

Review of Post-16 Qualifications – Impact Assessment for UTCs

Research from University Technical Colleges suggests that:

- the proposed binary model of T-Levels and A-Levels will harm social mobility.
- significantly fewer students will progress to higher technical study and apprenticeships.

Executive Summary

UTCs have built up a strong track record of leaver destinations for students aged 18. Whilst a similar percentage to national averages progress to university, an extremely high number (**72%** vs **42%** nationally) take science subjects. Furthermore, historically, about **one-quarter** of UTC leavers have progressed into apprenticeships, which is significantly above national averages (**6%**). Of those students starting an apprenticeship over **half** do so at higher and degree levels, **six** times the national average. Very few UTC students become unemployed after leaving aged 18.

One driver behind these impressive destinations is the design of post-16 study programmes to meet individual need. Students can choose between predominantly **academic pathways**, such as 3 A-Levels or 2-A Levels plus a complementing applied general qualification (e.g. extended certificate in engineering), or take **technical pathways**, such as an extended diploma in engineering (equivalent to 3 A levels), or one A Level plus a diploma in engineering (equivalent to 2 A levels). This flexible offer ensures that students can select programmes of study most suited to their needs and interests.

Importantly, research conducted by Baker Dearing shows that student progression into both university and apprenticeship is via technical or academic routes. Indeed, almost **two-thirds** of university entrants (**64%**) from UTCs studied technical courses through Key Stage 5, and **one-third** of all students starting an apprenticeship did so having studied an academic programme. For both destinations, university and apprenticeship, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to followed a technical programme at Key Stage 5 (**83%** and **100%** respectively).

The proposed removal of many technical qualifications as part of the current government review, will harm social mobility. In particular, there is no replacement for the popular technical programme of a level 3 diploma plus one complementing A Level. **One-third** of students from disadvantaged backgrounds progress to university with this qualification mix, and **40%** start apprenticeships. Other important student groups (such as BAME students and white British boys) also benefit from this programme which blends applied technical learning with a functional academic study.

The current level 3 Extended Diploma is not replaced in the proposals. Whilst of similar size and content, the new T-Level employs a significantly different assessment methodology (especially longer formal examinations). Whilst its structure will meet the needs of some students, in particular those currently studying a diploma plus one A Level, it will not be appropriate for the vast majority of those students whose learning styles are successfully recognised in the Extended Diploma.

In this research, **80%** of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who progressed to university, and **100%** of those securing apprenticeships, mainly STEM-related, did so through technical programmes which are being phased out. As a consequence of the T Level being the sole replacement, about half of all students from disadvantaged backgrounds at UTCs will no longer have appropriate level 3 courses to study. It is very likely that this risk applies to many other post-16 providers. **Overall**, the proposed qualifications structure is likely to reduce progression from UTCs to higher technical study and higher or degree apprenticeships by as much as **40%**.

Investigation of the impact of proposals in the Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3

