



EST 1892

**London
South Bank
University**

2019 in Higher Education

Articles and blogs on higher
education from LSBU



Introduction

Written before the current Covid-19 pandemic, Professor David Phoenix reflects on the past year in Higher Education:

2019 was a strange year for higher education. The political environment seemed tumultuous, with multiple changes of education minister. At another level, we waited for answers on a wide range of educational issues, and few were forthcoming.

The Department for Education published the long-awaited Post-18 review of education and funding: independent panel report (The Augur Review), which I was pleased to see contained several proposals the University has long championed, as well as a case study of LSBU Group. It also commissioned the Pearce Review of TEF and launched a consultation on its plans for Higher Technical Qualifications at Levels 4 and 5.

With a large majority we can hope that the Government will bring forward its responses to these reviews later this year. Additionally, with the first T-Level qualifications being rolled out later in 2020, the Government conducted a consultation on their proposed review of existing post-16 qualifications including BTECs. This could have a fundamental impact on the educational progression of a significant proportion of young people.

Of course, with the UK having left the European Union at the end of January, there is still much uncertainty ahead of a final agreement, both within the sector and of course in the wider environment. This includes the future of EU and international students and proposals for the Shared Prosperity Fund to replace the European Social Funds.

Over the last year, the University has responded to a number of the key issues that have affected Higher Education, and a selection of those pieces are available to read in the following pages. I hope you find them of interest.

*Professor Dave Phoenix, Vice-Chancellor,
London South Bank University*

Contents

2

A brick wall in the way of social mobility

4

The 4th Industrial Revolution: what skills do we need in education to prepare future generations?

6

We need to recognise prior learning

8

The pipeline in technically flawed

14

Augur and the ladder of learning: the value of Level 4 and 5 qualifications in lifelong learning

16

The UK needs a more integrated education system if we are to promote lifelong learning

19

Shining a light on Non-Prescribed Qualifications

22

Reforming the post-16 landscape

A brick wall in the way of social mobility

// **Wonkhe, 10 January 2019**

There are many compelling reasons why rationing student places by a minimum grade threshold for university entry is self-defeating for any government committed to social mobility.

School leaders as well as higher education figures have expressed their surprise in recent days that a policy decisively rejected in the past is being resurrected for consideration. It is remarkable that this policy is being entertained a little over three years since the previous Prime Minister committed the government to “20% more university places” by 2020, saying that this was at “the heart of a One Nation ideal”.

Brexit may have shaken Britain’s political foundations, but there is no excuse for it to shake our society’s commitment to allowing people from all backgrounds a fair chance to reach their potential, especially when restrictions to migration are likely to mean that we will need to train more high-skilled individuals than ever before.

There is a strong connection between socio-economic background and entry grades. As the Sutton Trust have stated, ‘highly able pupil premium pupils achieve half a grade less than other highly able pupils, on average, with a very long tail to underachievement.’ It is for this reason that many universities provide contextualised offers. Introducing a minimum tariff would limit universities ability to make local decisions based on their knowledge of the communities they serve and would severely undermine the widening of university

participation that has taken place under the current funding system by having a disproportionate impact on pupils from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds who may have been let down by the school system.

We all know about the booming private tuition industry. Better-off parents would be willing and able to help out financially for an extra private tuition or to enable an extra year resitting exams, or pay for grade boundary appeals. That is their right of course, but it would be highly naïve to think that this would not have an effect over time on the social distribution of student places in England.

The rationale for uncapping student numbers was to provide better access to universities for students from poorer backgrounds, on the basis that there was a vast amount of untapped talent missing out on higher education and the opportunities it brought for them and for the country. This policy would undermine that principle at the outset.

An analysis of the UCAS data on level 3 qualifications and acceptances into university shows that in 2018, a greater proportion of BAME students were accepted onto a university course with A level grades of DDD or below than compared to white students. This is particularly acute for black A level students, with over 10% of those accepted onto a university course with a grade profile of DDD or lower. So pulling up the drawbridge

for those students with lower attainment will affect BAME groups disproportionately, with black students being particularly badly affected.

A blanket all-England minimum grade threshold would differentially hit localities and regions with lower average school or college attainment. We know from Office for Students research on the geography of prior academic attainment that this varies quite significantly by region. At a stroke, then, a grade threshold would hit regions beyond London and the South East of England with lower average attainment, disproportionately reducing the total numbers of prospective students eligible to go to university from areas like the North East or the East Midlands. This does not seem to be a wise (or fair) policy response to the concerns about communities and regions being ‘left behind’ following the Brexit debate.

These would be the unintended but entirely predictable consequences of a grade threshold policy. Contrary to the impression you might get from some of the media we do not have too many people studying for degrees. Just under half of under 30’s in England have not studied at university and the UK is very much in line with Western countries in the proportion of people that experience higher education – and is somewhat behind world leading nations in HE participation such as South Korea. As I have argued, we do need better Level 4 and 5 work-related and technical routes to high level skills, including apprenticeships

and employer-sponsored degrees – but not by building an expectation that you follow one route if you achieve above a grade threshold, and the other if you are below it. If the government has the clear resolve to put the majority of younger people who do not currently have access to these higher levels on a genuine ‘skills escalator’, they need to address the lack of people achieving the level 3 (A level and B-tech) qualifications – and allow people to have a choice.

Back to Browne?

The minimum tariff proposal was originally featured as part of the Browne Review. In his final report, Browne did not recommend a minimum entry level, saying it should alter depending on the number of students vying for courses each year. It was then – and is now – a blunt financial rationing instrument taking no account of equality, diversity, talent or social mobility. It would remove the ability of universities to use their local knowledge and their knowledge of their academic support systems to make appropriate offers based on future potential of individuals, not their past performance.

