



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **PUTTING EMPLOYERS AT THE HEART OF POST-16 SKILLS – UK GOVERNMENT SETS OUT FURTHER EDUCATION REFORM**

*The Cast Metals Federation (CMF) has welcomed the UK government's announcement of an extensive reform of further education to encourage parity of esteem between technical training and university courses. The allocation of additional funding and incentives for employers to take on Apprentices, as announced in the Chancellor's Budget, is also encouraging.*

Recognising that the UK does not have enough technicians and engineers to meet future growth opportunities, the UK government has committed to reform further education to meet the skills gap and offer additional financial support to companies to train employees in the required technical skills.

The plans have been set out in a white paper published by the government in January 2021. 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' identifies the need to ensure technical skills meet job market requirements, a crucial aspect to building an agile and adaptable workforce. However, there is an obligation for industry to dictate requirements and take an active role in shaping skills development.

The paper recognises that the existing skills system has been "very efficient" at producing graduates but has been "less able to help people get the quality technical skills that employers want", with an acknowledgement that technical courses can lead to better career outcomes for those who follow them.

Inadequate support and incentives, student finance restrictions, and a lack of joined-up thinking between employers and training providers to identify skills needs in the local job market, are highlighted as existing barriers to solving the problem.

Using the national system of employer-led Apprentice Standards created, the Department for Education claims it will ensure employers have a central role in designing and developing qualifications and training. Employers will also be put at the heart of identifying skills needs and helping to shape local provision through close working with colleges and other providers. The Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP Secretary of State for Education has committed to make strategic development funding available to colleges to support this.

The reforms are to be made in order to deliver the Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, as set out in his speech in September 2020. As part of this, the white paper promises tangible support such as a Lifelong Loan Entitlement, the equivalent of four years of post-18 education from 2025, and the transformation of the funding system to make it as easy to get a loan for a higher technical course as it is for a full-length university degree. Subject to parliamentary approval, it is the Government's intention that many of the planned reforms will be implemented through future primary legislation.

The white paper also places an emphasis on meeting very specific regional needs using Local Skills Improvement Plans to bring employers, colleges and other providers, and local stakeholders together

to set out the key changes needed to make technical skills training more responsive to employers' skills needs, which is to be welcomed.

The acknowledgement that skills development programmes, such as Apprenticeships, are equally as important as graduate courses is timely. Training provider In-Comm Training points to an increase in the popularity of Apprenticeships in its recently published *Training Barometer Report*. The report highlights that 79 per cent of secondary school pupils surveyed admitted they would consider choosing an Apprenticeship as a route to their first job. Furthermore, nearly half of them classed Apprenticeships as being equal to securing a Degree.

The government reforms will be music to the ears of the cast metals sector, which has embraced the new Apprenticeships and is working to encourage greater uptake of technician roles. However, difficult economic conditions, including the effect of Covid-19 and Brexit, have played their part in deterring some companies from investing in training and Apprenticeships in recent months.

The Cast Metals Federation (CMF) has worked with its membership to promote the virtues of skills development in collaboration with other bodies including the Institute of Cast Metals Engineers, and Foundry Training Services Ltd, utilising the facilities at the National Foundry Training Centre. CMF, and many of the Federation's member companies, have been active participants in the development of a training facility and training delivery fit to meet industry's needs.

CMF CEO Dr Pam Murrell FICME said she welcomed the white paper but was somewhat disappointed by the finger pointing towards employers. "The white paper suggests a lack of joined up thinking between employers and training providers, which is not the case in our sector. We have worked extensively for many years to ensure skills development and access to training provision meets the very real needs of our industry, often without any outside support. CMF members have been instrumental in shaping training courses and formal qualification routes. This has resulted in a significant increase in the uptake of technical courses; we must see more support for these efforts to ensure the future of our sector. Any assistance that the Government can offer will be greatly appreciated and we must work in partnership to ensure that the industry is able to address the future skills needs at all levels.

"A reform of the further education system is long overdue and will give hope that the pipeline of talented technicians can be increased as they will be the leaders and wealth generators of our sector in years to come. We must also recognise that companies have to make a significant investment to support a trainee throughout their training so any assistance in terms of accessing funding and simplifying the process is to be welcomed."

Contact: Dr Pam Murrell FICME, Tel: +44 (0) 121 809 3500, email: [pammurrell@cmfed.co.uk](mailto:pammurrell@cmfed.co.uk)

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Cast Metals Federation is a Trade Association representing the needs of the UK foundry industry. The membership includes foundries, foundry supply companies and academia. CMF Members come from every part of the industry and produce around 85 per cent of all castings produced in the UK. CMF promotes the UK castings industry as a whole, influencing discussions with government bodies, negotiating and consulting on UK and European legislation.

2. CMF is the UK member of the European Foundry Association (CAEF) and a full member of the UK Metals Council