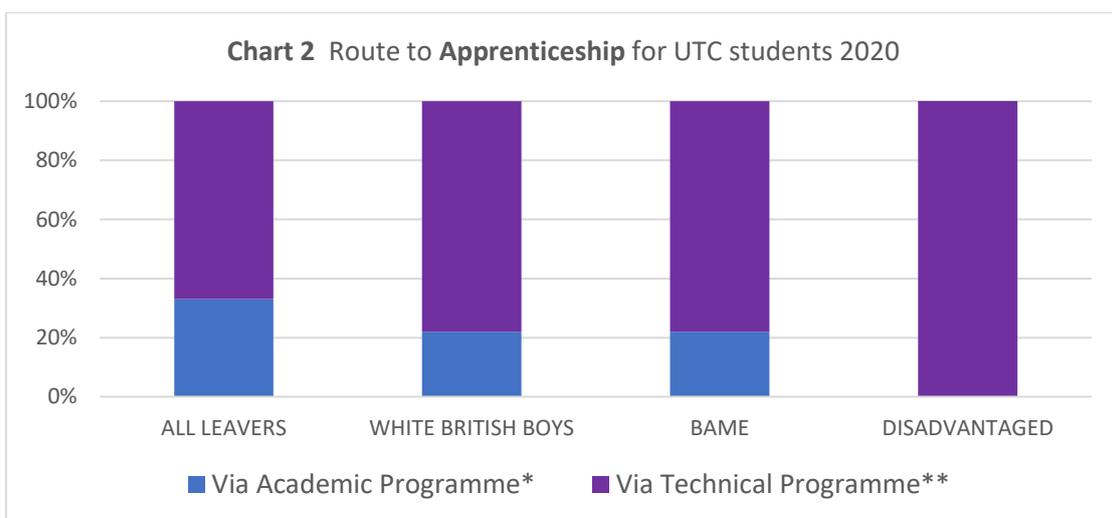
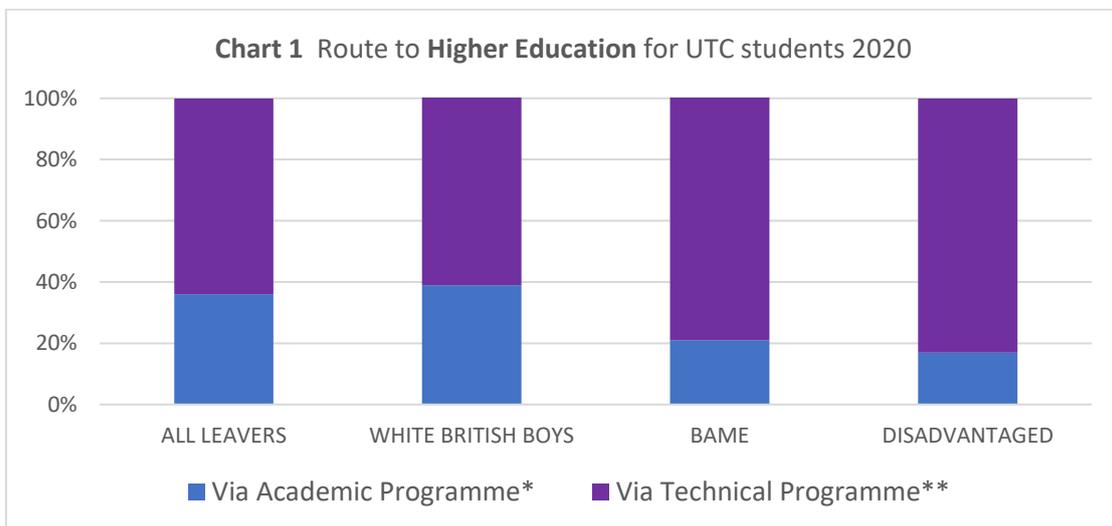
Research from University Technical Colleges suggests that:

- the proposed binary model of Level 3 qualifications will harm social mobility.
- significantly fewer 18-year olds will progress to higher technical study and apprenticeships

This research draws on data linking courses and subsequent destinations for 50% of Key Stage 5 leavers from University Technical Colleges in 2020. The distribution of this substantial sample (1154 students) is broadly representative of the destinations and characteristic pupil groups presented by the full UTC population.

1. UTC 2020 KS5 leaver progression by qualification type

The charts presented below are built from known destinations returned for 50% of UTC KS5 leavers in 2020. The sample distribution is broadly representative of that aggregated across all UTCs.



* 'Academic programme' includes 3 A Levels or two A Levels + one 360 glh L3 Ext Certificate

** 'Technical programme' includes one A Level + 720glh L3 Diploma or 1080glh L3 Ext Diploma

Chart 1 – progression to HE

- Of leavers progressing to Higher Education from UTCs, only **36%** currently do so via the ‘**academic qualifications**’ proposed by the Review i.e. A Levels or A Levels plus one Level 3 academic qualification providing a *practical or occupational component*.
- For **disadvantaged students** who progressed to HE, only 17% did so via such academic qualifications. **83% progressed to HE via a programme of predominantly technical qualifications** ie one which included a minimum of 720 glh studying a technical qualification such as a Level 3 Diploma or the larger Extended Diploma.
- **Four out of every five BAME leavers** who progressed to HE did so via a programme of predominantly technical qualifications.

