



A guide to the skills sector

April 2025

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Contents

Introduction	3
Who are the key oversight bodies?	3
Department for Education	3
Skills England	4
Ofsted	4
Ofqual	4
Office for Students	4
What format can an oversight body take?	6
Who are the key people within these organisations?	6
How is the government held to account?	7
Select committees	7
Urgent questions	7
Oral Questions and Written Questions	7
APPGs	8
How does the Skills Sector work at a National and Local level?	8
Key Organisations & People in the Skills Sector	9
Key Terms & Acronyms	10

Introduction

This guide is designed to offer a comprehensive overview of the skills sector, highlighting key organisations and significant individuals. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) intends for this guide to be a valuable resource for staff inductions and for current staff seeking a refresher.

Please note that while AELP strives to update this guide regularly, there may be instances where individuals have transitioned to new roles or where organisational structures have changed. As such, we recommend referring to the respective organisations' organograms via the provided links for the most current information.

Who are the key oversight bodies?

There are five main oversight bodies who providers will interact with to various extents whilst delivering skills provision. They include:

Department for Education

The Secretary of State for Education leads the [Department for Education](#) and is supported by a team of ministers including one who holds a brief linked to skills.

The Department is a ministerial department which is responsible for:

- teaching and learning for children in the early years, primary and secondary schools
- teaching, learning and training for young people and adults in apprenticeships, traineeships and further education
- teaching and learning for young people and adults in higher education
- supporting professionals who work with children, young people and adult learners
- making sure that local services protect and support children

The work of the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) has been absorbed into the DfE Operations Directorate rather than being a separate executive agency. The work that the agency undertakes includes:

- managing £70 billion of funding for the education and training sector, ensuring timely and accurate allocations and payment to education and training providers
- providing assurance to Parliament that public funds are spent properly, achieving value for money for the taxpayer and delivers the policies and priorities set out by the Secretary of State
- providing, where necessary, financial support for providers

Skills England

Skills England is a new executive agency whose purpose is to unify and support the skills system by:

- (1) Providing an authoritative assessment of skills requirements
- (2) Hold a comprehensive suite of programmes funded via the Growth and Skills Levy
- (3) Bring together key partners - employers, unions, mayors, providers and stakeholders
- (4) Look to the future of skills needs.

To support the fulfilment of their purposes, Skills England will absorb many of the functions the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) previously undertook in relation to the development of occupational standards.

Ofsted

Ofsted's is likely to be one of the most well know bodies within the skills sector, its role is to make sure that organisations providing education, training and childcare services in England, do so to a high standard for children and students.

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions, including state schools and colleges and independent training providers who receive funding from the DfE. It also inspects childcare, adoption and fostering agencies and initial teacher training, and regulates early years childcare facilities and children's social care services.

Following the Big Listen held in Spring 2024, Ofsted are currently refreshing their inspection frameworks and are moving away from single word judgement (overall effectiveness grades). The changes are expected to be implemented within inspections from November 2025.

Ofqual

Ofqual regulates qualifications, exams and tests in England. Ofqual is often referred to as the exam "watchdog".

They are responsible for making sure that:

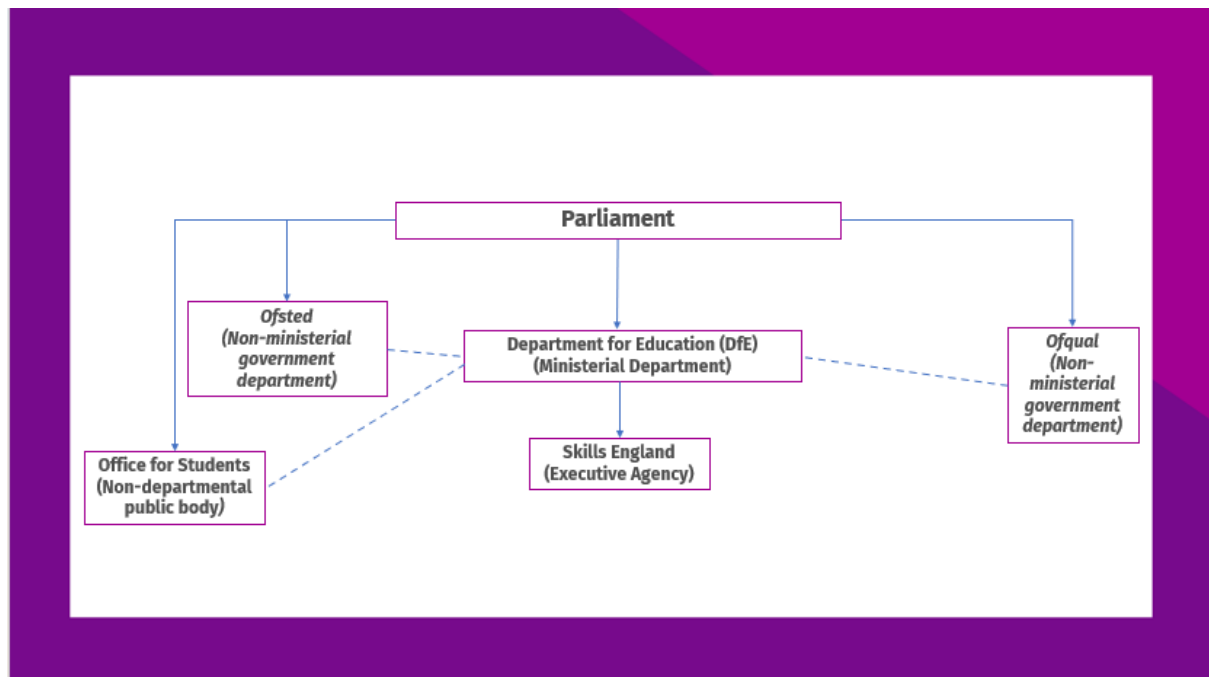
- regulated qualifications reliably indicate the knowledge, skills and understanding students have demonstrated
- assessments and exams show what a student has achieved
- people have confidence in the qualifications that we regulate
- students and teachers have information on the full range of qualifications that we regulate