The sector has worked with both a number cap and attempts to create a market, but a rigged system where central government seeks to control numbers by saying who can go to university based on historic performance is morally wrong and not supported by evidence of future success. It should be rejected before it is even proposed.

The 4th Industrial Revolution: What skills do we need in education to prepare future generations?

//LSBU Blogs, January 2019

I was recently invited to speak at the All Party Parliamentary Group of Apprenticeships on the topic of the 4th Industrial Revolution and to reflect on its implications for our skills agenda.

This is a very timely topic, as without a doubt, if we are to flourish as a knowledge based economy our approach to education will need to adapt in areas to meet the needs of 4IR.

The convergence of digital, biological and physical innovations could see smart technologies in factories and workplaces making decisions autonomously and will lead to different ways of working. The pace of change in many industries could be unprecedentedly rapid, with swathes of job roles made redundant or requiring significant re-skilling on an on-going basis.

Traditionally, education has focused on imparting a combination of knowledge and skills. But the importance that we have previously placed on learning facts has already been undermined by the reality that almost anyone can access a wealth of information with a few key strokes via a device in their pocket. The differentiator for those that will succeed in this environment will relate not solely to knowledge but to their mastery of a wider skills set.

How therefore do you prepare the future workforce for changes you can't predict? I argued at the meeting that we must model our skills agenda on three main areas of focus.

The first of these is core skills – literacy and numeracy. Regardless of the reskilling and upskilling individuals will need during their lifetime – they will always rely on these basic competencies. We need to reconsider how we teach these however, and we particularly need to review our rigid focus on maths and English GCSEs as the only marker of success.

In 2017, a third of 16 year olds in England failed to achieve GCSE maths and English. The policy of mandatory resits is not helping to combat this. In the same year, for those taking resits in an FE college only 13% achieved English and 5% achieved maths.

If we look to the population as a whole, in 2015 almost one fifth of 19-64 year olds held less than a Level 2 qualification. A further 39% held a Level 2 or 3. This creates the potential for almost two-thirds of our population being left behind by 4IR.

We need to look again at how we deliver these core skills. If I'm being treated by a nurse, I want them to have the numerical ability to know the difference between a microgram and a kilogram when handing out my prescription, but they don't necessarily need a full GCSE in maths.

The second area is higher-level skills. 4IR will see the creation of new and complex technologies. This has the potential to create an hourglass economy – with segregation between those with high skill / high pay positions who manage and develop these technologies, and those in

low skill / low pay positions who have been largely pushed out of the workforce due to automation. To avoid this, increasing the skills of our population – particularly in engineering and STEM areas is crucial.

Despite frequent suggestions, the UK does not have too many graduates. We have a comparable number to many other OECD countries. We do however have a lack of individuals educated to Levels 4 and 5, particularly in technical subjects. The solution to this is not restricting access to degree level programmes, but unblocking the pipeline of learners who have not achieved Level 2 and 3 qualifications so we can increase the numbers of people with higher level skills and strengthen our access to appropriately qualified multidisciplinary teams.

The final area links to employability skills, also known as soft skills. People will continue to need competencies for their roles but these will keep changing. Digitalisation and automation will make the 'human' element of people's job roles increasingly important. The responsibility will therefore fall on educators to develop in our learners these skills and attributes, many of which are encapsulated in entrepreneurship and enterprise education. These include not only resilience but also skills and attributes such as initiative, innovation, creativity, curiosity, critical and creative thinking, self-confidence and resourcefulness. These are the skills that will be key to the leadership and growth of the country's economy.

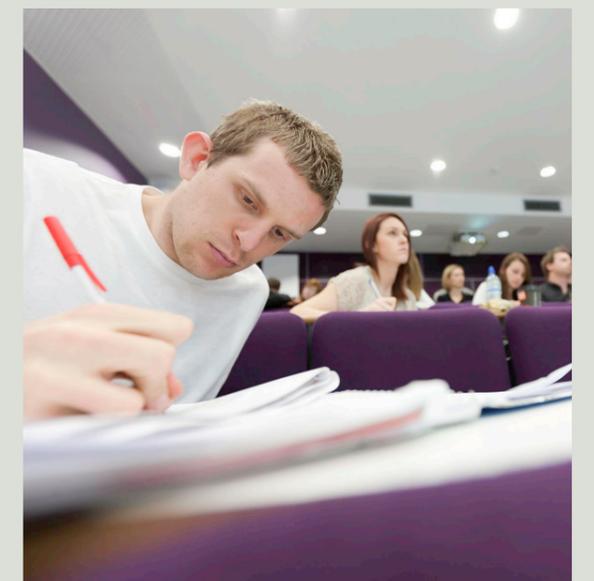
At London South Bank University, we are addressing these issues. We have created an educational framework which ensures our students have opportunities to apply the knowledge we teach them, and are

engaged in extracurricular activities to help generate the confidence that enables them to go out and deliver.

One example is our Legal Advice Clinic, where our law students (under the supervision of qualified solicitors on staff) are able to offer members of the local community impartial and free legal advice.

Our Student Life Centre builds upon this by guiding students through the process of securing employment – even after they've graduated. Our own employment agency, Elephant Works, provides opportunities for students to experience employability from day one of their student journey.

4IR will bring many challenges but we can begin to prepare learners by continuing to ensure our qualifications contain both knowledge and skills together. Every course contains a balance of both these elements whether academic or vocational. While the knowledge base of a degree will set them up for their chosen job role and sector the skills they achieve will equip learners with the competencies that will set them up for a career.



