

# LEVEL 4 AND 5 EDUCATION: UNIVERSITIES UK BRIEFING



## WHAT IS LEVEL 4/5 EDUCATION?

Level 4/5 refers to a certain skills level and includes qualifications such as apprenticeships, 'technical education', HNCs, NVQs, foundation degrees and the first two years of an undergraduate degree.

People tend to be familiar with the route whereby learners progress straight from Level 3 to 6 (ie A Levels to undergraduate degree) but many options exist.

32% of learners undertaking Level 4/5 qualifications are at a higher education institution 53% at a further education college and 10% at an Alternative Provider.

Some learners studying at further education colleges will be doing qualifications accredited by a higher education institution (university).

**On Higher Education accredited programmes, the largest subject by number of learners are:**

**29%**

Health, public services and care

**14%**

Education and training

**10%**

Engineering and manufacturing

**9%**

Business administration and law

## DID YOU KNOW?

Level 4/5 qualifications are the focus of partnership between universities and further education colleges and often meet local skills needs.



## WHY IS LEVEL 4/5 IMPORTANT?

Level 4/5 qualifications provide an opportunity for those whose highest qualification is Level 3 to develop their skills and enhance their job prospects.

As the labour market changes due to technological advancements people will be required to increasingly re-skill and up-skill throughout their lives. Level 4/5 qualifications are particularly valued in engineering and construction; areas where skills shortages exist.

Qualifications at Level 4/5 provide an alternative route to higher level skills for those that are not willing or able to undertake an apprenticeship or a university degree course. 60% of all Level 4/5 learners are over 25 and 50% study part-time.

Level 4/5 qualifications are often developed to respond to a specific employer need and address (often local) skills shortages. Strong partnerships have been developed between universities and local FE colleges to support deliver of Level 4/5.

## ISSUES AND BARRIERS

Despite Level 4/5 qualifications' ability to equip learners with higher level skills and meet employers' needs, current regulations around student completion statistics penalise universities if they offer flexibility to students that wish to complete one or two years of their degree course.

Level 4/5 qualifications are relatively unknown and therefore not embedded in careers advice. Better brand awareness would increase uptake and fill current vacancies in a range of sectors and occupations.

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are

**216,170**

learners on Level 4 and 5 programmes across the UK

### DID YOU KNOW?

**49%**

of Level 4/5 programmes provide routes to employment and 30% provide routes to higher learning

## 'TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS'

The government recently consulted on proposals to reform Level 4/5 qualifications identified as 'technical education', excluding those delivered as part of a degree and apprenticeships. There is no nationally recognised definition of 'technical education' however. Both technical and non-technical routes provide individuals with vital skills for future study or work and are equally valued by employers.

# WHAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO

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- 1** Change the regulatory system to recognise the Level 4/5 components of an undergraduate degree. Students and universities should not be penalised when only one or two years of a degree is completed
- 2** Make developmental funding available for new provision and collaboration to meet increased Level 4/5 skills needs in specific regions and sectors
- 3** Invest in efforts, including improved careers advice, to increase the number of learners on Level 4/5 programmes; these should be directed at those not intending to progress past Level 3, rather than re-routing them from Level 6 options
- 4** Reform Equivalent Level Qualification (ELQ) rules to allow people to take on Level 4, 5 and 6 skills throughout their lives as the needs of employers change
- 5** Any changes to the regulatory landscape should be proportionate and efficient, and not favour technical over non-technical courses