education and post-16 providers from September 2020.

T Levels are being developed by and with the industries who will benefit from the skills these qualification will provide. The government is working with more than 200 businesses, including Fujitsu, Skanska, and GlaxoSmithKline, to help design the course content to make sure young people taking T Levels are equipped with the knowledge and skills that employer's value.

The new programmes will be backed by an additional half a billion pounds of investment every year when the new qualifications are fully rolled out. The Government also recently announced an extra [£38 million to support the first T Level providers to invest in high quality equipment and facilities](#) in advance of their introduction. As well as this, the Government is investing £20 million to support the further education sector to prepare for new T Levels. This includes the £5 million [Taking Teaching Further](#) programme, which aims to attract more industry professionals to work in the sector, and the £8 million [T Level Professional Development offer](#) to help teachers and staff prepare for the roll-out of the new qualifications.

There are over 350 high quality apprenticeship now available in a wide

variety of jobs from planning officers to agriculture to accountancy. The number of people starting on these high quality apprenticeship standards is growing with 43.6% of total starts last year compared with just 5.0% in 2016/17. These high quality apprenticeships are longer in length, and with more off the job training than apprenticeships of the past.