



**Removing the tradesman's entrance – England's policies to reduce the divide between academic and technical education through initiatives such as T Levels and Degree Apprenticeships**

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## A historical legacy

Since the Victorian era, England has been publicly grappling with the consequences of a deep divide between academic and vocational or technical education. Though over the past 150 years, participation in both academic and vocational education institutions and qualifications has expanded exponentially, attempts to bridge the divide at both secondary and tertiary levels have only had limited success.

Despite the Victorians claiming Britain to be “the workshop of the world”, by the end of the nineteenth century Britain had lost some of its industrial advantage in Europe to a more technically literate Germany. Successive attempts and limited improvements were made throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to improve technical education. Many considered the division in education and training to be a technological hindrance, which was socially regressive and economically foolish. The division was seen as depriving the country of necessary technical skills to innovate and manufacture efficiently and forcing some students into unsuitable academic courses which prevented them reaching their true potential. Though reformers pushed for the establishment of technical training, an academic education was still considered socially and educationally superior. Even if Oxford and Cambridge’s role as finishing schools for the aristocracy and landed gentry was declining as the nineteenth century progressed, they were still the principal route followed by the ruling elites and the economically more powerful. The elite universities gave these groups access to professional careers in areas such as finance, law, medicine and government – the latter either as an elected politician or as a highly influential senior civil servant.

The recent Great Britain Department for Education review, referred to as the Augar Review (UK Department for Education, 2019) has starkly detailed how post-compulsory vocational education has been the neglected sibling of academic higher education, especially in funding. As late as 2011, the Specialist Diplomas for 14-19 year olds arising from the Tomlinson Report, failed because Tony Blair’s Labour Government was not prepared to replace what the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had earlier described as the “gold standard” of academic “A” Levels with a Diploma that covered both academic and vocational learning (Stewart, 2011).

This historical divide between academic and vocational or technical education could be finally changing.

Apprenticeships in England which were traditionally at Levels 2 and 3 in the national qualifications framework are becoming increasingly higher level. Level 4-5 Higher Apprenticeships came into being in 2006-7, and by 2016-17, 63% of starts at this Apprenticeship Level were at L5. Degree Apprenticeships (L6 and 7) began in September 2015. In 2016-7 there were 2,000 Level 6 starts and 50 at Level 7. In another age, putting the terms “degree” and “apprenticeship” side by side might have been considered almost an oxymoron.

Degree-level apprenticeships are too small a component of the overall reforms to be considered in isolation. Prompted by major reports by entrepreneurs Doug Richard (Richard, 2012) and Lord David Sainsbury (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016,

referred to as the Sainsbury Review), the UK government is undertaking some major reforms to the English technical education system. The reforms cover both secondary and tertiary levels. Linking the two sectors in the reform process through meaningful pathways and better consumer advice are critical success factors. Specific measures include making apprenticeships more rigorous as well as expanding higher level and degree apprenticeships. Vocational qualifications and pathways, whether for work-based or institutional learning, will continue to be rationalised. This process, that really began with the report by Dame Alison Wolf (Wolf, 2011) includes replacing a plethora of disparate vocational qualifications with new consolidated “T” Levels which aim to both challenge and complement “A” Levels for senior secondary students.

But there are two critical underpinning elements to these reforms.

First, the reformers want an emphasis on “technical or technical and professional education” rather than “vocational education”. The Government skills’ plan echoes the sentiments found in the Sainsbury Review (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016), that this change of emphasis is more than a branding exercise:

*“... technical education needs to be fulfilling, aspirational, clearly explained and attractive – to everyone, regardless of their gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, sexual identity or any other factor beyond their control. Successive governments have seen ‘vocational’ education as the solution to the problem of what to do with young people who don’t do A Levels. As a result, programmes were designed which did not demand enough of students.”*  
(Great Britain Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Great Britain Department for Education 2016, p.12)

Secondly, there is the bold funding initiative of introducing an apprenticeship levy on employers. This seems to have reinforced the movement to degree and higher level apprenticeships at Levels 4 to 7, rather than just intermediate and advanced apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3. Some commentators feel that this has made apprenticeships more attractive to able and aspirant young people by giving them a tertiary pathway free of large scale student debt, as employers pay their degree fees from the levy and they are in paid employment. Critics have even warned this will result in a “middle class” takeover of apprenticeships. However, the levy and the shift to apprenticeship standards from apprenticeship frameworks have seen an initial overall drop in apprentice numbers. Some argue this is due to the complexity of the new systems, others say it is because of higher and more demanding standards, including a minimum requirement of 20% “off the job” training.