Office for Students

The Office for Students (OfS) is the regulator of Higher Education in England, it is an executive non-departmental public body. The OfS sets the requirements that registered higher education providers must meet for teaching quality, student outcomes, equality of access and participation, and their

management, governance and financial sustainability. They also regulate degree awarding powers. The OfS monitor the performance of universities and colleges, publish data and reports, and act if a registered provider is failing to meet their requirements.

The Office for Students will have a broader remit upon the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) in January 2027 with more providers registering so that they can offer courses funded via the LLE.



What format can an oversight body take?

Within the Further Education and Skills Sector there are multiple organisations who you will engage with, this guide helps to navigate who they are and how they link together.

The oversight bodies fit into one of the following categories¹:

Ministerial Department - a department in the government that is headed by a minister and responsible for a specific function or area of administration.

Executive Agency – is a clearly designated unit of a central government department. It is administratively separate but legally remains a part of the department. It focuses on delivering specific outputs within a framework of accountability to ministers.

Non-Departmental Public Body – is a body which has a role in the processes of national government. It is not a government department but operates at arm's length from ministers. NDPBs have different roles some, advise ministers while others carry out executive or regulatory functions. They work within a strategic framework set by ministers.

Non-Ministerial Department – is a government department in its own right but does not have its own minister. However, it is accountable to Parliament through its sponsoring ministers. A non-ministerial department is staffed by civil servants and usually has its own estimate and accounts.

Who are the key people within these organisations?

- The Department for Education organogram can be found [here](#).
- Ofsted's leadership can be found [here](#).
- Ofqual's organisation organogram can be found [here](#).
- The Office for Students leadership can be found [here](#).
- Skills England information can be found [here](#).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-bodies-reform#public-bodies-reform-programme-2020-to-2025>

How is the government held to account?

There are several mechanisms for government decisions and departments to be held to account and for scrutiny to be applied by members of parliament and members of the sector.

Select committees

Select committees exist in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and their remit differs slightly depending on which house they are based in.

House of Commons Select Committees:

There is a Commons select committee for each government department, and they focus their work on examining three aspects: spending, policies and administration.

The committees have up to 11 members, with a chair selected by their peers, who decide upon the line of inquiry and then gather written and oral evidence. Findings are reported to the Commons and the government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

House of Lords Select Committees:

In the House of Lords there are two main types of select committee:

- 'permanent' committees that are set up in every parliament to cover broad subject areas
- special inquiry committees that investigate a specific current issue and complete their work within a year.

House of Lords select committees do not shadow the work of government departments. Their investigations consider specialist subjects, taking advantage of the Lords' expertise and the greater amount of time (compared to MPs) available to them to examine issues.

Urgent questions

Urgent questions are an opportunity for Members of Parliament to seek an answer from Ministers on an urgent issue without prior notice, they are granted at the Speaker's discretion.

Oral Questions and Written Questions

Members of Parliament are able to ask questions regarding matters of policy at regular opportunities due to the oral questions rota where questions can be submitted into a ballot and may be chosen to be answered in the main chamber of the House of Commons.

Written questions can also be posed by either MPs or members of the House of Lords to gain information and insight on the work, policy and activities of Government departments, related bodies, and the administration of Parliament.