Chart 2 – progression to apprenticeship

- **One in three leavers** progressing to an apprenticeship did so via academic qualifications.
- **17% of White British Boys in the UTC sample progressed to an apprenticeship.** Four out of every five did so through a programme of predominantly technical qualifications.
- Whilst only 7% of **BAME** leavers progressed to an apprenticeship, again **four out of every five did so via a programme of predominantly technical qualifications.**
- **ALL disadvantaged students** who progressed to an apprenticeship did so via a programme of predominantly technical qualifications.

2. UTC 2020 Leaver progression by finer qualification group

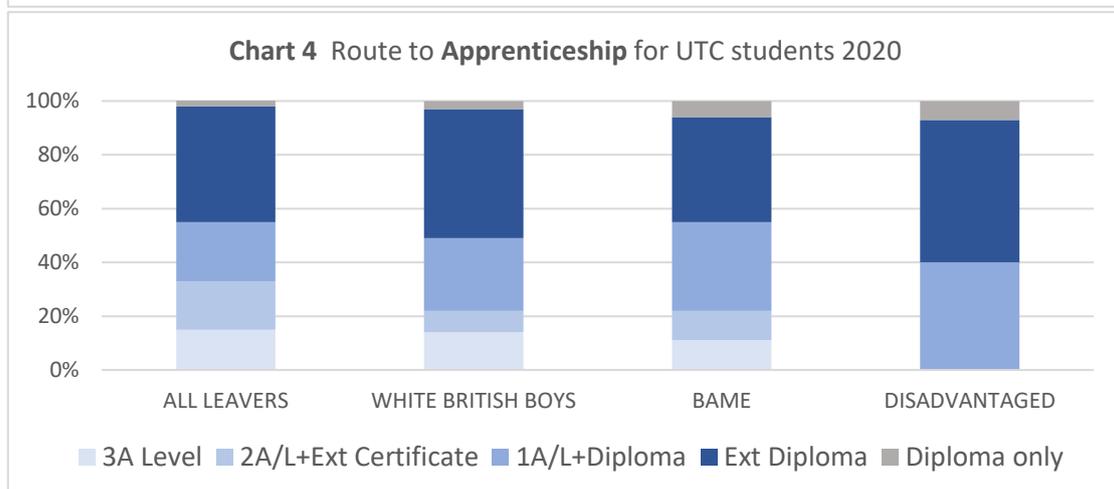
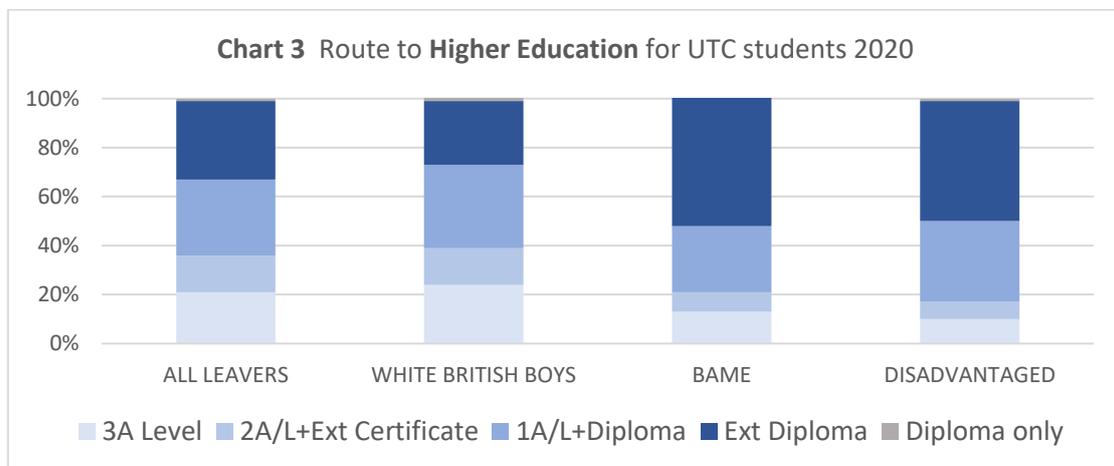