### **Academic institutions and their impact on social mobility in England**

Given their role as a route to wealth and privilege, elite universities were universally revered and seen as world class ornaments of the nation. As the recent Augar Review has pointed out, elite universities have friends in high places and have thus been able to resist the radical changes other parts of the English education system have been regularly subjected to (UK Department for Education, 2019).

University expansion, especially after the Robbins' report (Great Britain Committee on Higher Education, 1963) in the 1960s, widened participation exponentially, but still in a basically hierarchical way. The Russell Group of research-intensive universities that included not just Oxbridge but twenty odd others including Manchester, Bristol, York and Durham, became equally elitist. They often described themselves as “selecting universities” in contrast to the post 1992 Universities which had previously been Polytechnics that would equally often describe themselves as “recruiting universities”.

Though technical and vocational education might have been a poor cousin, it did develop into a large and complex system with, at various times, institutions known as Colleges of Advanced Technology, Polytechnics (both of which are now all universities), Technical Colleges and Colleges of Further Education.

As has been pointed out in reports by groups such as the Social Market Foundation, the most selective Russell Group universities are still choosing ‘high achieving’ students who have taken A Levels (Mian, Richards & Broughton, 2016, p.7). In 2015, just 2% of 18-year-old acceptances into higher tariff institutions had Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications, which are one of the main English vocational qualifications.

### **Leaving school and going to College at age 16 in England**

The selective nature of university entrance in England is significant as there are considerable differences in the structure of upper secondary education in England compared with Australia. In Australia the majority of students stay on at their secondary school to year 12 and leave aged 17/18 after taking their secondary school certificate, known in New South Wales as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or the Queensland Certificate of Education in that state. In NSW, the HSC is a comprehensive school leaving credential which does have some vocational subjects offered. Victoria is unique in having a Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) as a vocationally focussed credential, that provides an alternative to the more general Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE). Completing the HSC, or its equivalents in other states, also increasingly applies to students taking a work-based learning apprenticeship option.

In contrast, many students in England leave school at 16 after taking their GCSEs, a public externally set and marked national credential, and pursue upper secondary studies at a college, usually a Further Education College (similar to a TAFE College in Australia). Sometimes, these students move to a specialist sixth form college, which in Australia would be similar to the small number of senior high schools. In 2017-18, there were around 1.1 million students in England participating in some form of publicly funded 16-19 education at around 3,000 education providers. This included 128,000 students at sixth form colleges, 437,000 students in over 2,000 school sixth forms (including maintained schools, academies and free schools), and 500,000 students in just under 200 general Further Education Colleges (Foster, 2018, p.5). So Further Education Colleges are the largest single provider category for this age range. The majority of students at sixth form colleges, like those remaining in school sixth forms, study for academic A Levels, as do some students at Further Education Colleges. But the majority of 16-19 years olds at Further Education Colleges are following

vocational courses at Levels 2 or 3, such as BTECs. Many older students and some 16-19 year olds are also studying for a range of vocational qualifications, part-time at Further Education Colleges, including those following a work-based learning route, via an intermediate apprenticeship.

As elite universities rarely select students with vocational qualifications, two main pathways have emerged. First, progression from a school sixth form via “A” Levels (subject to grades achieved) to elite, selecting university or alternatively, progression from a further Education College, via a vocational BTEC, to a recruiting university which was once a Polytechnic or College of Advanced Technology.

Degree Level apprenticeships have the potential to disrupt this typology by attracting high tariff students.

Given that, historically, the economic returns of attending a selecting university were considerably higher in most cases to attending a recruiting university, the question arises: why do students choose a Further Education College rather than a school sixth form? For some it may be the more adult environment of a college or they have a deep interest in their vocational subject of choice. But for some others there has been little option. Performance league tables of secondary schools, which can have a profound impact on the popularity of schools in a highly competitive market, are partly based on A Level results (Richards, 2016, p.10). Many schools, including local state comprehensive school, do not allow students to study a subject at A Level unless the student achieves at least a B Grade in the corresponding GCSE subject. Students with C Grades or below can therefore only study at a more open access Further Education College. Academic sixth form colleges tend to be at least as selective in this area as secondary schools.

## Reform

By around 2010, England was faced with a post compulsory education and training system that was seen to be:

- hierarchical
- insufficiently meeting the skills’ needs of industry and the career needs of students
- expensive for tertiary students who incurred large tuition and maintenance debts, which discouraged many potential students from poorer backgrounds.

