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A Handy Guide to the Sainsbury Review

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Introduction

This guide gives an overview of the report issued by the Independent Panel on Technical Education, published on 8 July 2016, and the accompanying Post-16 Skills Plan. The panel was chaired by Lord Sainsbury, who has long campaigned for reform in this area, and comprised representatives from business (Simon Blagden, Fujitsu), Higher Education (Steven West, University of the West of England, Bristol), and Further Education (Bev Robinson, Blackpool and the Fylde College). The fourth member was Alison Wolf, which ensured some continuity from the current round of reforms to vocational education.

Overview of the recommendations

The direction of travel to date in 14-19 education has been to emphasise the difference between qualifications that prepare learners for further study, and those that prepare them for employment. This can be seen in the comparative purposes of current Technical Awards and Technical Certificates at level 2, and Applied General and Tech Levels at level 3. The first recommendation of this report emphasises this separation, with a call for the creation of **two distinct pathways post-16**, the 'academic' and the 'technical'.

Developing what is meant by the 'academic' pathway is not the purpose of this report, so little is said about it beyond stating that the Applied General suite of 'vocational' qualifications, which has a primary purpose of supporting progression to HE, should be part of the 'academic' pathway. The Skills Plan adds that there will be a review of the part AG qualifications will play in this new structure. There is also the recognition that learners who have chosen a particular pathway at 16 could want to change their plans at a later stage, and so there is a recommendation for '**bridging provision**' to allow movement between the two. This is an area where more work will be needed to scope out what this might look like in practice.

The technical pathway will have two modes of learning – one which is '**college-based**' (a term that includes other providers such as schools, UTCs and training providers) and one which is '**employment-based**'. The two routes are designed to end up at broadly the same place, and take into account that at 16 not every learner will have access to an apprenticeship. The content of the two routes will be aligned, but inevitably there will be certain aspects that cannot be fully delivered through a course based in a college, and there will be aspects of learning that an employment-based learner will need to acquire in college.

The Report defines a framework of **15 routes which will encompass all technical education at levels 2-5**. These routes are divided up into a number of occupations. The Report identifies some examples of those occupations; work is under way to expand these into a definitive list for each route. Each occupation or clusters of related occupations (perhaps 12-15 per route?) will have a **single technical qualification** at level 2 and another at level 3. Awarding bodies, or consortia of awarding bodies, will follow a bidding process to be awarded the licence to deliver each of these qualifications.



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The 15 routes are:

- Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
- Business and Administrative
- Catering and Hospitality
- Childcare and Education
- Construction
- Creative and Design
- Digital
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Hair and Beauty
- Health and Science
- Legal, Finance and Accounting
- Protective Services*
- Sales, Marketing and Procurement*
- Social Care*
- Transport and Logistics*

* Routes primarily delivered through apprenticeships

The full programme for a route will consist of a technical qualification, English and maths, digital skills and a significant work placement, together with any sector-specific learning deemed to be essential by employers – this might include a food hygiene certificate in the Catering and Hospitality route, for example. On successful completion of this programme the learner would get an **over-arching certificate**.

The Report is clear that learners should be focusing on preparation for an occupation, rather than a broader ‘sector’ or a narrow job- or employer-specific role. To this end it recommends that there should be a **review of all existing apprenticeship standards** to ensure this is the case.

To oversee this work it is proposed that the emerging **Institute for Apprenticeships** expands its remit to cover all of technical education – something the Skills Plan suggests is likely to happen by the autumn.

It is recognised that not all learners will be ready, at 16, to access a technical route or start on a level 3 academic qualification. The Report proposes a ‘**transition year**’ programme for these learners and gives some indication of what this might look like for the technical pathway. However, like the bridging provision, this is another part of the plan that needs more working out.

In order to deliver this vision, it is recognised that there are systemic issues that must be addressed. The first of these is **high quality careers education and guidance** to ensure learners are aware of the options open to them at 16. There also needs to be a network of **providers** which have the appropriate specialist and up-to-date expertise and facilities to be able to deliver the new courses.



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What is the timeline for these changes?

- October 2017 - first standards in two routes are approved
- February 2019 - new qualifications for those two routes are approved
- September 2019 - first teaching of new qualifications
- September 2021 - first certificates issued on successful completion
- September 2022 - all 15 routes available

What are the implications for schools, colleges and training providers?

There is still much detail to work out in terms of implementation. While the Report talks about creating a 'fundamental shift', there is also a recognition that there must be a managed transition from the current reforms through to this next stage.

Will current vocational qualifications remain valid?

The existing Tech Levels and Technical Certificates will be eligible to continue until the relevant route is in place – which could be until 2022, according to the published timeline. Applied General qualifications are part of a separate review which will report later in 2016.

Can we still offer a mixed curriculum of A level and BTECs?

There is nothing to stop learners taking a mix of qualifications. Until the first routes begin, existing Applied General and Tech Level qualifications will be eligible to continue being offered, and they can be taken on their own or in combination with each other or with A levels. As the routes become available the intention is that there will be just one level 3 Tech Level available for those routes, but there is no indication currently that a learner would not be permitted to take an appropriate A level or AG alongside this new Tech Level. Applied General qualifications have been assigned to the 'academic' pathway, as their main purpose is preparation for higher study, and so there is no restriction on how these are combined to make up the right course to support a learner's progression.

Who will be delivering the new technical routes?

The main recommendation in the Report about providers is the need to ensure that those delivering any route should meet clear criteria of quality, stability and an ability to maintain up-to-date equipment and infrastructure. It is also clear that there must be a strong local employer base in the relevant occupations so that appropriate work placements can be incorporated in the study programme. This could limit many providers in the number of routes they are able to offer. More controversially there are also comments about the appropriateness of for-profit providers receiving public funding to run these courses.

Are there any implications for Key Stage 4?

The Review and the Skills Plan focus on 16+ learning, so there is no direct impact on KS4. The Skills Plan emphasises the government's commitment to the EBacc as the curriculum that should be followed by most learners at KS4.

Where can I find out more?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education>