

Proposals launched to boost the quality and uptake of Higher Technical Qualifications

Opaque and misunderstood Level 4 and 5 qualifications are being renamed and revamped [under plans unveiled today](#) (Monday 8 July) by Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

Level 4 and 5 qualifications – lesser known qualifications that sit between A Level (Level 3) and degrees (Level 6), such as CertHE, DipHE and foundation degrees – will be rebadged as Higher Technical Qualifications and quality approved, in a drive to attract more students to study them.

[Despite research showing Higher Technical Qualifications can lead to better wages and provide the skills in demand in the future job market](#), only around [1 in 10 adults](#) in England hold them – one of the lowest rates in the OECD. Of the 4,000 qualifications offered, [research shows](#) that over 40% of these only have 5 students or even fewer on them.

[Recent research](#) has also revealed that students who gain these qualifications in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects can earn up to £5,000 more a year than people with degrees from many universities.

[The CBI](#) have predicted that in 5 years' time almost half (47%) of all employment will be in management, professional and technical roles – boosting demand for the specialist skills that Higher Technical Qualifications provide.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Employers across the country are crying out for more computer programmers, engineers, electricians and technicians in fields from advanced manufacturing to healthcare. But the evidence shows that despite these qualifications putting people in prime position to take advantage of that demand and the opportunities for better wages and better prospects – not enough people know about them.

That needs to change. To help that change we need to make sure these courses are high-quality, lead to good jobs and that people know about them. We can't legislate for parity of esteem between academic and technical routes, but we can make sure the options out there are clear and high-quality so students and employers know and trust that they will give them the skills they need.

This overhaul is part of Mr Hinds' radical shake-up of technical and vocational education, so students and employers understand Higher Technical Qualifications and see them as high-quality and valued alternatives to a

traditional academic route.

To boost uptake of these qualifications and ensure they are of a high standard the Government has outlined proposals including:

- Reviewing Level 4 and 5 Qualifications – ensuring they are of a high-quality and lead to well-paid jobs – and awarding a new quality mark for all approved Higher Technical Qualifications so students and employers can be confident courses provide the skills they need
- Ensuring that approved Higher Technical Qualifications are only available with access to student finance at high-quality further and higher education providers – so that students know the qualifications they get from these institutions are prestigious and highly valued by employers
- A new public campaign working alongside employers and careers advisers to showcase the benefits and the wide range of career opportunities that studying a Higher Technical Qualification can open up

To be internationally competitive and develop the skills our economy needs to drive growth, more people need to gain these Higher Technical Qualifications. In Germany, where productivity levels [are 25% higher than in the UK](#), leading to better wages and prosperity, one in five adults holds a qualification to this level.

Today's plans build on the action already underway to transform technical and vocational education in this country. This includes the introduction of new T Levels from 2020 – technical alternatives to A Levels – and the creation of more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.

Higher Technical Qualifications will provide a natural progression route for young people taking new T Levels from 2020 or A Levels (Level 3) enabling them to take the next step up and gain higher technical skills in key subjects like STEM.

Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director, said:

There is increasing demand from business for skills at all levels, so it's vital the education system keeps pace with the changing world of work.

It's terrific to see a focus on level 4 and 5 qualifications. This 'missing middle' has been overlooked for too long, and yet for many employers it can provide the skills by bridging a gap between A levels and degrees.

The CBI encourages more flexible routes to higher skills. Ensuring

firms have confidence in these qualifications is critical, so an increased role for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and Office for Students to oversee and kitemark quality on behalf of employers will be welcomed.

Federation of Small Businesses National Chairman Mike Cherry said:

We welcome the findings of this review into higher technical qualifications. It's vital for future generations and for the economy, that education and training at all levels are readily accessible. Small firms tell us that technical skills are the most important skillset to achieving future growth. However, many small businesses are still unaware of the potential training possibilities that are available to meet the technical skills gaps they face. We want to work with the Government to change this.

Lord Sainsbury of Turville, chair of the Independent Panel on Technical Education, said:

In the world's best technical education systems, higher technical qualifications play an essential role in equipping people with the skills that modern industry and business need. In England, however, this 'missing middle' of technical education has been neglected for decades. As a result, we now see a significant mismatch between the skills that our economy needs and the qualifications on offer.

I warmly welcome these plans for reform. Qualifications bearing the new, government-backed quality-mark will have met employer standards, be taught in excellent institutions and align with apprenticeships. In this way, employers and students alike can be confident that they have real value in the labour market.

Higher technical courses are offered at universities, FE colleges and National Colleges – such as the London South Bank University and the National College for Nuclear. [The Government's network of Institutes of Technology](#) – unique collaborations between universities, FE colleges, and leading employers – will also specialise in delivering quality Higher Technical Qualifications and training in STEM subjects, such as digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering that will provide employers with the skilled workforce they need.

The Level 4 and 5 review will complement the Government's Post-18 review, to ensure the system is joined up, accessible to all and encourages the development of the skills the country needs. This is central to the Government's modern Industrial Strategy, which aims to make sure everyone is equipped for the jobs of the future.

The Government is also [reviewing post-16 qualifications at Level 3](#) and below

to make sure that all qualifications taken by students are high quality and lead to employment or further study.