We need to recognise prior learning

// **Wonkhe, 16 May 2019**

Despite the country's expanding skills crisis, there is a failure to harness the huge pool of talent that potential mature learners could offer. That's because, for all of its benefits, the current funding system, has been disastrous for part-time and mature learners, causing significant and continuing declines in both groups since 2012.

Last year, I contributed the foreword to MillionPlus's Forgotten Learners report – welcoming a focus on mature learners that was sorely needed. I pointed out that given there are currently around 20 million working-age adults without any higher education qualifications (compared to only around three-quarters of a million 18 year-olds in total), reviving access for mature learners to higher education should be a key educational priority for the government.

Meanwhile, we remain in the dark about the extent to which Brexit could reduce skilled migration to the UK, and a fast-approaching 4th Industrial Revolution will almost certainly make it necessary for many people to reskill and retrain, not just once, but numerous times within their lives. In other words, the supply of mature learners has decreased in the lead up to the period during which we will need them most. That is why I'm pleased that, alongside colleagues from the Open University, Birkbeck and others from across

the education sector, I have been asked to sit on the independent panel of Labour's new Lifelong Learning Commission. I hope we will be able to look holistically at the country's educational needs and make suggestions for building on the excellence that already exists to promote life-long learning.

Regardless of the solutions that are put forward, it is clear that all institutions will need to become better equipped at educating mature students. For universities, recognising prior learning is one area that deserves attention. This concept primarily affects learners during the application stage but should also be considered in terms of the support required after acceptance – taking into account both certificated and experiential learning. A more welcoming and transparent approach by institutions to accrediting prior learning may offer a means of encouraging more potential mature learners to re-enter education. Accrediting prior learning as part of the admissions process can assist potential learners in meeting the admission requirements for a programme. It can also enable them to be exempted from parts of the course (such as individual course modules) and the time and costs these incur as well as aiding identification of future support requirements for these learners, helping to aid successful completion.

Accreditation of certificated learning is relatively straightforward, and potential learners can, at least to an extent, evaluate the potential of their existing qualifications to permit them to access and omit parts of a course. The evaluation and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) is more complex however. APEL involves the recognition of learning that a student has already undertaken outside the classroom (i.e. not measured and verified by a process leading to certification). It takes into account and awards "credit" for the experience accrued during what could be, ten, twenty or thirty years working within their industry – removing the expectation they repeat learning unnecessarily. Importantly, credit is not awarded on the basis of experience, per se, but on the basis of what is learned through reflecting on that experience.

Most universities could do more to make better use of recognising prior learning by proactively offering assessments of it to all applicants including those who exceed the criteria for entry to a course (or believe they do so) in order to determine whether or not they can be exempt from some requirements for their award.

At the moment, there are no significant obstacles but neither are there real incentives for institutions to more vigorously apply different approaches to recognising prior learning. I suggest that our ability

to respond to the changing nature of the higher education landscape will be enhanced if we start a more radical exploration of these opportunities sooner rather than later.

Accrediting prior learning in this way and facilitating access for mature learners can also bring a new dimension to the learning environment. Having students in a classroom who themselves have significant life and professional experience can change the teaching dynamic significantly. Students can learn from each other as well as their lecturer creating opportunities for peer-based and problem-based learning models.

As welcomed as the current focus on Lifelong Learning Commission is, we shouldn't rely on external commissions or reviews to provide all the solutions to addressing the collapse in mature learner numbers. Institutions must also look for solutions they can implement now and that are under their own control. A common criticism levelled at universities is that we aren't attuned to providing the skills the economy needs. Extending the recognition of prior learning (be it certificated or experiential) will not only demonstrate that we do value and recognise such skills, it will facilitate and enhance access for mature learners, and in doing so, enrich the classroom experience for all our students.

The Pipeline is Technically Flawed

// NCUB State of the Relationship Report, June 2019

To truly address skills shortages, we need to pull together the whole system: from secondary to further education to higher education.

There is an acknowledged shortfall in the number of people educated to Levels 4 and 5 in England. The principle cause of this shortage is the significant number of learners who are failing to progress from lower levels.

Levels 4 and 5 are represented by HNCs and HNDs, amongst other qualifications, and are equivalent to the first two years of a degree. Last year I wrote about the importance of Levels 4 and 5 in a paper for HEPI entitled, "Filling in the biggest skills gap: Increasing learning at Levels 4 and 5".

It highlighted both the importance of ensuring competency in English and maths and that too many learners are completing compulsory education without the necessary qualifications, limiting their access not only to HE, but also to work and apprenticeships. It also drew attention to the importance of providing greater access to high quality Level 4 and Level 5; treating this as higher education, as it is officially designated, and resourcing it accordingly to ensure that it has both the facilities and staff it needs to attract the esteem it merits. With government plans to introduce T Levels well advanced, and a review of vocational qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 underway, I believe it is time for employers,

universities, FE Colleges and others to come together to examine the role of prior education and qualifications in our Level 4 and 5 problems.

A Levels (defined as Level 3 qualifications) were devised by universities to prepare learners for higher education; and GCSEs (Level 2) to prepare learners for A Levels. This works, to a large extent, but only for those for whom this is the most appropriate pathway. In 2017, 39.4 per cent of 19-year-olds had not achieved a Level 3 qualification. A further 28.6 per cent did not even achieve a Level 2 in English and maths. This amounts to a significant pool of learners who cannot progress to Level 4 or above.

To solve our skills shortages at Level 4 and 5, we must turn our attention to Levels 2 and 3.

There is a hope that the new T Levels - described as substantial and rigorous job based qualifications at Level 3 - will offer a route into "higher technical" Levels 4 and 5, by both supporting some of those currently taking the more academic routes to progress using different delivery frameworks and by providing a new pathway for those not currently progressing at all to Level 3 and beyond.