The post-compulsory education and training system was also seen as having:

- a confusing plethora of low value, vocational qualifications. Over 21,000 vocational qualifications were on the national register developed by 158 commercially orientated, qualification awarding bodies. Plumbing training providers alone had a choice of 5 qualifications
- an apprenticeship system that lacked rigour, put quantity above quality and was failing to meet the needs of industry and individuals
- poor information and guidance systems

These issues were exposed in a number of national reports commissioned by the Government.

The 2011 Wolf Review of Vocational Education exposed the large number of low level and low value vocational qualifications that were being used by secondary schools to ‘game’ the performance or league tables at Levels 2 and 3. If a secondary school students passed a BTEC First Certificate in any vocational discipline, it was counted as equivalent to meeting the national minimum standard of obtaining 5 GCSEs at Grades A to C. Many schools found vocational courses an easier route. This in turn devalued vocational qualifications more widely. These qualifications were never intended for this purpose and were often designed to supplement “off the job training” for those in employment. However, this process was facilitated by a system whereby qualifications were designed and administered by external “awarding bodies” which were separate from providers. Awarding bodies are operated by both charitable institutions and commercial companies, such as the City and Guilds of London Institute and Pearson’s which owns BTEC. Awarding bodies operated in a market for qualifications which they sold to providers for delivery.

The government has acted on this report and reduced the number of qualifications that can both count and be funded.

Doug Richard chaired a Review of Apprenticeships in 2012 (Richard, 2012). The review’s principal conclusions were that apprenticeships needed greater rigour and to be more employer driven. The review resulted in outcome-focused apprenticeship standards replacing apprenticeship frameworks. Apprenticeships should be principally about initial workplace training. The previous frameworks were more credential focused and mainly developed by Sector Skills Organisations. Standards are developed by “trailblazer” groups that represent groups of employers and sector organisations, and always include an end-point assessment, conducted by a third party, independent of the employer and the training provider.

The most comprehensive review was chaired in 2016 by Lord Sainsbury (i.e. the Sainsbury Review). His Independent Panel on Technical Education advocated for a strong and simplified technical education option, covering both college and work-based learning, which would be a viable alternative to academic routes. The system would be centred on a common framework of 15 industry-orientated pathways or routes which would encompass all employment-based and college-based technical education at Levels 2 to 5. These would give young people and adults clarity about which programmes to follow in order to target particular careers. The review argued that college-based and apprenticeship routes should both achieve common outcomes-based standards. It therefore recommended that the remit of the peak body, the largely autonomous Institute for Apprenticeships, be expanded to cover all technical education as well as apprenticeships. As the review stated, “*This will allow the Institute to maintain a single, common framework of technical education standards, qualifications and quality assurance.*” (Great Britain Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Great Britain Department for Education 2016, p.10). Technical education standards would be set by the Institute with input from industry experts.

The Sainsbury Review wanted the market-based system which had allowed 158 awarding bodies to put 21,000 qualifications on the Register of Regulated Qualifications to be replaced by a licensing system at Levels 2 or 3 which would allow only a single qualification for each occupation to be licensed and offered. Because arrangements at Levels 4 and 5 were different, it recommended the Institute for Apprenticeships maintain a register of publicly fundable qualifications so as to start the

simplification processes here. The Augar Report was concerned about a decline in enrolments in Level 4 and 5 qualifications.

The Sainsbury Review recommended that every college-based route should begin with a two-year 'common core' programme suitable for 16-18 year olds which would be aligned to the work-based learning, apprenticeship route.

*“After the common core, individuals should specialise to prepare for entry into an occupation or set of occupations. Beyond the age of 18 we also anticipate that many individuals will continue to study technical education at a higher level – full-time, part-time alongside work, or through a higher or degree apprenticeship”* (Great Britain Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Great Britain Department for Education 2016, p.12).

All students or apprentices would be expected to achieve certain standards in English and Mathematics. For students with difficulty, the system allowed for a transition year, post age 16. Funded work placements were seen as essential for college-based learners.

The Sainsbury Review also recommended improved careers' advice, especially working with schools to explain the proposed consolidated routes.

The UK Government unequivocally accepted all the recommendations of Sainsbury and began implementation with the publication of 2016 Post-16 Skills Plan.

