

Universities UK has now published its own response to the DfE Consultation on 'Post-16 level 3 and below pathways',⁶ proposing 'V-Levels' for the pre-higher education 'post-16' stage.⁷

Will the proposed changes bring FE and HE closer together? If so, is that desirable? They seem to introduce still further complexity about boundaries between further and higher education and challenges for providers seeking to offer both.

¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9194/>

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/advanced-learner-loans-funding-and-performance-management-rules/

advanced-learner-loans-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2025-to-2026

³ <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/who-qualifies>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulators-code>

⁵ <https://www.teachinfurthereducation.education.gov.uk/faqs/what-is-fe>

⁶ https://consult.education.gov.uk/technical-education-and-qualifications-reform/post-16-level-3-and-below-pathways/supporting_documents/post-16-level-3-and-below-pathways-consultation.pdf

⁷ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUK-response-to-the-Department-for-Education-consultation-on-Post-16-level-3-and-below-pathways.pdf>

An Oxford Song

(to the tune of 'The British Grenadiers')¹

Some speak of Cambridge rivers,
And the glory of her 'backs';
Of Durham's castle towers,
And the learning of her hacks.
But none can match the splendour,
That through her years endures:
Of the noble halls of Oxford,
And the laughter of her youths.

'Midst cloistral hush we wander,
With knowledge as our guide.
In minds we plant the wonder,
Of truth that shall abide.
In every age and season,
Her light forever glows,
For Oxford stands unyielding,
Her charges to dispose.

We stand in quiet reverence,
Of the Isis' unending stream:
For Oxford, ever pleasant,
Is where minds are taught to dream.
So sing her name with gladness,
As we join in the *gaudeamus*:
Hail our noble *alma mater*,
And good health to Oxonians afar.

Dear Oxford in her bounteous train,
Did give us all we hold dear.
Truth, Right, and Honour to Maintain,
Against the wide world's sneer.
For this place and for these people,
Oh Lord, we give our thanks:
Dominus illuminatio
Mea; Deo gratias!

ALEXANDER YEN

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¹ Yes, it does scan, I've tried it. Try adding (or subtracting) some quavers, or whatever they're called.

The Natural History Museum in Oxford

There is a place in all the world that stands as my cathedral.
It has a light-drenched lofty roof of glass
supported not on stone, but vaulted iron
whose capitals are wreaths of industry and thought and craft.
They trace a panoply of floral forms from latitudes and longitudes
that map the earth and fix their place of birth in human minds.
And round the space that cloisters this museum rise granite pillars
pink or blacky brown, or mauve with speckles of a greenish hue
once mined from bedrocks of our ancient Isles.

I seek this place to marvel at a small child's chatter
on touching furry taxidermy, or to hear their laughter whiffed
with fear
as one gigantic roar suspends its sound within T. Rex's tooth-filled open jaw.
And more than this I seek a place to think,
and bring the questions that I ask of nature into light.

I feel the awe inspired by temples
yet this place is neither sacred nor profane.
It is a habitat for beauty and for truth
for both are cherished here and house the story of this planet Earth.

But crowning all are hung the epic molecules of life,
those subtle helices whose bonds still open to the point-specific drift of change.

And if these spiral chains from different source combine,
their permutations shift most wondrous variation for evolving life.

Provocative in its turn, this place questions me.
It asks about the role of humankind
and how we value nature, space and time.

C. E. PARKER

Claire Parker was one of the first cohort of women at Clare College Cambridge, graduating in Nat. Sci/ Med Sci in the 1970s. After GP training in Oxford, epidemiology in the US and cellular immunology at the IMM in Oxford, she took a DPhil from Pembroke College, finally returning to general practice from 1998 until retirement.