

# FE WEEK

## FE reform consultations

Funding and Accountability System - part 1 - funding

11:00 - 12:00

**Nick Linford**

Q&A session with editor Shane Chownen

Tuesday 17 August 2021

**Have a question?**

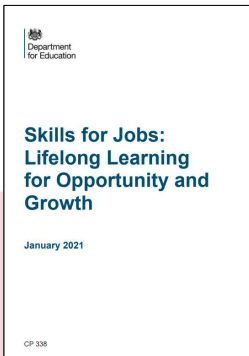
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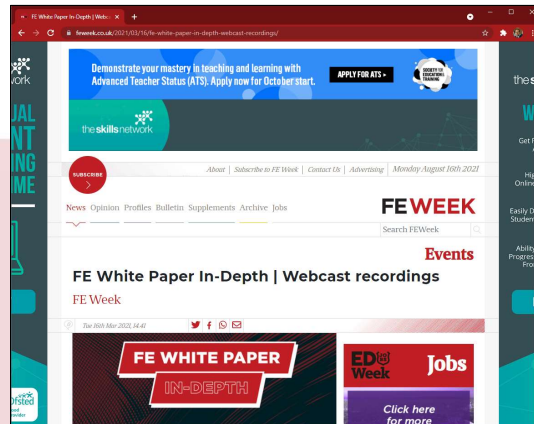
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## FE White paper signals new legislation

Published January 2021



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>



<https://feweek.co.uk/2021/03/16/fe-white-paper-in-depth-webcast-recordings/>

Access videos of all six webcast sessions from the FE Week website



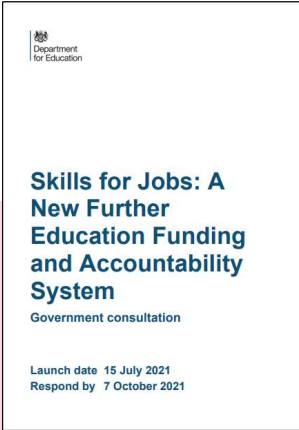
# FE WEEK

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## Consultation

### A New Further Education and Accountability System

Published 15 July 2021



**Skills for Jobs: A New Further Education Funding and Accountability System**

Government consultation

Launch date 15 July 2021  
Respond by 7 October 2021

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<https://consult.education.gov.uk/fe-funding/reforms-to-funding-and-accountability/>



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## Purpose of the reforms



“I am personally committed to transform further education, so young people and adults **gain skills employers value**”

“In the Skills for Jobs White Paper, we set out our vision for colleges: “to give people the advanced technical and higher technical skills they need to get good jobs, which will **boost the nation’s productivity** and support progression.”

“give **colleges** a renewed sense of **autonomy** so they can focus their attention on supporting their students into good jobs and meeting this country’s local and national skills needs, delivered through a new Skills Fund”

“I propose to introduce a new **Accountability Agreement** which will give colleges the freedom to decide for themselves how best to support the needs of their students and local employers”

*Is college autonomy compatible with accountability?*



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## Focus on outcomes and simplification\*

“These reforms will ensure a shift in focus for the skills system towards one which focuses on supporting individuals to acquire skills which lead to employment”

“We will ask them [colleges] to focus on this core role”...“to give people the advanced technical and higher technical skills they need to get good jobs”

In the current system “there is little incentive to ensure the mix of provision leads to sustainable jobs for individuals and meets labour market needs.”

Reforms will be “simplifying the adult skills funding system and refocusing accountability onto the outcomes delivered”

\*Just colleges, universities and local authorities (not independent training providers)

*Is it possible to simplify the funding system when switching incentives from inputs to outputs?*



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## Colleges in the driving seat?

“The funding and accountability proposals described in this consultation are two parts of a single model which **put colleges in the driving seat** for delivering outcomes. **Freed up from multiple funding rules** and restrictions but accountable for how they use this freedom to deliver the outcomes individuals deserve and the country needs”

But consultation does not cover:

- Apprenticeship accountability or funding
- 16-19 accountability or funding
- Devolved area accountability or funding
- Lifelong Loan Entitlement accountability or funding
- Funding for students aged 19-25 with high needs
- Capital funding (typically just for colleges)

*Surely multiple funding bodies and employers  
they listen to remain in the driving seat?*



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## Summary of funding proposals

“We envisage consulting on further detail on a range of areas following the Spending Review”