APPGs

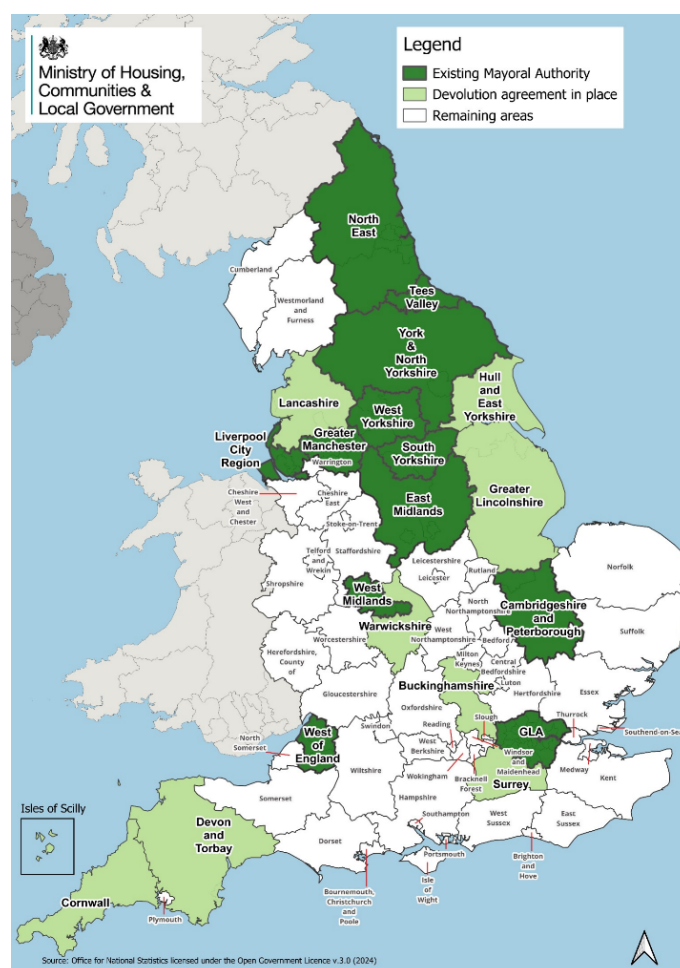
All Party Parliamentary Groups are informal cross-party groups run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords, they are often chaired by individuals who have a particular interest and passion for a topic. Many choose to involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration and activities.

How does the Skills Sector work at a National and Local level?

The Skills Sector in England works at both a national and local level, at a local level this is primarily through devolved authorities. This means that there is a dual system operating for programmes like the Adult Skills Fund and Skills Bootcamps depending on a provider/learner's geographical location.

Nationally managed	Locally managed
16-19 provision	Devolved Adult Skills Fund
Apprenticeships	UK Shared Prosperity Fund
Non-devolved Adult Skills Fund	Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs
Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs	Skills Bootcamps

Within both the national and local funding systems there is both grant and procured provision. Most Independent Training providers receive funding via the procured route which means they are required to bid for a share of the budget and are not guaranteed success. Unlike grant funded providers who receive an automatic allocation each year. The current picture of devolution can be seen below:



Key Organisations & People in the Skills Sector

1. Government & Policy Bodies

Organisation	Role	Key People
Department for Education (DfE) and ESFA	Sets overall education and skills policy. Also manages funding assurance and allocations.	Secretary of State for Education
Skills England	Works with employers to develop apprenticeship standards and T-Levels.	CEO of Skills England

2. Regulatory & Quality Assurance Bodies

Organisation	Role	Key People
Ofsted	Inspects FE and skills providers for quality assurance.	HM Chief Inspector
Ofqual	Regulates qualifications, exams and tests	Chief Regulator of Ofqual
Office for Students (OfS)	Regulates Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and HE pathways.	CEO of OfS
Qualification Bodies (e.g. City & Guilds, Pearson, NCFE)	Develop and accredit vocational qualifications.	CEOs of awarding bodies

3. Employer & Skills Support Organisations

Organisation	Role	Key People
AELP (Association of Employment and Learning Providers)	Represents education providers and employers.	CEO of AELP
AoC (Association of Colleges)	Represents Colleges	CEO of AoC
CBI (Confederation of British Industry)	Represents employers' skills interests.	Director-General of CBI
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)	Supports SME engagement in skills training.	National Chair of FSB

Key Terms & Acronyms

Term	Definition
DfE	Department for Education
ESFA	Education & Skills Funding Agency (until March 2025)
SE	Skills England
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services & Skills
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
OfS	Office for Students
MCAs	Mayoral Combined Authorities
LSIPs	Local Skills Improvement Plans



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