



Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP

Secretary of State

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Sent by email

26th May 2022

Dear Lord Wharton,

Guidance to the Office for Students on supporting further education providers to increase delivery of level 4 and 5 courses over the next three years

We want to thank the Office for Students (OfS) for its continuing and vital support in delivering the government's strategic priorities for higher education.

It is the government's ambition to ensure employers have access to the talent they need to thrive, and that more people can gain the skills they need to get good jobs. We need an education and skills system that meets the needs of our economy and ensures vocational and technical options are high quality and regarded as just as prestigious and rewarding as academic routes.

One key challenge is that there are areas in the country where people find it difficult to access courses that will equip them with the higher-level skills they need. Further education providers (FEPs) tell us that the costs and complexity of creating new courses and of getting validation from higher education providers (HEPs) can prevent them from delivering level 4 and 5 courses.

To help address this, the government is seeking to invest up to £10 million over three years to enable ambitious FEPs to deliver level 4 and 5 courses. We would like this funding to be allocated by the OfS under section 39 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), and to be used to support validation and the development and provision of level 4 and 5 courses.

This intervention is aimed at encouraging the expansion of higher education (HE) provision in new areas, which is one of the government's strategic priorities, as described in the statutory guidance letters dated 31 March 2022. Further guidance will be issued on the funding allocations shortly.

This letter sets out guidance, as referred to in section 2(3) of the HERA, as to how we would like the OfS to manage this programme. It does not supersede any other statutory guidance letters.

Working with the sector

We would like the OfS to work with partners in the higher and further education sectors to develop a model to invest the government's funding. Where appropriate, we would like the OfS to use its powers under section 50 of HERA to enter arrangements with HEPs requiring them to offer validation.

We would expect the arrangements to be made with an authorised registered HEP or HEPs that meet the following criteria:

- a strong track record of providing validation, content services and support to FEPs at a national scale;
- an ambition to support the delivery of high-quality level 4 and 5 courses;
- a clear social purpose, understanding how important education is to social mobility and creating vibrant local economies; and
- experience of delivering courses in different ways, including online and in person, and full and part-time.

Selection of FEP participants

We would like the OfS to set appropriate terms and conditions for any commissioning arrangements and funding. We would like the intervention to focus on FEPs that, with validation and the right support from a HEP, would have the capability to deliver level 4 or 5 courses successfully. We would like the support to be targeted at level 4 and 5 courses which will or can be aligned with Higher Technical Qualification routes. In addition, we would like the participating FEPs to be in areas where:

- attainment of qualifications at level 4 and above is low;
- there is a lack of local higher education provision;
- there is a significant and unmet local skills demand for new provision (for example, an area where there is a freeport, or a need for specific skills relating to green energy, healthcare, etc.); and/or
- there is an Educational Investment Area.

It may be appropriate for different FEPs to access different types of support depending on their specific requirements and existing experience and we also understand that this may change over the period of the programme.

Measuring progress

The OfS is well placed to determine the best way to measure the success of the programme, working with the higher education and further education partners involved. It would be helpful for officials and Ministers at the Department for Education to understand how those receiving and delivering support are performing throughout the course of the programme.

It would also be helpful to follow-up with FEPs involved annually for five years to understand how they have progressed following the conclusion of the programme.

We want young people across the country to have up-to-date skills which employers need in their organisations, for example, in local NHS services, so it is vital that high quality level 4 and 5 education is accessible in every part of the country. FEPs often know the local employer landscape well and have strong relationships with local schools and communities. With the right support and with courses which serve a wide community of employers, we believe FEPs are well placed to help us achieve this ambition.

This is a strategic priority for the government and a key part of the levelling-up agenda. Through this programme we want to see experienced HEPs enabling FEPs to deliver the courses local people and employers need in parts of the country that have - so far - not shared equally in our nation's success. We look forward to working with the OfS to make that a reality.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', with a large loop at the end.

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education