The Sainsbury Review referred to consolidating some delivery institutions. The Post-16 Skills Plan announced the creation of National Colleges which would be beacons of skills development for new areas of the economy. Examples quoted included high-speed rail and digital. They were given two critical roles – to be state of the art in terms of delivery and staff and to design and award qualifications that other colleges could use. This was unusual in the English system outside of universities, where Colleges tended to deliver courses developed and assessed by third party awarding bodies. They would concentrate on higher level credentials at Levels 4 and 5. The possibility was also raised that they should seek degree awarding powers at Level 6 so that they could contribute to degree apprenticeships where industry had critical gaps and needs.

The Post-16 Skills Plan (Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016) also attempted to address shortages in STEM skills, through the introduction of Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to provide technical education in STEM subjects at Levels 3, 4 and 5 (Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016, p.35). These would build existing providers but would have their own independent identity and would extend to governance arrangements which would directly involve employers, and national branding (Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016, p.35).

The Post-16 Skills Plan included a useful graphic of the proposed new system (shown below), comparing it with the academic route:

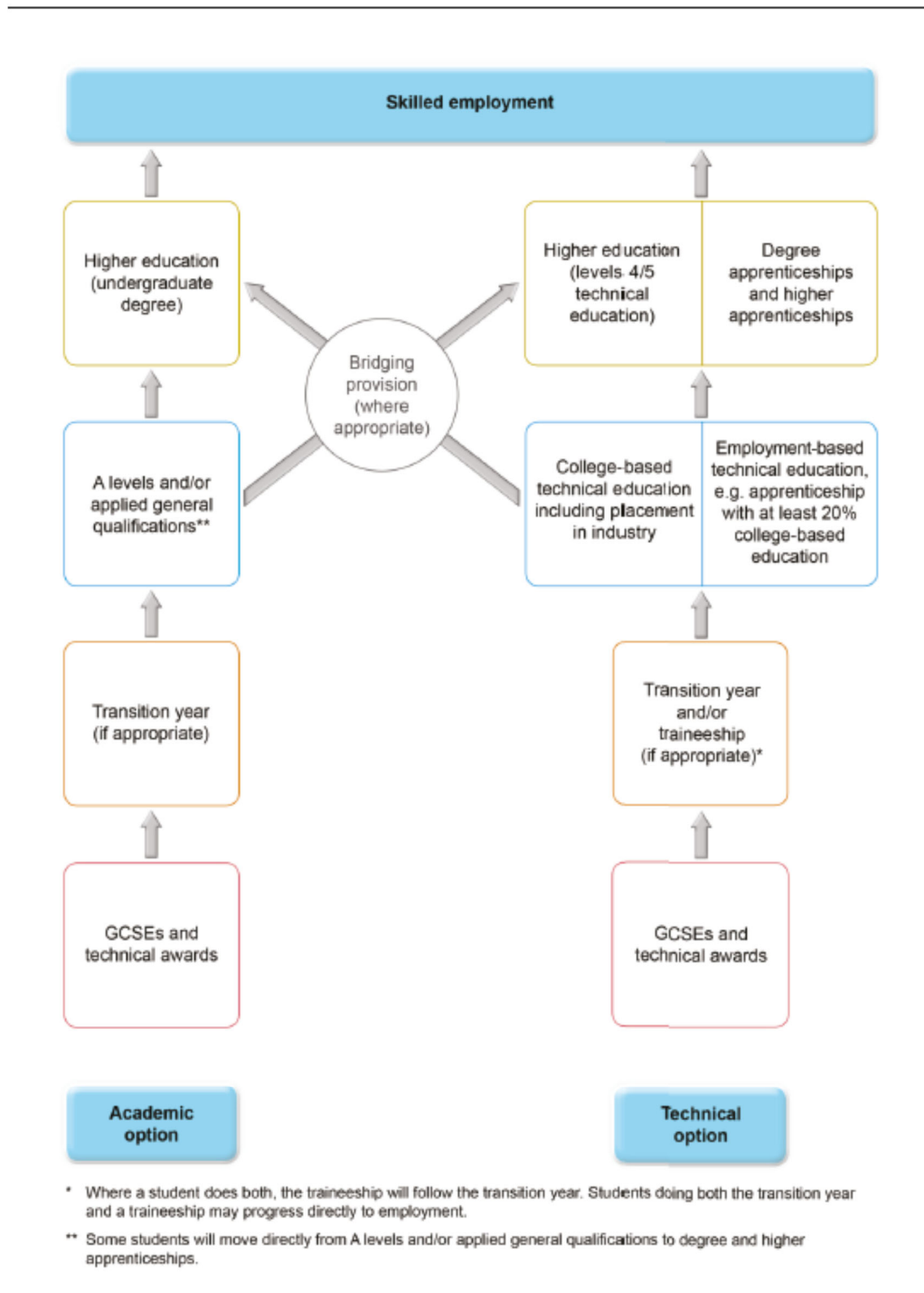


Figure 1: How the academic and technical options would work

(Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, 2016, p.15)

Note that, given the speed of change, this diagram needs to be added to, to delineate fully the range of changes in the English system.