Whilst there are outstanding issues around how these will operate there is potential for them to make a valuable contribution

to enhancing, for some, the pathway from Level 3 to 4 if the systems are joined up and do not fall into the English tendency of creating artificial divides between what is seen as disparate FE and HE systems. Indeed, there is common consensus that, to achieve widespread acceptance and credibility, T Levels must, like A Levels, offer a route to Higher education. However, these qualifications have been largely designed by employers; and whilst they may ultimately prepare learners very well for particular jobs, there are serious questions over whether they will prepare them for higher level study.

If T Levels are to offer a route into Higher education, including Level 4 and 5, then universities must be invited to play a much greater role in developing and designing these qualifications. If T Level learners end up having to supplement their T Levels with A Levels or other learning, then any sense of "parity" with A Levels will be lost. Furthermore, the number of teaching hours (and available funding) required for T Levels are likely to make such additional study impractical.

Whilst T Levels might provide an opportunity to expand entry into Level 4 and 5, the current approach simultaneously risks substantial collateral damage to another, well established and largely successful, route into higher technical education and vocational degrees. In recent years, Applied Generals have

increasingly become a pathway for university admission. In 2017, 19 per cent of 18-year-old applicants to HE held one or more BTECs (the most common form of Applied General).

Historically, some of these learners have struggled to make the transition to HE; however, user research by York Consulting on behalf of Ofqual suggests that the new revised BTEC Nationals, with "must-pass" external assessments, may be providing a stronger grounding for HE progression. It also suggests that applicants with Applied Generals for courses in the creative arts, ICT, sports related subjects and areas of health and social care, may be preferred to their A Level counterparts.

The Government is consulting on the withdrawal of funding for Applied Generals, in part with a view to clearing the way for the untested T Levels. Such a step would remove an existing pathway without a proven replacement, potentially exacerbating the shortage of learner supply at Levels 4 and 5. Furthermore, there are substantial questions around the suitability of T Levels for older learners, for those with Special Educational Needs, and those too geographically distant from a suitable placement in their subject of interest.

The current system of allowing students to select an academic A Level track, a more vocational (Applied General) track,

or a mix of the two – to keep future work and study routes open – has led to an increase in learners progressing to Level 3 qualifications.

Without BTECs and other qualifications that offer a mixture of applied technical and academic learning, there is a genuine risk of imposing a rigid binary choice on learners at 16 and reversing these improvements and strengthening a silo-based approach between so called academic and vocational routes. I believe this would be a failure.

Alongside its review of Level 3 qualifications the Government appears to be considering a further reduction of vocational qualifications at Level 2. At Level 2, some support the Level 2 apprenticeship as a first step on the upskilling ladder. However, only 25% of those achieving a Level 2 apprenticeship are progressing to Level 3, suggesting that this ladder is not working as it should. Level 2 apprenticeships are often very job specific and many offer neither a clear onward pathway nor an embedded, recognized qualification, leaving the learner with little basis for progression.

Apprenticeships, though originally designed to deliver productivity gains, are now often characterised principally as a potential booster to social mobility. A recent report by the Social Market Foundation helpfully

addresses this potential dichotomy. It highlights that only by delivering productivity can we deliver effective social mobility – the higher wages that underpin social mobility are only made possible through higher productivity. Sadly, the SMF report shows that “on average, Level 2 apprenticeships do not produce a statistically significant increase in wages upon completion”.

Some Level 2 apprenticeships are contributing little or nothing to increasing either social mobility or UK productivity. The conclusion therefore is that. Understandably then the Social Market Foundation sees the recent fall in Level 2 apprenticeships as a positive sign – contributing to a shift in investment to higher level programmes. Advanced / higher level apprenticeships accounted for just under three in ten (29 per cent) of apprenticeship starts in 2002/03, a proportion which increased to 57 per cent in 2017/18. However, although the percentage shifts are substantial, there are still relatively low numbers of Level 4+ apprenticeships. The Social Market Foundation says “This trend is positive but the large volume and proportion of Level 2 apprenticeships remains very concerning.”

Of course, it is wrong to dismiss all Level 2 apprenticeships; earnings vary significantly by occupation. A study by the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER)

found men on engineering apprenticeships can expect very high returns. And in some cases where productivity returns are low we may wish to make strategic decisions, for example in health and social care. Productivity and wage outcomes from Level 3 are also highly variable. In 2017, only a third those undertaking Level 3 apprenticeships in education reported a pay rise; however, for those in construction the figure was over 70 per cent.

When exploring the reasons why productivity outcomes from Level 2 apprenticeships can be so poor, it is worth going back to the descriptions of Levels 2, 3 and 4 within the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). Learners at Level 2 are defined as having the “practical skills to complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems”. By Level 4 these learners are able to “address problems that are complex and non-routine”.

It could therefore be that for employers, Level 2 apprenticeships are simply not adding enough value to justify the cost and effort. The recent withdrawal from Level 2 apprenticeships by Halfords suggests that the cost and return of them simply do not add up for them.

If employers are not willing, or able, to upskill those who have been failed by the education system, then we must go back to looking at that system.

The Department for Education's Skills Index, which measures the impact of further education and skills on productivity, has dropped by over 25 per cent in five years (see figure 1). According to the DfE report: “The overall FE skills index has decreased each year since 2012-13, largely driven by a reduction in learners achieving classroom-based qualifications”

With that in mind, perhaps it is time to review the current emphasis on skills over education and to provide vocational qualifications, which focus more on knowledge and application. Perhaps we can create Level 2 and 3 qualifications which have the educational underpinning to ensure they apply not only to the learners' current job and current employer but also in other jobs with other employers; and which lead to genuine progression in employment, in higher-level training or in education.