Chart 3 – progression to HE

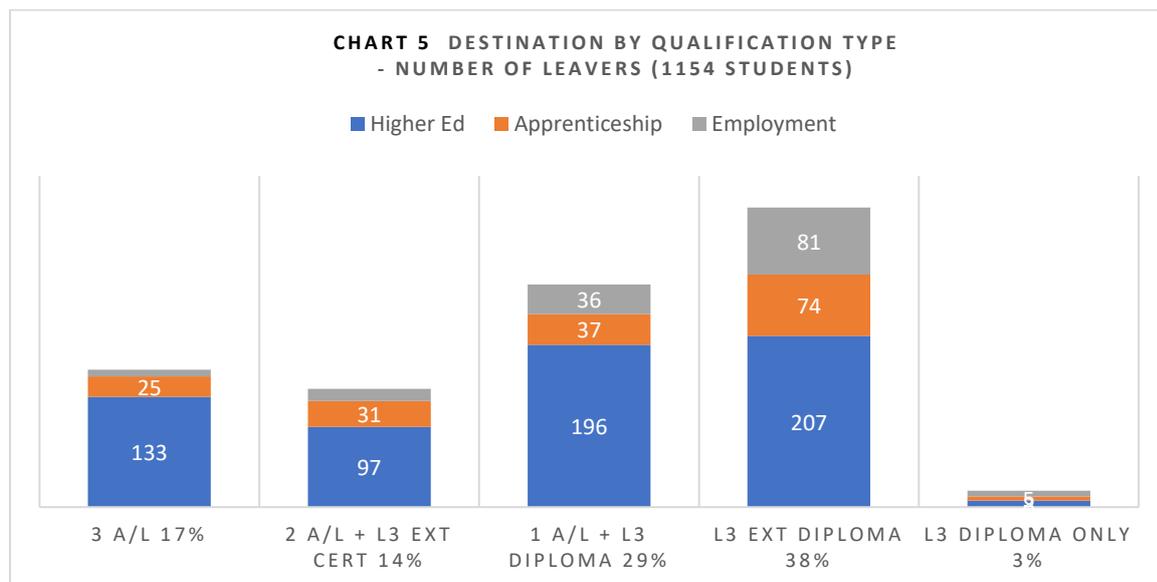
- Of ALL leavers progressing to HE, **almost half** (46%) did so through holding a **mix** of academic and technical qualifications eg 2 A/Ls + Level 3 Extended Certificate or 1A/L + Level 3 Diploma.
- The **Level 3 Diploma** (720 glh) provided a route to HE for approximately **one in three** leavers to that destination.
- The **Level 3 Extended Diploma** (1080glh) supports **one in three** progressions to HE. Over **half** (53%) of BAME leavers in the sample progressed to HE via this qualification.

Chart 4 - progression to apprenticeship

- Post-16 study programmes **combining academic and technical qualifications** supported progression to approximately **40%** of apprenticeship destinations across cohort groups.
- The Level 3 **Diploma** supported **25%** of progression to apprenticeships.
- The Level 3 **Extended Diploma** supported **43%** of progressions to apprenticeships. This increased to 48% for White British Boys and **53%** for the **Disadvantaged** cohort.