## T Levels

The desire outlined in the Sainsbury Review to rationalise the plethora of vocational qualifications resulted in the development of T Levels by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Delivery will commence in 2020. T Levels are two year programmes designed primarily, but not exclusively, for 16-19 year olds as an alternative to academic A Levels or a work-based learning apprenticeship. They have three elements including:

- The development of technical knowledge and skills specific to the student's chosen industry or occupation
- An industry placement of at least 45 days in their chosen industry or occupation
- Continued emphasis on relevant maths, English and digital skills.

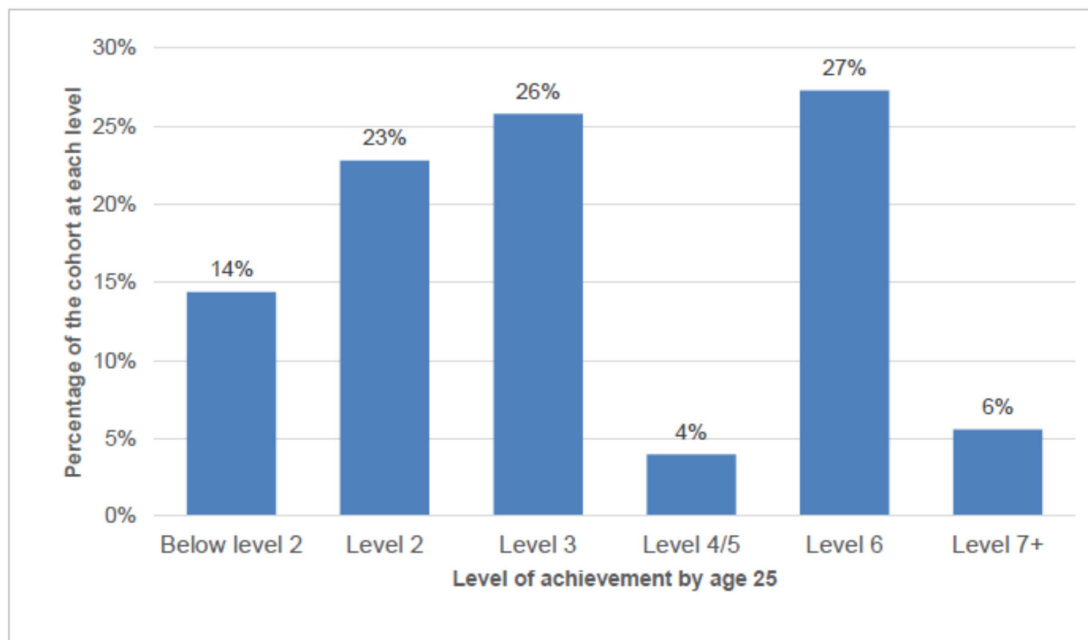
According to the Institute:

*"T Levels will become one of three major options for students to study at Level 3, alongside apprenticeships for those who wish to study and train for a specific occupation 'on the job', and A Levels for students who wish to continue academic education"* (Institute for Apprentices and Technical Education, 2019, unpagged).

Within the 15 technical routes set up by the Sainsbury Review, 11 have T Levels planned, with each route expected to have 1-3 T Levels within it.

### Progression from T Levels – the possibility of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)

The standard progression route for full-time school and college students in England has become from a Level 3 qualification to a Level 6 Bachelor's degree (Note that in the Australian Qualifications Framework a Bachelor Degree is Level 7). This is irrespective of whether the Level 3 qualifications are academic A Levels or a vocational qualification, like a BTEC National and in the future T Levels. The Augar Report was not unique in lamenting that qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, such as the long established Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/D), were now being over-looked by students in favour of degrees, even though there was industry demand for these higher technician and trade skills. A government review paper found that Level 4 and 5 qualifications were mainly taken by part-time students aged over 25 (Great Britain Department for Education 2018, p.9). Except for apprenticeships at these levels, they seem to be a niche qualification level used for skills' extension and updating by existing employees, which take less time and are at a lower level than a degree or post graduate qualification. What is surprising is how much smaller their numbers are than Level 3 or Level 6 qualifications.