The London South Bank Group comprises South Bank Academies (South Bank Engineering UTC and University Academy of Engineering, South Bank), South Bank Colleges (Lambeth College), South Bank Enterprises and London South Bank University. These organisations work to shared outcomes and use a shared educational framework.

This shared educational framework comprises:

- Knowledge - in its applied context
- Currency - the latest insights informed by employers, professional bodies and researchers
- Competency - the skills to apply that knowledge
- Confidence - the personal attributes to put those skills and knowledge into practice in the workplace and beyond.

The successful application of this framework has delivered a dramatic increase in graduate employability which now sees LSBU ranked 4th in the UK for graduate outcomes, joint 7th for graduate starting salaries and being named University of the Year for Graduate Employment, for the second consecutive year, in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide. Alongside the shared educational framework, the group members are working to integrate operational services where this makes sense. In South Bank Academies, the ability to integrate funding at Multi Academy Trust level ensures that learners can make a genuine choice based on the learning style and outcome that is right for them - either focusing on a route through the Engineering Academy or the Technical College.

It also enables flexibility between institutions, allowing learners to transfer, to take courses at different institutions and I would like in the future to explore

options to enable students to defer selected exams until the time that is right for them i.e. breaking down the need to compartmentalise learning pathways by level.

This facilitates more flexibility for the learner than the very age-based linear system that pervades education generally. I believe we need a more holistic and integrated education and qualifications structure that offers some flexibility based on the needs of individuals and doesn't make people see variations as inferior to conventional linear routes.

In any re-examination of Levels 2 and 3 and the skills pipeline, we must be mindful not only of those who have been failed by school but by the millions of potential adult learners who are being denied the opportunity of later advancement. Since 2005, there has been a 45 per cent decrease in adults participating in FE and skills. Given there are currently around 20 million working-age adults without any higher education qualifications (compared to only around three-quarters of a million 18 year-olds in total), reviving access to higher education for mature, principally part-time, learners could be a key path to delivering more Level 4 and 5 learners and should be an educational priority for the government. Given the weakness of some Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships and some of the limitations of T Levels, we need to look at what pathways at Level 2 and 3 there are into

Level 4 and 5 for the millions of working age adults.

In summary, much of the discussion around the UK's future education and skills needs is framed by the context of skills shortage, the growing impact of Artificial Intelligence and other technology, and the UK's poor productivity. There is constant talk of the need to upskill to Levels 4 and 5; but politicians and others are unduly focused on lower level apprenticeships some of which have little educational value, limited transferability and no productivity gains.

Our ability to deliver the requisite Level 4 and 5 qualified technicians is limited principally by the failure of our secondary and Further education systems to create the pipeline. We are failing to get 28.6 per cent of young people to Level 2 and a further 39.4 per cent to Level 3. Without addressing this, we have no hope of addressing our gaps at Level 4 and 5. It is time to look at alternatives to GCSEs and consider the below recommendations.

- Identify an educationally robust vocational Level 2 pathway to Level 3 that meets the needs of younger and older learners and which does not create silos that limit future opportunities.
- Avoid a binary option of academic or vocational study at 16 by providing earlier opportunities for learners to experience both, enabling them then to exercise real choice.

- Ensure that learners are future proofed by rooting T-Levels and other vocational qualifications in education that prepares for a career, rather just in skills that limit them to a job - as some of the developments in BTECs are indicating.
- Refocus on the foundations of English and Maths in schools rather than focusing on GCSE as the only option.
- Provide more access to high quality Level 4 and 5 and increase our aspiration as a country that should be seen as a global leader.



Augar and the ladder of learning: the value of Level 4 and 5 qualifications in lifelong learning

// HEPI, 22 July 2019

Beyond the headline announcements of the Augar Review, there are wide-ranging proposals, covering everything from Level 2 to adult education. Its recommendations regarding the promotion and expansion of Level 4 and 5 education demand particular attention, and I am pleased to see several recommendations I sought in my paper for HEPI last year (Filling in the Biggest Skills Gap).

The current student loans system and its apparent 'one shot' approach encourages learners to use their maximum entitlement by undertaking a full Level 6 qualification. It also provides little incentive for universities to offer a more diverse range of qualifications. To overcome this, the report recommends the introduction of a lifelong learning loan allowance for modules (of minimum 30 credits) of Level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications. By providing a means for learners to "step-on" and "step-off" it is hoped they will be encouraged to study at lower levels initially, safe in the knowledge that they will be able to top up their learning later if needed to further their career.

To boost the profile and esteem of Level 4 and 5 the report also recommends that institutions should award at least one interim qualification (either a CertHe [Level

4] or DipHe [Level 5]) to all students who are following a Level 6 course successfully. This would help establish awards at these levels as positive targets, rather than as just early exit awards.

In order for such a system to work, universities will need to pay heed to how they build such qualifications within their degrees – something we have some experience of at London South Bank University (LSBU).

This approach is applied principally in our Construction Division in the School of Architecture and Built Environment, due to the esteem that Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) hold within the construction industry. At degree level we currently offer BScs in Quantity Surveying, Building Survey and Construction Management. Each is fully accredited by their relevant professional body (RICS, CIOB or CIAT) meeting their full academic requirements and mapping to their educational frameworks. Courses are available for study part time (5 years) as well as full time (3 years) and a significant proportion of students undertake them with employer sponsorship.