3. Destinations by qualifications type – student numbers

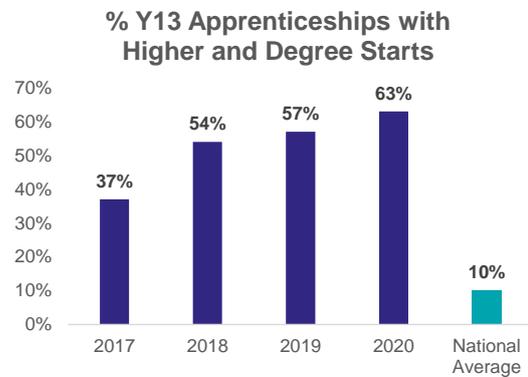
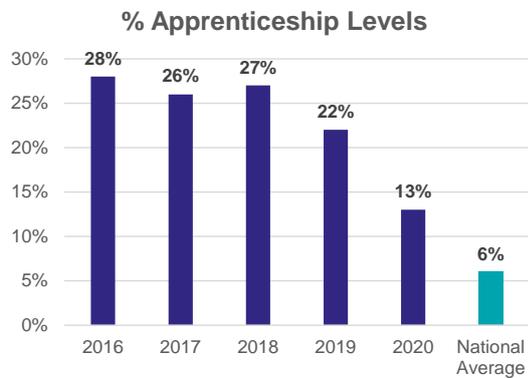
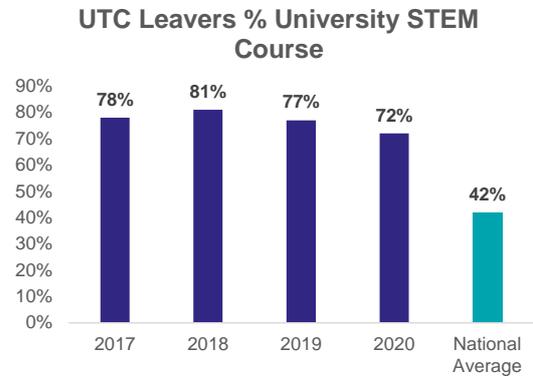
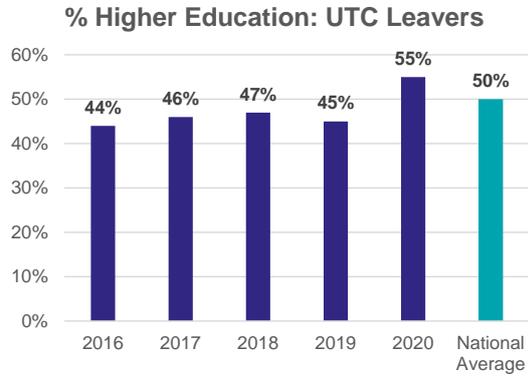
Charts 5 displays the number of KS5 leavers in the study who progressed to HE, apprenticeship and confirmed employment from each distinct qualification programme.



4. Conclusions

1. A binary modelling of level 3 qualification groups to distinct progression pathways is over-simplistic. Destination outcomes for students in UTCs indicate that **all the current level 3 qualification types** are being used to meet the requirements of both employers and higher education institutions.
2. The ‘academic’ qualifications described in the proposals are likely to meet the needs of about **30%** of students in University Technical Colleges, where learning is deepened and stretched through application in technical projects with employers and universities.
3. The current **suite of academic and technical qualifications** supports construction of a range of personalised study programmes which meet the disparate needs of learners at 16 years and lead to **demonstrably successful progression** two years later. See Appendix.
4. The current range of **technical qualifications** underpin progression to both higher technical study and apprenticeships, **especially** for those in the **BAME** and the **Disadvantaged** cohorts.
5. The 720g1h level 3 **Diploma** is **not represented** in the current Review proposals. In combination with one A Level, this qualification group supported **one third** of progressions to **HE** and **one quarter** of **apprenticeships**. *Supplementary returns from UTC Principals estimate that either the T Level or the combination of two A Levels plus complementing academic qualification, are likely to be appropriate for the overwhelming majority of this group.*
6. The 1080g1h level 3 **Extended Diploma** provides a significant route for progression to both HE and apprenticeships. For students wishing to study a level 3 programme of similar size and technical focus, the new proposals offer the T Level. However, it is indisputable that the two qualifications are very different in structure, especially in regard to their arrangements for assessment. As a consequence, it is highly improbable that the T Level will provide an accessible route for equivalent cohorts. **The choices for those 16 year olds for which the T Level is not fit for purpose are unclear.** *Supplementary returns from UTC Principals suggest that the T Level is likely to be accessible and appropriate for only 5- 10% of this group. In support of this assertion they reference the educational design of the (RQF) Extended Diploma and its continual application of learning and practical skills into assessment.*
7. University Technical Colleges progress about **25%** of KS5 leavers to apprenticeships annually (see appendix). The fundamental educational differences between the Extended Diploma and the T Level are projected to halve the number of apprentices feeding the respective technical sectors from UTCs.
8. Overall, the research indicates that the proposals presented in the Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England would **meet the learning and progression needs of just 60% of students in our 48 University Technical Colleges.** *This percentage is consistent with supplementary returns from UTC Principals in regard to their current Year 12 cohorts.*

Appendix: UTC Student Leaver Destinations 2016-20



Simon Connell/Ken Cornforth Jan 2021 Draft Final