15. In summary:

We will reform the adult skills funding system so it is simpler, outcome focused and more effective. We set out our proposals in Chapter 1 and seek your views on the following areas:

- Establishing a new Skills Fund to bring together all direct funding for adult skills.
- Ensuring the system can support both qualification-based provision and non-qualification provision so adults can retrain and upskill in the most effective way.
- How a needs-based approach could be introduced to distribute funding across the country.
- How funding can be most effectively distributed between colleges in non-devolved areas, in particular:
  - What a simpler formula might look like if a system based on funding learners is retained
  - Moving to a lagged funding system
  - Delivering a multi-year funding regime
- What entitlements and eligibility rules should apply in a new system.
- How funding for Independent Training Providers and other non-grant funded providers would work in a reformed system.

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## The perceived problems

“Funding flows and eligibility rules are complicated leading to a focus on inputs and processes rather than outcomes” - *no real suggested solutions to the eligibility rules problem*

“The existing pattern of provision delivered by the system often fails to meet the skills needed by the labour market. Employers do not have enough influence over the skills offered in their local area and can find it hard to engage; labour market needs do not feature in the funding system in terms of the allocations to colleges or the funding rates paid; and colleges are not accountable for the outcomes they achieve with their funding”

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## The reform objectives

30. Our objectives in reforming the system are to deliver a system which is:

- **Simpler and more streamlined:** We want funding delivered in a clear, logical way through a minimal number of routes, minimising requirements on providers and on local and national government and reducing administrative costs.
- **Outcome-focused:** Funding should be directed towards provision that will deliver the greatest benefits to individuals, employers and the economy and society more widely. The system should be forward-looking, responding to changing economic and local area needs.
- **Effective:** funding should be distributed and used efficiently, fairly and transparently, with clarity on where decisions will be made on how funding should be used and delivered in a way which supports providers to plan provision strategically.

DfE Q1 & Q2: Do you agree with objectives?



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## A new Skills Fund

“To simplify funding for adult skills, we propose to bring together all adult skills funding which is provided directly (rather than supported through the Apprenticeships or loan system) by the Department to colleges into a single Skills Fund”

*This appears to just be renaming the Adult Education Budget. Does not even include NSF funded bootcamps and 16-18 and 19-24 traineeships remain separate. \*facepalm\**

“We see the Skills Fund as resourcing a mixture of both qualification-based provision and non-qualification (non-regulated) provision that enables broader learning programmes and innovative skills provision to be developed, thus supporting individuals to acquire these skills” - so no different from AEB

*Consultation questions remain very high-level and broad, like: “How can we ensure this provision is of high-quality?”*



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## More freedoms?

“Our new Skills Fund will give **more freedom to colleges** to meet local needs in a way they see fit while ensuring that taxpayer money can still be effectively targeted to deliver on the government’s agenda”

“We remain committed to introducing a multi-year funding regime, subject to the Spending Review framework, so that colleges can take a more strategic approach to planning their provision in line with Local Skills Improvement Plans” - this will never happen

*And exactly what freedoms are being proposed that colleges don't currently have? - because I can't find any*



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## Future of devolved AEB

No change to current approach where devolved authorities are the funding body setting their own allocations, rates, rules, audit and accountability

Except, potentially moving away from a funding allocation model based on 2017/18 values to “a needs-based approach for setting the future funding share of the overall quantum for the devolved authorities (and for the residual share of the budget, used for colleges funded directly by the Department)”

After producing a complex calculation to redistribute allocations - this could be ignored for several years: “The move to a fairer needs-based system of funding for devolved authorities will inevitably result in a distributional shift which we will want to ensure is manageable. Transitional protection can smooth out the impact of this change over a number of years with a funding floor to limit % changes in budgets, with levels subject to a combination of affordability and limits on the gains”



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## Four high-level college funding options

1. Plan-led funding. *On the upside college would not face clawback for under-delivery. On the downside this requires DfE resource to agree/cost the plan (19+ provision more complex than 16-18) and lacks incentives to deliver what's agreed. They don't seem to favour this*
2. Keeping historical allocation approach. *"a pragmatic view could be to continue with historical allocations for a period of time, allowing colleges time to respond to the new focus on outcomes and supporting individuals and employers through the recovery from the pandemic" - seems to me they've already decided to stick to current approach but without clawback (there are currently already tolerances)*
3. Needs based approach. *"A variation on the plan-based approach would see calculations being made for a local area, such as a county council area, based on the needs-based formula set out earlier" - "this would lead to challenges around learners crossing local area boundaries" - just as there is now with devolution*
4. Activity based approach (like apprenticeships) - *"This approach would also, of necessity, involve some measures to control total costs across the sector." Colleges hate this approach as it does not guarantee monthly payments - or where it does - it includes year-end claw-back*