**Figure 5: Highest Level achieved by age 25 – England, cohort that undertook GCSEs 2004/05**

As in England, qualifications above Level 3 are classified as higher education (there is no cross over like in Australia, where Level 4/5 Diplomas can be Higher Education or VET) and it is interesting to note that the largest deliverers of these qualifications are Further Education Colleges (Great Britain Department for Education 2018, p.8)

Provider Type	Learner numbers	(%)
Further Education College	111,640	52
Higher Education Institution	69,820	32
Private Training Provider/Local Authority/Other	34,170	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>216,170</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1: Total volume of Level 4-5 learners by provider type, including apprentices**

Source: ILR 2015/16 & HESA 2015/16 - Mapping the Higher Technical Landscape, RCU (2018)

The UK Government is currently consulting on Level 4 and 5 qualifications in an attempt to increase their volume and standing. One suggestion is that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education “kite mark” or quality endorse some of these qualifications as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) (Belgutay, J, 2019). Whether this will also help raise the status of technical education, as UK Ministers hope, will be interesting when so many people now have a degree and degree entry is relatively straightforward and accessible.

## Apprenticeship Levy

The apprenticeship levy came into effect in April 2017 for all UK employers with a payroll of over £3 million per year. The levy is set at 0.5% of the employer's payroll, though there is an apprenticeship levy allowance of £15,000 per financial year. The levy is paid into an apprenticeship service account that has to be spent on apprenticeship training and assessment. The Government will top-up what the employer pays into the levy with a further 10% contribution (Powell, 2019, p.10).

Employers are able to transfer unused apprenticeship funds to other employers. They may transfer a maximum amount of 10% of their annual funds, but can make as many transfers as they wish.

Smaller employers with a payroll of less than £3 million who do not pay the levy will pay 10% of the cost of training and assessment of apprentices, with the government contributing the remaining 90% (up to the upper limit of the funding band). This decreases to 5% in 2019.

The Government estimated that the levy will allow double investment in apprenticeships by 2020 from 2010 Levels, to £2.5bn per year

## Degree Level Apprenticeships

Degree and degree-level apprenticeships follow the same development route as all apprenticeships. A "trailblazer group" (see Appendix 'Glossary of Terms') of employers develops a proposal for an occupation that fits with one of the 15 industry routes. The proposal includes defining relevant occupational standards and the specifications for end-point assessments. A credential – in this case a degree – can be specified as part of this process. Technically an apprenticeship could specify outcomes at Level 6 without specifying a specific credential. The proposal is then sent for review and approval by the Institute for Apprenticeships and various reviewing bodies. Elements of the apprenticeship and the apprenticeship delivery are subject to review, regulation and inspection by various national review and inspection bodies including the Office for Students (OfS) and OFSTED.

At a recent conference on degree-level apprenticeships (Westminster Higher Education Forum, 2019), both employers and higher education providers stressed that a degree-level apprenticeship was more than just a traditional "sandwich" degree or a degree with a specified level of work placements. The apprentice was an employee not a student and the credential was a subsidiary part of the overall training, not as in sandwich degrees the dominant part, hence the distinguishing level of employer involvement.

At this same Westminster Higher Education Forum, a number of employers stressed the superiority of degree apprenticeships over traditional sandwich courses and graduate programmes. Jenny Taylor, UK Foundation Leader, UK Early Professional Programmes, IBM stated that,

*"I would say as a manager of graduates and apprentices that if I had to choose, then a degree apprentice with four years training on the job and at university, they are gold dust. We still have to train graduates, even if they come to us with a computer science degree, but we do not have to further train degree apprentices. And I would expect that by the time they come to the end of their four years they have had at least one promotion if not two, and we are getting to that stage now so I can say that with confidence." (Taylor, 2019).*

Apprenticeships starts at higher levels have been increasing – as have degree level apprenticeships, though it is very early days given that degree apprenticeships have only begun to be available in the past 2 years. Overall apprenticeship numbers declined after the introduction of the levy and standards replacing frameworks. Some say the decline was because of the complexity of the new system – others by higher standards, such as a commitment to a minimum 20% off the job training component and an emphasis on more and advanced and higher levels.