Alongside these courses, we offer an HNC in Construction, available either part-time (2 years) or full-time (1 year). This course offers far more flexible entry criteria, opening up progression opportunities for those that would not meet the normal university entry criteria to enter directly onto the Level 6 course. Entry to the surveying degree requires a total UCAS tariff of 128 points, typically made up from A-Levels or a Level 3 BTEC qualification. For the HNC we will typically accept candidates with A-Levels or other Level 3 qualifications to a tariff of

60 points and also welcome those with industrial experience who wish to pursue an academic qualification. The main criteria for the HNC is that the university needs to be confident the student will be able to cope with the academic rigours of the course and we look for evidence to support this from their previous studies and industrial experience.

When studying full time, Year 1 of both the HNC and the Degree covers the same specialist content but the students are taught separately to enable a different support environment for the HNC students. The success of our approach is based on recognition that the HNC has a student cohort which is much more variable in terms of their age, experience and educational background. Completion of the HNC (both full and part time) offers a clear progression opportunity and subject to meeting specified grades, students are able to progress to either Year 2 of the full time or Year 3 of the part time degree, with many of these students going on to perform very well at degree level and beyond.

Providing an entry route into the degree via the HNC not only provides greater opportunity to learners from varying educational backgrounds; it also gives employers the flexibility to manage their financial investment step by step. They can fund a single year in the knowledge that this will provide their employee with a reputable qualification, whilst retaining the opportunity for them to progress immediately or at a later date. Interestingly, employers and their staff overwhelmingly see the benefit of progression and over 90% of employer-sponsored students who complete the HNC are, at some point, subsequently funded to carry on with the degree.

Our experience with construction courses shows that qualifications at levels 4 and 5 can be successfully embedded into a progression pathway. The creation of a single lifelong learning loan allowance offers real potential to allow individuals (and their employers) greater freedom to align learning with the needs of their career while simultaneously boosting the numbers of learners achieving Levels 4 and 5.

Jane Baker, Director of Higher Education Qualifications at Pearson, who design, develop and validate Higher Nationals, agrees with the value of embedded qualifications to support a flexible, lifelong learning approach to higher education provision: 'Higher Nationals are developed with career outputs in mind, with employer and professional body engagement a central feature of the qualification design and development process, to ensure they include the right content and standards. While they lead to employment outcomes for students in and of themselves, they are also flexibly structured to support the kinds of lifelong and employer relevant learning that London South Bank University, amongst others, are delivering. The Higher Nationals therefore offer the ladder of learning, with recognized and valued accreditation points at level 4 and 5 – and articulation to level 6 and beyond, allowing for flexibility of learning and attainment while delivering the higher level technical skills required by industry and effectively supporting the 'missing middle'.

The UK needs a more integrated education system if we are to promote lifelong learning

//LSBU Blogs, July 2019

I was very pleased to be asked to join the Independent Panel of the Labour Party's Commission for Lifelong Learning at the start of this year. Without doubt, this is an area of our education system that demands far greater attention. The number of mature learners has collapsed in the last decade and the opportunities for further learning after the age of 25 have shrunk – just as the onset of automation and the fourth industrial revolution mean that individuals will need more opportunities to retrain than ever before.

Six months on Co-Chairs Estelle Morris and Dave Ward have brought together an interim report based on a diverse range of contributions from members of the Independent Panel and submissions from other stakeholders. The report sets out the direction for developing robust recommendations if we believe in the need for a more cohesive system of lifelong learning and provides further opportunity for interested parties to submit their thoughts.

The report rightly highlights many of the systemic problems that exist when it comes to lifelong learning, and the fact lifelong learning is often seen as a deficit model. In 1997, when referring to our educational system Baroness Kennedy said: 'If at first

you don't succeed ... you don't succeed'. Indeed, in 2017, 39.4 per cent of 19-year-olds had not achieved a Level 3 (A-Level/BTech) qualification. A further 28.6 per cent did not even achieve a GCSE in English and maths. In a country focused on the need to successfully obtain a given qualification at a given age, related gateways to lifelong learning have to provide opportunities for those who have not achieved to be able to achieve later in life.

However, if we are to develop the skills we need as a knowledge based economy, helping individuals to develop their potential and reskill, we need to change this narrative to one that does not focus on lifelong learning as a deficit model but one that recognises the need for the majority to be able to access learning throughout their career.

A key part of the problem is that so much of post-18 education is fragmented and disjointed, with institutions facing conflicting priorities and driven into competition with each other for funding. If we are to unlock the reservoir of talent that exists in this country and face the challenges of insecure work, automation and the fourth industrial revolution, we need a far more integrated education system. By removing the incentives for schools to compete against each other

and providing further and higher education with the means to collaborate, we can create much clearer pathways, without the age-based hurdles, from school through to training and university.

In its next stage of its work, the Lifelong Learning Commission will be establishing four workstreams to develop policy and funding recommendations to take forward. The 'providers workstream' will look at the roles played by the range of different education institutions and how they can work together to develop a more integrated system that provides clear pathways from foundation level to doctoral level education – meeting the differing needs of learners as well as those of local communities. A clear area of focus will need to be progression routes from level 3-5 where employers say there is greatest unmet skills demand and where the fourth industrial revolution will have greatest impact.

I look forward to engaging with this workstream and there are lessons we might learn from the work we are currently undertaking at LSBU to create a family of educational providers.

The LSBU Family utilises a group structure, with each specialist institution sharing a common educational framework and governance arrangements (as well as

administrative and back-office functions) while providing high quality education in their distinct fields.

In addition to the University and a Multi-Academy Trust, containing a UTC and an Academy of Engineering, since February 2019 the LSBU Family has also contained Lambeth College – a vocationally focused Further Education College.