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## Reforming the funding formula

*"Funding based on the unit of activity" - Current funding rate "banding leads to a set of quite uneven funding rates which we think could be replaced by representing the course size as a full-time equivalent measure"... "For example, a full-time course typically consists of 600 GLHs and a course with 150 GLHs would count as 0.25 FTE, with a cap set at 1FTE"... "A similar approach could be used for nonregulated courses" - so basically funding by glh yet they still refer to "simpler set of funding bands" - so would it mirror the small number of 16-19 glh bands? Skills Matrix has 13 bands up to 389-580glh. And what about two-year full-time courses well over 1 FTE (such as the '1061 or more' Skills Matrix band)?*

*"If learners drop out after the qualifying period then the funding could be adjusted on a pro-rata basis [as is the current practice in AEB] or adjusted by 50%, as happens in the 16-19 system" - highly unlikely they will move away from monthly funding - which is what they are talking about but does make for a highly complex funding system*

*"We think we could have a small number of funding bands which would reflect both an assessment of relative cost and relative value" - wow! 'relative value' now throws in a whole new level of complexity*

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## Other formula elements

**Programme weighting** - No direct mention but they seem to be saying this is not needed (?) - and would be replaced by a 'relative value' weighting

**Disadvantage uplift** - seem to want to scrap this and replace it with a "single additional needs element"

**Area Cost uplift** - seem to want to keep this - but only those in the South East (especially London) get it so expect to see other urban areas calling for it

**Achievement element** - want to scrap this (as is the case for 16-19 funding) and rely on a new accountability system (to examine and drive college performance) - more on that later

**Co-funding** - "If co-funding was in place, the rates would adjust accordingly." - don't be surprised if co-funding is scrapped given by its very definition it is low priority provision

**Outcome based funding** - Appears to be no appetite to include any wider outcomes (e.g. job outcomes) in the funding formula itself. Even the current system has that for Traineeships and those that drop-out early

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## The small print...

### Upfront funding for growth areas

82. Currently, we provide distinct funding for specific programmes such as the level 3 offer or skills bootcamps up-front to providers in these areas of provision. This is achieved either through direct procurement or through making an up-front allocation. Because we will wish to see growth in such areas, using a lagged mechanism will not work and thus a different approach will be needed to support colleges delivering this growth. We therefore think there will be times when part of the Skills Fund might need a different mechanism for funding specific areas of provision.

So colleges will still be tendering for little pots of ring-fenced funds

*Is the only winner here the DfE civil servants micro-managing tenders, contracts, delivery outcomes and financial assurance (and only way in for ITPs not reliant on colleges - see next slide)*

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## Oh - and what about ITP?

“Our Skills for Jobs White Paper and the proposals in this consultation envisage colleges as the lead provider in delivering skills provision funded directly by government. Therefore, as now, grant funding of colleges and local authority education providers, will be the main funding flow in our new system for adult skills”

This section reads like ITPs can bid for the little pots for ‘growth areas’ but only way to access the actual Skills Fund would be through subcontracting from a college - not dissimilar to now but likely ‘growth areas’ much more restricted to specific areas and priorities

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## Transitional protection

“As we introduce changes, we will ensure their impact is made gradually through the use of transitional protection and consider whether ongoing limits are needed to manage the degree of year-to-year changes in their budgets that colleges experience. The level of transitional protection will be subject to affordability”

History has shown that transitional protection itself can be very complex to calculate and can last as long as the reforms - sometimes still in place when the next round of funding formula reforms inevitably come in 5-7 years

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## Key questions for me...

Skills Fund + growth areas (e.g. Bootcamps) + devolved areas = simplification?

LSIPs and a new statutory duty to keep provision under review = college freedom?

How does removing achievement element without even debating the introduction of a wider outcome element support a move to outcome-based funding?

