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**New inquiry: Level 4 and 5 Higher Technical Qualifications**

**Call for Evidence**

*The Policy Connect Skills Commission is gathering written evidence for an inquiry into the accessibility, flexibility, and parity of esteem of higher technical education, particularly qualifications at Level 4 and 5.*

**Overview**

The Skills Commission initiated an inquiry into higher technical education following on from its earlier report [England’s Skills Puzzle: Piecing together further education, training, and employment](https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/skills-commission-englands-skills-puzzle-piecing-together-further-education-training-and).

The inquiry is held at a time of unprecedented challenges to our economy and society which affect and are affected by the education and training system. Complex questions remain on the labour market post-Brexit and the future of work with respect to automation, the transition to net zero, and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Government have committed to long-term reforms to technical education, with specific [aims](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/htqs) to promote Level 4 and 5 qualifications as “a high-quality, prestigious and popular choice, which learners could consider alongside other routes such as apprenticeships, traineeships or degrees”.

The problem identified by Government is low and declining uptake of higher technical qualifications in spite of the [reportedly](https://www.makeuk.org/insights/reports/unlocking-the-skills-needed-for-a-digital-and-green-future) high employer demand for workers with skills equivalent to Level 4 and 5qualifications. To confirm this, we are interested in the experiences different economic sectors and regions in England.

A more nuanced understanding of qualifications at Level 4 and 5 is clearly needed to make these once-in-a-generation reforms deliver the impact needed to respond to our challenges with a stronger, better-qualified workforce in good, sustainable jobs.

**Inquiry**

This is a significant opportunity to influence the delivery of the government’s commitments from its 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, particularly the government’s ambition to raise productivity through an increase in the number of Level 4 and 5 skilled workers.

Interviews, written evidence and roundtable oral evidence sessions will inform the inquiry. We are working with a wide group of stakeholders in particular sectors who have lived and learned experience of these qualifications specifically in the following sectoral pathways (as per the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education occupational maps):

* Health and science
* Care services
* Legal, finance and accounting
* Construction
* Creative and design
* Digital

**Call for evidence: What we are looking for**

We appreciate that you may prefer to respond only to the questions that fall within your area of expertise. Please also feel free to include wider insights into this topic area or submit papers, data, or reports that you or your organisation have completed.

Submissions of evidence will not be published on their own, nor shared with third parties. We will publish the names of organisations who have responded to this call for evidence within the final report, unless you inform us not to.

We are requesting evidence organised by the following themes:

1. ACCESSIBILITY
   1. How does the geographical distribution of Level 4 and 5 providers affect learner enrolment and the availability of course offerings? How do the challenges for colleges and other providers in developing a Level 4 or 5 offer affect learner enrolment and the availability of course offerings? Do you have examples of good practice where offers were designed in programmes to meet local economic development needs that demonstrably led to positive employment outcomes for learners? If so, can you describe any success factors?
   2. What is needed to ensure routes into Level 4 and 5 qualifications? How important are career pathways for Level 4 and 5 qualifications?
   3. How does finance affect access to Level 4 and 5 qualifications? How can financing of Level 4 and 5 qualifications influence take up of Level 4 and 5 qualifications?
2. FLEXIBILITY
   1. How can courses and/or qualifications better meet individual learner needs? What is your experience of modularisation?
   2. How has credit transfer worked in your experience, and how can it support learner needs? How can credit transfer help improve learner pathways between Further Education and Higher Education? Should this be associated with the proposed Lifelong Loan Entitlement?
   3. How has the recognition of prior learning worked in your experience, and how can it support learner needs?
3. PARITY OF ESTEEM
   1. How do providers of higher technical education differ?
   2. What evidence is there that higher technical education and qualifications are given as much prominence as academic routes in careers advice, guidance and information? Is this different for different groups of learners?
   3. What does a return on investment to higher technical education look like for learners? For employers?
   4. What would you say are the reasons for the decline in participation in Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications in the UK?

**Submissions**

Please submit your evidence to Policy Connect by **27 May 2022**. You can submit your responses, or any questions, to Teymour Anwar, [teymour.anwar@policyconnect.org.uk](mailto:teymour.anwar@policyconnect.org.uk)

**Skills Commission and Policy Connect**

Policy Connect’s Skills Commission examines skills and post-16 education policy, holds evidence-based inquiries, and produces written reports with recommendations for policymakers. The Skills Commission is an independent body comprising leading figures from across the education sector that meets every month in Parliament to discuss important issues in skills, training and further education policy.

The Skills Commission’s recent research publications include [Transition to Ambition: Navigating the careers maze](https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/transition-ambition-navigating-careers-maze) and [England’s Skills Puzzle](https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/skills-commission-englands-skills-puzzle-piecing-together-further-education-training-and), which was cited in the Skills for Jobs White Paper three times. The findings from these projects have led to briefings with ministers and DfE officials, Parliamentary questions and debates, and citations in government and sector reports.

Policy Connect is a membership-based, not-for-profit, cross-party think tank. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples’ lives.

We lead and manage an extensive network of parliamentary groups, research commissions, forums and campaigns. We are a London living wage employer and a Member of Social Enterprise UK, and have been operating since 1995. Our work focuses on key policy areas including: health; education & skills; industry, technology & innovation; and sustainability. We shape policy in Westminster through meetings, events, research and impact work.