Apprenticeship starts in England by level since 2009/10, thousands									
	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
<b>Level</b>									
Intermediate (Level 2)	191	301	329	293	286	298	291	261	161
Advanced (Level 3)	88	154	188	208	145	182	191	198	166
Higher (Levels 4-7)	2	2	4	10	9	20	27	37	48
Level 4	1	2	3	4	4	7	10	12	17
Level 5	-	-	1	6	5	13	17	23	20
Level 6	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	2	6
Level 7	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	5
<b>Proportion</b>									
Intermediate (Level 2)	68%	66%	63%	57%	65%	60%	57%	53%	43%
Advanced (Level 3)	31%	34%	36%	41%	33%	36%	37%	40%	44%
Higher (Levels 4-7)	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	4%	5%	7%	13%

**Notes:** Proportion is the percentage of all apprenticeship starts made at each level.

Table from: Apprenticeship Statistics: England. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06113, 11 February 2019, p13

### Implications and lessons for Australia

The reforms announced in England are potentially more radical than those that have been announced in Australia over the past decade. Critically, they recognise and acknowledge the privileges that Higher Education has traditionally enjoyed over Technical Education. They are also probably more integrated and coherent across the tertiary sector.

The English technical education route has been strengthened, consolidated and simplified. Funding disparities with Higher Education should be addressed if the recommendations of the Augar Report are implemented. Clearer pathways now exist between technical, upper secondary, further and higher education with the advent of the 15 “Sainsbury” routes, as well as T Levels and higher and degree- level apprenticeships. Even the comparatively small number of qualifications at Levels 4 and 5 are under review. Whether this will weaken the hegemony of the academic routes is still open to question.

Independent end-point assessments for apprentices will ensure quality and consistency in outcome standards. This is a far more comprehensive than current Australian practice in external validation

and verification in VET though it has been raised as an issue in the recent Joyce Report, *Strengthening Skills - Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (Joyce, 2019). Currently it is only really matched by the capstone assessments in limited areas, like electrical engineering.

English students can make a reversible choice to follow an academic or technical route at age 16. Many choose an apprenticeship or to study for a technical qualification (from 2020 a T Level) full-time at a Further Education College. There are currently few full time 16-19 year olds in Australian TAFE campuses. Maybe this is a missed opportunity for young people and a waste of assets in terms of access to specialised staff and buildings. If TAFE Colleges were to provide a full-time Year 11/12 technical or vocational alternative, they would need to upgrade their staff's skills in dealing with 16-19 year olds in terms of pastoral care. It would also add to the argument for a far better and national system of careers' advice for all of those at school, beginning in the earliest years.

Emphasising "technical and professional" education rather than "vocational" education is an attempt to emphasise aspiration and ambition rather than second chance and remediation. There is clearly a notion in this of selection, as well as choice.

Academic routes in England have traditionally led to elite jobs in such "higher" professions as law, medicine and government. But given the expansion in university participation, the academic route today does not guarantee an elite job; rather it gives a "license to hunt". Increasing numbers of young people with academic degrees have found it difficult to achieve graduate-level jobs

The apprenticeship levy could be a game changer in this respect. A degree apprentice is clearly on an almost guaranteed pathway to a graduate-level position. Though small but growing in absolute numbers, degree-level apprenticeships are attracting very high achieving applicants because a degree can be achieved student debt free.

Employers might have seen the apprenticeship levy as another tax. This is how industry lobby groups portrayed such a levy when it was tried unsuccessfully in Australia in the 1990s. It makes it unlikely that such a levy could be re-introduced here. This might be unfortunate because some English employers are beginning to see the benefits of the levy in attracting high calibre applicants to address critical skills shortages.

This highlights the fact that "policy tourism" can be dangerous. What looks the same in reality is different because of culture, context and history. Though caution may be appropriate, there is nothing wrong with, and some things to be gained in learning from each other.

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## Appendix – Glossary of terms (and their Australian counterparts)

English term	Description	Australia
A Level	Advanced Level qualifications (known as A Levels) are subject-based academic qualifications at Level 3 that can lead to university, further study, training, or work. Students normally study three or more A Levels over two years in a school sixth form or FE College. Usually assessed by a series of external examinations	Similar to HSC and VCE in Australia but requiring an extra year of study (Year 13) and arguably more selective. UK university entrance guide states to start A Levels you normally need: at least five GCSEs at grades 9 to 4/A* to C and at least grade B in the specific subject(s) you want to study
Apprentice	A training job which requires an apprenticeship contract between the apprentice employee and the employer. Regulated by statute.	Similar
Apprentice Levels UK	Intermediate Level 2 Advanced Level 3 Higher Level 4 and 5 Degree Level 6 and 7	Traineeship Trade Higher or Diploma No equivalent
Awarding Body	An awarding body, in the United Kingdom, is an examination board which sets examinations and awards qualifications. Some like AQA specialise in school level academic qualifications like GCSEs and A-Levels. Others like City and Guilds or Pearson's (BTEC) specialise in vocational qualifications. They are regulated by Ofqual. They are not training providers themselves and are at sub degree level.	In school sector in Australia similar to State Boards of Studies. No vocational equivalent as RTOs are licensed to award their own qualifications from Training Packages by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).
College of Advanced Technology	A type of higher education institution established in 1956 in England and Wales following the publication of a government white paper on technical education which listed 24 technical colleges with 75% advanced work.	Nearest equivalent, former College of Advanced Education (CAE)