With only 1 mention in context of simplifying if using lagged allocations, notably absent is proper consideration around the future of the much loved (?) single ILR data returns - something Bootcamp providers do not submit. Question is do we cling onto the benefits of one monthly data return for all national and devolved provision?



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## FE reform consultations

Funding and Accountability System - part 2 - funding  
13:00 - 14:00

**Nick Linford**

Q&A session with editor Shane Chowen

Tuesday 17 August 2021

### Have a question?

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# Consultation

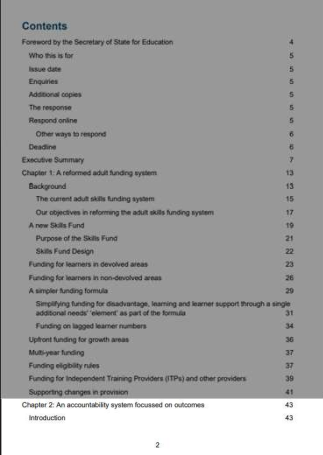
## A New Further Education and Accountability System

Published 15 July 2021

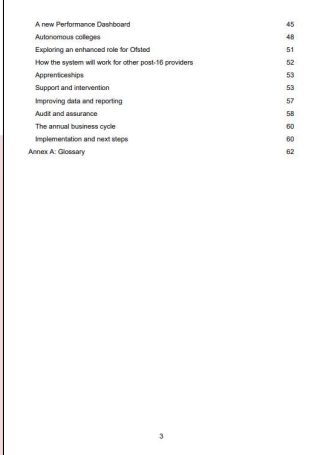


**Skills for Jobs: A New Further Education Funding and Accountability System**  
Government consultation


Launch date 15 July 2021  
Respond by 7 October 2021



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<https://consult.education.gov.uk/fe-funding/reforms-to-funding-and-accountability/>

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## Purpose of the reforms



“I am personally committed to transform further education, so young people and adults **gain skills employers value**”

“In the Skills for Jobs White Paper, we set out our vision for colleges: “to give people the advanced technical and higher technical skills they need to get good jobs, which will **boost the nation’s productivity** and support progression.”

“give **colleges** a renewed sense of **autonomy** so they can focus their attention on supporting their students into good jobs and meeting this country’s local and national skills needs, delivered through a new Skills Fund”

“I propose to introduce a new **Accountability Agreement** which will give colleges the freedom to decide for themselves how best to support the needs of their students and local employers”

*Is college autonomy compatible with accountability?*



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## Summary

“Colleges have an extra role in ensuring that both the nature and mix of their provision give people meaningful skills which open the door to good quality jobs, enable them to contribute to the wider economy and society, and help them lead enriched and fulfilling lives.”

### Chapter 2: An accountability system focussed on outcomes

#### Summary

We will reform the accountability system so it is focused on outcomes and will take a strategic approach to support and intervention. This chapter sets out proposals, and seeks views, on the following areas:

- Specifying the outcomes we expect colleges to deliver through a new Performance Dashboard.
- Introducing a new skills measure that will capture how well a college is delivering local and national skills needs.
- Introducing a new Accountability Agreement that will reinforce colleges’ autonomy while providing a clear sense of mission.
- Exploring an enhanced role for Ofsted to inspect how well a college is delivering local and national skills needs.
- Enabling the FE Commissioner to enhance its existing leadership role, with a renewed focus on driving improvement and championing excellence.
- Improving data quality and reducing the requirements we place on providers through student data collection and financial reporting.
- Retaining the necessary regulation and oversight to ensure the effective operation of the market, including providing assurance on the use of public funds.



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## Another dashboard...

“We propose to introduce a new Performance Dashboard which will capture how well a college is performing on these outcomes. We also propose to introduce new Accountability Agreements where we will articulate priorities and colleges will set out their plans, outlining how they will achieve these priorities. Through introducing these new system components we will reinforce colleges’ freedom to decide how best they achieve these outcomes”

“We would expect colleges to report on how they performed against their **targets** in subsequent Agreements”

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## Performance dashboard

No two colleges are the same, but...“We propose to introduce a new Performance Dashboard that will include a prioritised number of outcome and output measures”

“We propose to make the Dashboard publicly available” - *who doesn't love a league table?*

“The Dashboard will also be available for students who may want to use it to make informed choices about what and where to study” - *presumably focused on employability conversion rates*

116. We propose that the Performance Dashboard is designed around three principles:
- Measures need to be fair and comparable to enable colleges to act on the information.
  - We need to keep the headline number of measures to a minimum to create focus, without creating perverse incentives.
  - Measures should be outcome-based where possible.