Aligning a group of institutions in this way creates a new approach to educational provision by offering learners access to high quality education across a range of ages and through multiple qualification pathways and utilises short courses through to doctoral programmes to meet individual and employer needs. As there is no competition for funding between institutions, this allows the focus to be centred on the learner, providing a genuine choice in learning styles by supporting transfer between technical, vocational and academic pathways and it enables a central focus for support and guidance. This enables learners to build a portfolio of skills, experience and qualifications relevant to their current needs and aspirations and ensures a focus is on student outcome and success.

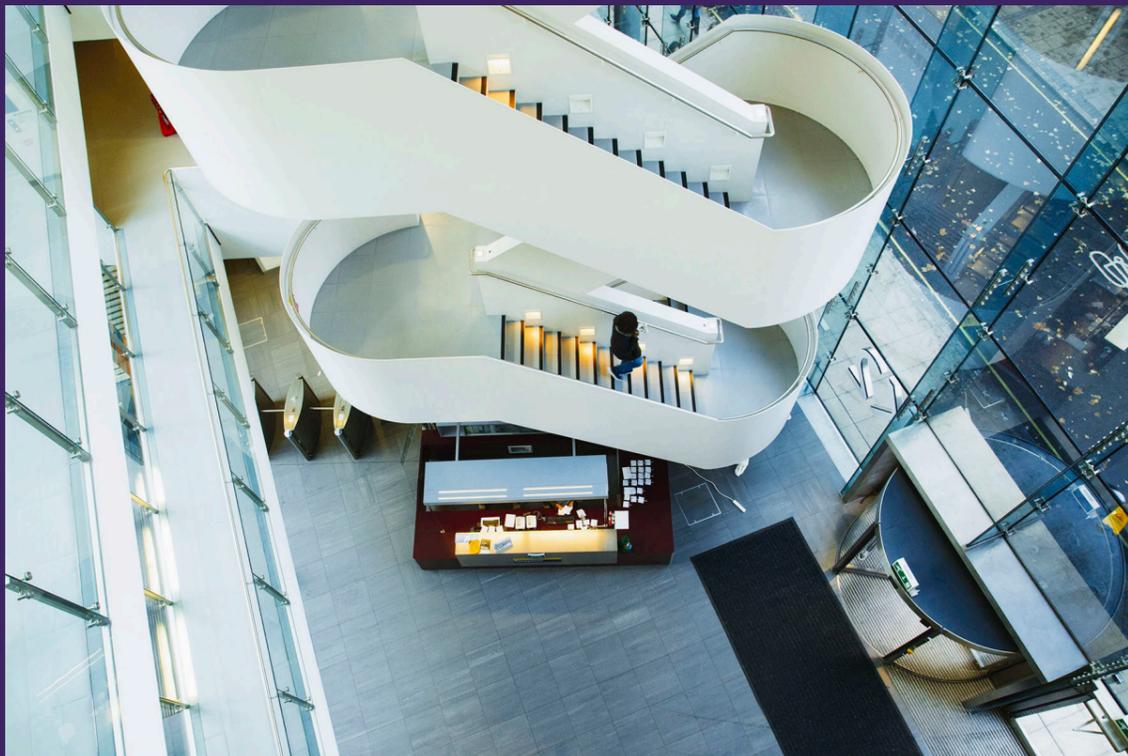
For example, our Institute of Professional and Technical Education supports

employers in upskilling their staff, whether that be through CPD courses or degree apprenticeships from Levels 2 to 7. It acts as a single gateway for employers and apprentices spanning university and college delivery and is able to provide a key point of oversight and guidance. This has already seen the apprenticeship offer grow to include over 1000 apprentices.

We are continuing to develop the Family – aligning curriculums and overcoming regulatory and cultural rifts between the different educational sectors. However, we are already beginning to see some successes with significant increases in those progressing from Level 3 to 4 for example. It was pleasing to hear from a former student of our UTC who is now doing a degree apprenticeship with the University and a local construction employer about the

benefits they received from the employer links and guidance that was available via this larger more sustainable structure.

Ours is just one model but if we are unable to provide a more integrated and proactive approach to lifelong learning and reskilling then we will be poorer as a country – not only in terms of reduced productivity but through the lost potential due to over half the population being unable to obtain the education they need when they most need it. I look forward to working with colleagues in developing recommendations which I hope will be of benefit to individuals, society and the economy – ensuring that a person's future life chances are not determined by their performance on one particular day in an exam hall when they are at school but are supported throughout their career.



Shining a light on Non-Prescribed Qualifications

//HEPI, 7 August 2019

The Augar Review has provided much to consider; and one area on which it shines a gentle light is that of “Non-Prescribed” qualifications. For those who are unfamiliar, Non-Prescribed courses lead to qualifications, which, although at Levels 4 and 5, are not considered to be “higher education” and therefore sit outside of the higher education framework. They are instead classified as “higher level” skills courses and lead to certificates, diplomas and other awards in a wide range of vocational areas.

Non-Prescribed qualifications are owned by awarding organisations (AOs), including City and Guilds, Pearson and professional bodies, and are delivered principally by Further Education Colleges or private training providers, although a few universities also offer them.

According to a report by ICF Consulting undertaken on behalf of the Department for Education, in 2016/17 there were 666 Non-Prescribed qualifications (compared to 2,734 Prescribed). Of these, 284 were diplomas, 169 were certificates, 127 were awards and 55 were NVQs. 46% of learners on these programmes were studying qualifications in Business, Administration and Law; with a further 15% studying Health, Public Services and Care; and 11% Studying Education and Training.