	Became universities in 1963 e.g. Brunel University	
College of Further education (FE College)	Publicly owned but autonomous training provider offering mainly Further Education courses up to Level 3 and usually a smaller number of higher education courses at Levels 4, 5 and occasionally 6	TAFE institute
GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)	GCSE is an academic qualification, generally taken in a number of subjects by pupils in secondary education in England. Studies for GCSE examinations generally take place over a period of two or three academic years (depending upon the subject, school, and exam board), starting in Year 9 or Year 10 for the majority of students, with examinations being sat at the end of Year 11.	Year 10 school certificate – but possibly of less academic standing as GCSE taken at end of Year 11
Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ)	Suggested brand name for Level 4 and 5 qualifications subject to approval by Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education	Equivalent to Diplomas in AQF
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education	The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education is an employer led crown Non Departmental Public Body. It oversees the development, approval and publication of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans as well as the occupational maps for T Levels and apprenticeships. The Institute is responsible for Technical Qualifications, which is the main, classroom-based element of the T Level.	Nothing directly equivalent
Institute of Technology (IoT)	In UK Post 16 Skills Plan: plan to introduce Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to provide technical education in STEM subjects at levels 3, 4 and 5. Each IoT is likely to build on infrastructure that already	Nothing directly equivalent

	exists but will have its own independent identity, governance arrangements which directly involve employers, and national branding.	
National Colleges	In UK Post 16 Skills Plan: lead on skills for important areas of the economy, such as high-speed rail and digital. National Colleges have two main roles: teaching students at the highest levels, using teachers with up-to-date understanding of the industry and in environments which accurately simulate the workplace; and awarding qualifications in their specialist area and setting standards which other colleges across the country could use. National Colleges will focus on addressing higher-level skills gaps (predominately Levels 4 and 5) but may also look to deliver education and training up to Level 6, including degree apprenticeships,.	Nothing directly equivalent
Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)	Inspects services providing education and skills (including FE Colleges and apprenticeship providers) for learners of all ages. Also inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.	Inspectoral body. Remote overlap with ASQA
Office for Students (OfS)	Regulates the higher education system in England. Distributes government higher education funding to more than 300 providers in England. Providers must register with the OfS to receive funding. Not involved with Further Education students and courses.	
Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	Regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. Responsible for qualification levels and register of regulated qualifications	

Oxbridge	Term applying to medieval foundation universities of Oxford and Cambridge	
Polytechnic	Were higher education (not further) teaching institutions in England, offering higher diplomas, undergraduate degree and post graduate education (masters and PhDs) with an emphasis on applied learning and technology. They were not self-accrediting as their degrees were awarded by the Council for National Academic Awards. All became self-accrediting universities in 1992. E.g. Polytechnic of Central London became University of Westminster	No real Australian equivalent. Nearest former College of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology.
Qualification Levels (Ofqual) with examples of regulated qualifications	Level 1 - GCSE Grades D to G Level 2- GCSE Grades A to C Level 3 - A Level, BTEC National Level 4 -Higher National Cert Level 5 -Higher National Dip Level 6- Bachelor Degree Level 7- Master Degree Level 8- Doctorate See for Ofqual: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels">https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels</a>	Similar to Australian Qualification Framework AQF, though the AQF has 10 Levels with a Bachelor Degree at Level 7 and an Advanced Diploma at Level 6. See for AQF: <a href="https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-levels">https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-levels</a>
Russell Group	The self-selecting Russell Group represents 24 research intensive UK universities. Perceived by some to be top of UK academic hierarchy.	Similar to Group of 8, research intensive “sandstone universities”
T Levels	T Levels are two-year technical study programmes that will become one of three major options for students to study at level 3 alongside apprenticeships and A levels.	Elements of Australian vocational qualifications and VCAL
Trailblazers	Employer groups called trailblazers to develop apprenticeship standards and assessment plans.	Elements of Industry reference Committees in Training Plan development