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## New 'skills' measure

119. We propose that the Dashboard is structured in two parts:
- **Part 1:** core performance measures:
    - Quality - a provider's current Ofsted rating.
    - Financial Health - a provider's current ESFA rating. We do not currently publish this rating.
    - Skills - a new measure to capture how well a college is aligning its technical provision with local and national skills needs.
  - **Part 2:** supporting performance indicators:
    - A longer list of performance indicators that reflect what excellent delivery looks like. We envisage that these performance indicators will consist of student outcomes (including the needs of different cohorts), employers' and students' experience, and how well a provider is engaging with meeting local skills needs, including the balance of provision across different sectors, for example through Local Skills Improvement Plans. We will also look to include academic provision.

Presumably, if it's possible to fail this measure then a college faces at best, intervention and at worst legal challenge

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Skills measure (however set calculated)  
I think is only really biggie here

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## New 'skills' measure

"We are exploring options for the new skills measure in part one of the Dashboard.

"We are planning to produce a comparable value-added or progression measure covering the technical provision a college is delivering. For example, this measure could look at what proportion of a college's students move into a high value job after finishing their course, or alternatively what proportion move into a job in a related sector or occupation to their course.

The measure will need to take certain characteristics of their student population into account, such as prior attainment as well as the characteristics of the local labour market".

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## A partial dashboard annually??

“We envisage that colleges’ outcome and output targets will focus on provision where an improvement is needed and will not be an exhaustive list of all the provision a college is delivering at that time.”

“We expect that college corporations will produce the plan element of the Agreement, and while we want to work with a small number of providers to codesign the outline structure of the document, we want to keep guidance highlevel to give colleges an opportunity to think innovatively about how they best set out their plans. We would expect colleges to update their plan each academic year, though we would not anticipate major changes each year as outcome targets will take time to materialise.”

“we publish the documents in a central gov.uk location.”

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## Role of Ofsted to be ‘enhanced’

We are “considering how information from a college’s Performance Dashboard and Accountability Agreement could be used during inspections, as well as how to ensure that clear reporting against meeting local needs feeds into decisions on improvement support and intervention.”

Everything else is “subject to affordability” such as moving back from 5 to 3 year max for full inspection - which isn’t looking likely!

Also - remember that whilst the DfE funds Ofsted - inspectorate are meant to be answerable to Parliament - so could simply ignore the DfE

Different accountability regimes for schools, academies and any courses funded by the OfS

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## What about ITPs

Consultation basically says no direct Skills Fund for Independent Training Providers - and there will be a new register they have to get themselves on before a college consider subcontracting

Only access to direct funding is through tendering and “commercial arrangements”. No clues as to what the accountability will be for these contracts

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## FE Commissioner

“The FE Commissioner will take on a new responsibility for supporting any colleges underperforming specifically on the skills measure in between Ofsted inspections.”

“The FE Commissioner will provide high-quality practitioner expertise as part of a toolkit of peer-to-peer support”..plus “new ones including resource management advice to help them operate more efficiently using costed curriculum planning.”

“In addition, we believe that the FE Commissioner has a crucial role to play in acting as a champion for the sector, celebrating successes and setting a cultural shift towards a system of continuous improvement.”

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## Definition of success?

“Our proposals for new and improved accountability shift the system towards measuring colleges on how well they help people get good jobs.”



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## Data capture (they mean the ILR)

“We are exploring how we can use advances in technology to improve how this is done, particularly to ensure data can be shared between colleges and the Department more easily than the existing process of monthly submitting of data”

“for courses requiring physical attendance, to record attendance simply through scanning QR codes”

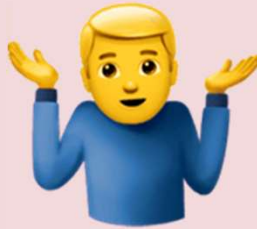


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## Audit 'flexing'

"Our current assurance framework combines our own assurance programme and 'local' assurance delivered by internal and external auditors. By flexing our assurance framework, we expect it will result in the reduction in the Agency's assurance programme for the new Skills Fund, provided the requirements of the National Audit Office are met. We will continue to assure public money on the delivery of adult learning activity while recognising a shift in provider focus to delivering national and regional skills priorities, and outcomes. We will conduct a review and report back publicly with proposals."



