

Major expansion of post-18 education and training to level up and prepare workers for post-COVID economy

- Lifetime Skills Guarantee to give adults the chance to take free college courses valued by employers
- New entitlement to flexible loans to allow courses to be taken in segments, boosting opportunities to retrain and enhancing the nation's technical skills
- PM acts to boost productivity and help the country build back better from coronavirus

The Prime Minister will today set out plans to transform the training and skills system, making it fit for the 21st century economy, and helping the country build back better from coronavirus.

Adults without an A-Level or equivalent qualification will be offered a free, fully-funded college course – providing them with skills valued by employers, and the opportunity to study at a time and location that suits them.

This offer will be available from April in England, and will be paid for through the National Skills Fund. A full list of available courses will be set out shortly.

Higher education loans will also be made more flexible, allowing adults and young people to space out their study across their lifetimes, take more high-quality vocational courses in further education colleges and universities, and to support people to retrain for jobs of the future.

These reforms will be backed by continued investment in college buildings and facilities – including over £1.5 billion in capital funding. More details will be set out in a further education white paper later this year.

The coronavirus pandemic and changing economy is why the Prime Minister is developing a long-term plan to ensure that, as work changes, people can retrain, upskill and find new well-paid jobs.

In a speech on Tuesday, the Prime Minister is expected to announce a new Lifetime Skill Guarantee. He will say:

As the Chancellor has said, we cannot, alas, save every job. What we can do is give people the skills to find and create new and better jobs.

So my message today is that at every stage of your life, this government will help you get the skills you need.

He will add:

We're transforming the foundations of the skills system so that everyone has the chance to train and retrain.

Apprenticeship opportunities will also be increased, with more funding for SMEs taking on apprentices, and greater flexibility in how their training is structured – especially in sectors such as construction and creative industries where there are more varied employment patterns.

In 2000, over 100,000 people were doing Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, but that has reduced to fewer than 35,000 now. Those doing foundation degrees has declined from 81,000 to 30,000.

As a result, only 10% of adults hold a Higher Technical Qualification as their highest qualification, compared to 20% in Germany and 34% in Canada.

This is despite the fact that five years after completion, the average Higher Technical Apprentice earns more than the average graduate.

That is why the government is committed to making higher education more flexible to facilitate lifelong learning, and to make it easy for adults and young people to break up their study into segments, transfer credits between colleges and universities, and enable more part-time study.

This new arrangement will provide finance for shorter term studies, rather than having to study in one three or four year block.

The government is also committing £8 million for digital skills boot camps; expanding successful pilots in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands and introducing programmes in four new locations.

From next year, boot camps will be extended to sectors like construction and engineering, helping the country build back better and support our refreshed Industrial Strategy.

Earlier this year the government launched its free online Skills Toolkit, helping people train in digital and numeracy skills. This is being expanded today to include 62 additional courses.

£2.5 billion is also being made available through the National Skills Fund to help get people working again after COVID, as well as giving those in work the chance to train for higher-skilled, better-paid jobs.