

Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education (The Sainsbury Report) and the Government's Skills Plan response

On Friday 8th July the report by the [Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), chaired by Lord Sainsbury, was published. In parallel, the Government published its [Skills Plan](#) which responds to the panel's recommendations and sets out its overarching framework for the post-16 skills system.

The Government said, "Together, they herald the most radical reforms to post-16 education since A Levels were introduced. The Skills Plan presents a vision of a radically simplified system, with students presented with the clear choice of a high quality technical option at age 16, alongside the already highly regarded academic option. Building on the apprenticeship reforms, the technical option will provide students with a clear line of sight from education into skilled employment."

Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education – April 2016 - summary of main recommendations

The vast majority of 16 year olds will choose between two main options:

1. The academic option, for those who are aiming to progress to a full-time undergraduate course at university at 18. This option includes A-levels and applied general qualifications. Reform of this option fell outside the Panel's remit.
2. The technical option, for those wishing to gain the technical knowledge and skills required to progress to skilled employment at 18. There are two possible modes of delivery:
 - apprenticeship;
 - a two-year, college-based technical education route.

There will be short, flexible, bridging courses to enable individuals to move between the academic and technical education options (in either direction) and to support adults returning to study.

There will be 15 technical education routes. 5 of these can be seen as progressing from D&T and/or related Technical Awards pre-16:

- Catering and Hospitality
- Construction
- Creative and Design
- Digital
- Engineering and Manufacturing

It says that details of all 15 routes should be shared with young people from an early age.

Each route will:

- be aligned to apprenticeships
- provide an initial 'common core' for everyone on the chosen route, followed by specialised options which prepare students for entry into a specific occupation or set of occupations
- include:
 - a single set of maths and English 'exit' requirements

- short duration work experience/work tasters (in year 1)
- a high-quality, structured work placement (in year 2)

Individuals who are not ready to access a technical education route at age 16 will be offered a transition year to help them to prepare for further study or employment. The transition year will be flexible and tailored to the student's prior attainment and aspirations.

Technical education qualifications at levels 2 and 3 will be based on requirements defined by panels of industry professionals convened by the Institute for Apprenticeships and will be aligned with approved apprenticeship standards. They will be offered and awarded by a single body or consortium, under a licence awarded after an open competition. Each licence will run for a fixed term. For college-based technical education at levels 2 and 3, this means there will be only one tech level qualification for each occupation or cluster of occupations.

All qualifications used in college-based technical education should assess both the common core for the relevant route and the appropriate specialist/occupation-specific knowledge and skills. Assessments should include realistic tasks as well as synoptic assessment which, together, should test a student's ability to integrate and apply their knowledge and skills. All qualifications should include external assessment to ensure comparability and reliability.

The Report is also clear about the need to move away from the use of the term 'vocational education' towards 'technical and professional education' or simply 'technical education'. The report follows this convention and uses 'technical education' throughout, but is clear that this must not be simply re-badging of vocational education. "Rather, the Government must be explicit that to be described as technical education, a programme must focus on progression into skilled employment and require the acquisition of both a substantial body of technical knowledge and a set of practical skills valued by industry."

Post-16 Skills Plan - July 2016 – DfE, BIS

In the Foreword the Minister of State for Skills, Nick Boles, says, "We accept and will implement all of the Sainsbury panel's proposals, unequivocally where that is possible within current budget constraints."

After this caveat, the paper goes on to repeat and accept most of the Sainsbury Report. There is one significant addition in paras 2.4-2.6 which refer to the necessary groundwork to be done pre-16. Paragraph 2.6. states,

"At pre-16 we will: continue to equip schools to embed a knowledge-based curriculum as the cornerstone of an excellent, academically rigorous education continue to embed reforms to assessment and qualifications, including more robust and rigorous GCSEs; and the ambition that at least 90% of pupils in mainstream education enter GCSEs in the EBacc subjects of English, maths, science, history or geography, and languages ensure a knowledge-based curriculum is complemented by the development of the character traits and fundamental British values that will help prepare children and young people for adult life."

The Design and Technology Association believes this is completely counter to the needs and approaches identified in the Skills Plan. The Association will continue to campaign for D&T to be recognised as a vital part of the education of all young people and for there to be urgent changes to school accountability measures to better facilitate this.