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## FE reform consultations

National Skills Funding Consultation  
16:00 - 17:00

**Nick Linford**

Q&A session with editor Shane Chowen

Tuesday 17 August 2021

### Have a question?

Please use the comment box to submit your question. Nick will review all incoming questions and try to ask as many as possible during the session.

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## National Skills Funding consultation



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Note: Although published on the same day as the funding and accountability consultation, you only have until 17 September to respond (not 7 October)

This one was written by the DfE's "National Skills Fund Division"

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<https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation/>

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## National Skills Funding consultation

"We had planned to consult on the National Skills Fund in Spring 2020 but were delayed by the onset of the pandemic"

Seems they want quick answers (before October) to make quick funding plans/allocations/tenders to spend rest of NSF in 2021/22 (before April 2022 and before next spending review period)

Nothing about this seems well thought through as it's not actually about the funding formula or funding rates

But it could be used to justify some sensible changes (like removing 'firstness')

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<https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation/>

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## Feedback sought on current NSF

“This consultation focuses on three primary areas: free level 3 qualifications for adults, Skills Bootcamps, and meeting critical skills priorities. Funding beyond the Financial Year 2021-22 is subject to future Spending Reviews.”

1. **Adult Level 3 offer:** “Through National Skills Fund investment, this year we have launched free level 3 qualifications for adults, giving adults without a first level 3 qualification the chance to access around 400 free courses”
2. **Bootcamps:** “This year we are continuing to test and expand our Skills Bootcamps, which offer [level 3 and above] flexible courses that provide adults with in-demand skills and then fast-track them to an interview with an employer”
3. **Other short courses?:** “this year we are also using National Skills Fund investment to meet critical skills priorities which are below degree level.”

“The responses from this consultation will help shape the provision which is **currently funded through National Skills Fund investment**. We have also published a consultation on reforms to FE Funding and Accountability. National Skills Fund investment will move to being delivered through our reformed funding system, when established”



<https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation/>

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## Adult level 3 offer

“We want to ensure as many eligible adults as possible can benefit from this offer, so through this section we are exploring how we can make these free qualifications even more accessible to a wide range of people”

Obvious answer seems to be to remove all or some of the current barriers. Currently:

- > Must be your first full level 3 qualification
- > Must be on a limited list of available full level 3 qualifications
- > Must be with a provider that has available AEB funding
- > You must live in the right English postcode where funding available
- > Level 3 apprenticeships are not eligible
- > Bursary funding or loans are not available



<https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation/>

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## Ladder rungs before Level 3

“Q25. How can providers best support adults without a level 3 to access the level 3 qualifications available through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, given that they may lack some prior learning or experience?”

It’s like the DfE National Skills Fund Division are not sure if they need to cater for learners that want to do a level 3 course but would need to do a course at a lower level first.

Really important, if you are going to respond to any questions, that it is this one!

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## Skills bootcamps

“By the end of March 2021, the first digital Skills Bootcamps [up to 16 week courses when full time] will mean that approximately 2,500 adults have gained digital skills that are in high demand from employers; and the aspiration is that three quarters of these adults will have moved into new roles directly linked to these skills by the end of September”

“Pending the evaluation results of the Skills Bootcamps and the outcome of the next Spending Review, we will consider whether to expand the Skills Bootcamps further in future years.”

“Some colleges have said to us that they have held back from delivering Skills Bootcamps because they have been funded through a separate procurement process targeted at Skills Bootcamps alone

“Employers can use the Skills Bootcamps either to train their existing employees and move them into other roles or to find and hire new staff.”...but they have to pay 30% of the cost.

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## We have cash - what to spend it on?

Q47. Are there any current critical skills gaps below degree level and in particular sectors, occupations, or locations that you think the skills system will not meet, either now or in the next five years?

“We want to explore if there is a need for more shorter courses”

“A key way that we might address critical skills needs below degree level and meet the needs of adults is by exploring further options for shorter courses (under 12 months) of provision. Much of the current regulated training provision requires a longer period to complete.” *Longer than 12 months!?*

“Are there any particular sectors or occupations which would benefit from improved access to shorter courses?”



<https://consult.education.gov.uk/national-skills-fund-consultation/national-skills-fund-consultation/>

FEWEEK