Being outside of the Higher Education quality framework, Non-Prescribed qualifications are regulated by Ofqual,

which assesses their Level and determines the number of credits they comprise, based on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). A substantive difference between Prescribed and Non-Prescribed qualifications is their varying sizes. A Prescribed Level 4 qualification generally amounts to 120 credits. Non-Prescribed qualifications, such as those listed below, vary significantly in the number of credits awarded with some having fewer than 30 and some over 120.

Examples of non-prescribed qualifications:

- Level 4 ACCA Diploma in Accounting and Business (89 credits) *Awarded by: the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants*
- Pearson Edexcel Level 4 NVQ Diploma in Construction Site Supervision (Construction) (123 credits) *Awarded by: Pearson Ltd*
- Level 4 Diploma in Advanced Hairdressing Techniques (50 Credits) *Awarded by: City and Guilds of London Institute*
- CIPD Level 5 Certificate In Human Resource Management (32 credits) *Awarded by: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development*
- City & Guilds Level 5 Diploma For Assistant Practitioners in Healthcare (120 credits) *Awarded by: City and Guilds of London Institute*

Unlike Prescribed qualifications (such as HNCs), learners on Non-Prescribed courses are not eligible for HE loans or maintenance support. Instead, they are able to take Advanced Learner Loans, with the maximum loan amount determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency based on the subject, the educational level and the number of credits/learning hours required. In 2017/18, the average cost of a Non-Prescribed qualification was around £2,700.

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has the authority, but no formal duty, to fund Non-Prescribed higher education. If a qualification does attract funding then, under the Common Inspection Framework applicable to FE provision, it is liable for inspection by Ofsted.

The Augar Review recommends that this current system of Prescribed and Non-Prescribed be replaced by new employer-led national standards, against which qualifications will be kite-marked. The DfE has subsequently launched a consultation on these new “Higher Technical Qualifications”. Kite-marked qualifications would be eligible for full HE funding (£7,500 under Augar’s proposals), student loan support and the same teaching grant as Level 6 qualifications. Previously non-prescribed qualifications, which do not receive the kitemark, will remain outside the higher education framework. The Review

further recommends that ‘once national standards are fully established, there is a case for government to review this group of qualifications’ – presumably with a view to encouraging their discontinuation, perhaps by ceasing to assess them under the RQF. We can probably assume that many of those Non-Prescribed qualifications with current enrolments are valued by the employers that pay to send their employees on them. Should Augar’s proposals be implemented, we might therefore expect a good number to be endorsed by these same employers and thence to become kite-marked and be eligible for student loans. Although these programmes are already eligible for Advanced Learner Loans, being kite-marked may increase their attraction and increase the associated funding to HE levels. This is likely to be an area that the Treasury will wish to look at in some detail.

However, even if a qualification receives a kite-mark from employers by meeting occupational standards, this does not necessarily mean that it will meet the educational standards to become Prescribed. Many qualifications may also be too narrowly focused or simply too small to evidence the learning and achievement expected from a Level 4 or 5 qualification. The Augar review recommends that ‘The OfS should become the national regulator of all non-apprenticeship provision at Levels 4 and above’. The DfE consultation

suggests that this will include all kite-marked qualifications. Given that non-prescribed qualifications are currently quality-assured by Ofsted, it remains to be seen how they will match up to the quality requirements of the QAA.

There is also a further question about how these newly kite-marked qualifications might interact with the Review’s proposal for a Lifelong Learning Allowance (LLA). Augar proposes that learners should be able to use their LLA to fund individual 30 credit modules; building these over time into a degree. But it is difficult to see how a kite-marked but highly-specific vocational certificate at Level 4, for example, would necessarily develop the skills for a learner to enter into the second year of a degree; and it further raises questions regarding

the extent to which universities might be expected to reconstruct their courses to accommodate learners presenting such qualifications.

Augar, in examining this little explored area, raises some interesting possibilities for learners and providers but at the same time brings to the fore a number of questions about funding, regulation and institutional autonomy. This area certainly warrants further discussion; and there is a danger that in potentially rushing to a solution we end up with a more confusion rather than less – more complex ranges of courses; more confusion over the regulation and assurance of HE; and increased cost; without additional educational benefit for learners or employers.



Reforming the Post 16 Landscape

// **LinkedIn, October 2019**

The Times Education Supplement revealed yesterday that the majority of providers for the first T-Levels available next year, will require students to have a grade 4 (C) or above in English and Maths.

Despite the fact that this would prevent almost 30 per cent of the 2019 cohort from taking a T-Level, it appears the Government is, at the same time, attempting to clear ground for these new qualifications with a review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England.

The review aims to streamline the number of qualifications available with the expectation that there 'will be far fewer qualifications at these levels approved for funding post-16 than is the case at present'. In keeping with the Government's Post-16 skills plan, qualifications that are retained should fulfil a 'distinct purpose', following either the 'academic' or 'technical' route while not overlapping significantly with the 'gold standard' qualifications: A-Levels or T-Levels (which are not subject to the review).

This raises the significant threat that Applied Generals (such as BTEC Nationals and Cambridge Technicals) may be defunded in the future with potentially devastating impacts on access into higher education for a wide array of learners.

Applied General qualifications have become an increasingly important route into higher education in recent years with almost a fifth of applicants in 2017 holding BTECs or a combination of BTECs and A-Levels. In addition, students holding BTECs on average are more likely to have a disability, come from a BAME background, a low participation neighbourhood or be the first in their family to go to university. If Applied Generals are de-funded, it is not clear whether there will be any suitable Level 3 route available for many of these, or other, learners.

Employers have had significant input into the design of T-Levels and they may ultimately prepare learners well for specific jobs. However, given the lack of involvement from universities (conversely to A-Levels and the new RQF BTEC nationals) there are serious questions over whether these employer focused qualifications will prepare learners for higher-level study.

