

Thousands more adults set to benefit from new technical skills

Thousands of working adults will soon benefit from free courses that will help them to rapidly upskill or retrain, as part of the government's drive to plug skills gaps and boost access to more high-quality training alternatives.

Sixty-five short and modular courses will start to roll out from later this month at 10 [Institutes of Technology](#) (IoTs) across England in sought-after STEM subjects. This will include courses such as Artificial Intelligence, Digitisation of Manufacturing, Digital Construction, Agricultural Robotics, and Cyber Security.

The courses will be a blend of classroom and remote online study, and will vary in length from 50 to 138 hours – giving more adults greater flexibility in how and when they learn, so they can fit it around their lives. Swindon and Wiltshire IoT, for instance, will offer five short 50 hour courses across eight weeks.

The programmes will be available to working adults aged 19 and over, with priority given to those employed locally to the IoT, in related industries such as digital or healthcare. The IoTs have worked in partnership with local employers to ensure courses address existing skills gaps, meaning employees from both large and SME businesses will be able to gain in demand new skills or retrain – so they can progress on to higher skilled, higher paid jobs in their area.

Separately, over 100 further and higher education providers have also been awarded a share of £18 million to invest in new equipment, such as virtual reality goggles, therapeutic play equipment for children, and air quality testing equipment that will support them to offer more higher technical training. The funding will also help them to boost links with local businesses in key sectors such as digital, construction and healthcare – so employers can tap into the talented workforce they need for the jobs of the future.

Minister for Further and Higher Education Michelle Donelan said:

Making sure more people can train and develop at any stage of their life to secure high skilled, high paid jobs is at the heart of our plans.

These fantastic new courses will open up more training alternatives for adults, address skills gaps in our economy and level up opportunities across the country.

We are also investing up to £18 million to support over 100 further and higher education providers to expand the higher technical training on offer to their local communities.

[The government's network of Institutes of Technology](#) – collaborations between leading employers, further education colleges and universities – specialise in delivering high-quality Higher Technical Education and training in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, such as digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering, providing employers with the skilled workforce they need.

A total of £6.4 million is being invested to support IoTs to offer the free courses, which will support up to 4,000 working adults to get on the path to a new, rewarding career and will plug local skills shortages.

The Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology will be running courses for the medical technology and engineering sectors, including one on Anaesthetic and Operating Theatre Equipment. This will enable someone already working in medical engineering to gain new skills in using, calibrating and maintaining anaesthetic and operating theatre equipment – opening up new options for progression in their workplaces.

Principal and CEO of Dudley College of Technology Neil Thomas said:

As lead partner of the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology, Dudley College is really excited to be a part of this project. The aim of the IoT is to provide employers and local residents with new opportunities for higher level training, and initiatives like this give us the chance to develop training solutions that really meet the needs of local employers.

The industry relevant course content and the accessible, business-friendly delivery model are what employers have been asking for. Under the pilot the IoT is supporting the MedTech and Advanced Engineering Sectors, and we've already got staff signing up from employers like Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust.

Vice Principal of The Bedford College Group Georgina Ager said:

In order to prepare for delivery of Higher Technical Qualifications we are investing in staff training and upskilling. We have undertaken workforce planning exercises to model staffing skills gaps we may face in the future. Where gaps exist, we are investing in staff to upskill and retrain to ensure our staff have the most up to date industry and academic knowledge to deliver the Higher Technical Qualifications.

In addition, we are ensuring that our facilities are in line with industry standards in order to ensure our learners and our employer partners can access and train on equipment relevant to the current industry standards.

Boosting the uptake and quality of Higher Technical Qualifications – that sit

between A levels and degrees – and supporting adults to study more flexibly throughout their lives is a key part of the [government's landmark reforms to post-16 education and training](#).

A [major review of higher technical education](#) revealed these qualifications can unlock the [skills employers need](#) and lead to well paid jobs. However, it also shows that the quality of qualifications on offer at further and higher education providers can be variable and it can be hard for students and employers to find the ones that are right for them.

From September 2022, the government will start rolling out newly approved Higher Technical Qualifications, beginning with Digital, and followed by Construction and Health in 2023. A full suite of qualifications will be available by 2025.

Higher Technical Qualifications will provide a natural progression route for both young people taking T Levels or A levels, and adults looking to upskill or retrain – enabling them to take the next step up and gain higher technical skills in key subjects like STEM.