

Research Briefing

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# Technical education in England: T Levels



## Summary

- 1 Background
- 2 The development of T Levels
- 3 How do T Levels work?
- 4 Reaction, issues, and reports

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## Summary

### What are T Levels?

T Levels are two-year technical courses taken after GCSEs and equivalent in size to three A Levels. Launched in September 2020, they offer students practical and knowledge-based learning at a school or college and on-the-job experience through an industry placement of approximately 45 days (20% of the course).

T Levels are intended to sit alongside apprenticeships within a reformed skills training system. They will be based on the same set of employer-designed standards as apprenticeships, but while apprentices will train for a single occupation, T Level students will undertake a broader programme, gaining skills and knowledge relevant to a range of occupations.

The first three T Levels were launched in September 2020 in construction, digital, and education and childcare. Seven more T Levels were launched in September 2021, six in September 2022, two in September 2023, and three in September 2024. A T Level in marketing is due to be introduced in September 2025. The government is considering whether to introduce T Levels in catering and in beauty therapy, but any new T Levels in these areas would not be available until at least 2026.

In 2023, 1.5% of the 16- to 17-year-old population in England were studying T Levels compared to 45.2% who were doing A/AS levels and 18.8% who were following other level 3 courses.

### The development of T Levels

In July 2016, the Conservative government published its [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), which committed to implementing the recommendations from the 2016 [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#).

The plan outlined the government's desire for academic and technical options at age 16 to be held in similar esteem. The technical option would be delivered by either college-based technical education or apprenticeships, and underpinned by a new framework of 15 'technical education routes' divided into 'pathways'.

These routes and their pathways will provide training for skilled occupations where technical knowledge and practical skills are required. 11 of the

technical routes will have pathways that begin with one or more T Levels, while the other four routes and their pathways will be covered by apprenticeships.

## How do T Levels work?

T Levels all follow the same broad framework and primarily consist of:

- A technical qualification. This is the main, classroom-based element and includes core content followed by occupational specialisation. Students will learn about their chosen sectors through a curriculum designed by employers and developed by an awarding organisation.
- An industry placement with an employer. This runs for a minimum of 315 hours (45 days) overall and will give students practical insights into their sector and an opportunity to embed the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom. Up to 20% of placement hours (50% for Digital T Levels) for most T Level qualifications can be undertaken remotely.
- English and maths provision. This is built into the classroom-based element of the T Level with the aim of giving those students who need it a solid foundation of transferable skills.

To pass a T Level and be awarded a certificate, students need to pass all components of the programme (although students are no longer required to achieve either a grade 4 in English and maths GCSE or Level 2 in functional skills to pass their programme). The government hopes T Levels will then support progression directly into skilled employment, an apprenticeship at level 4 or higher, and degrees and other higher education courses in related technical areas.

In April 2024, the Department for Education [said it would oversee a twelve-month route-by-route review](#) of the content and assessment of all T Levels on an individual basis.

For students who are not ready to start a T Level, but who may have the potential to progress onto one following some initial preparation, a one-year, post-GCSE [T Level Foundation Year](#) has been designed.

## Reaction and issues

The Conservative government's proposals for T Levels, as set out in its Post-16 Skills Plan, received a broadly positive response from stakeholders when they were announced. In opposition, Labour welcomed the introduction of the new qualification, but said it wanted to address what it sees as "current flaws" within the new qualification.

There have been concerns raised about some aspects of the T Level programme as well as subsequent policy developments, particularly around the decision to remove funding from other level 3 qualifications that will overlap with T Levels. The full rollout of T Levels has also been delayed on several occasions, while education providers and employers have expressed concerns about their ability to deliver the industry placement component of the course. A [2024 report by the Education Policy Institute](#) also highlighted issues with student retention, with nearly a third of first-year health and science T Level students dropping out of their programme.

In July 2023, [Ofsted published a report on T Levels and the T Level Transition Programme \(now renamed the T Level Foundation Year\)](#) that said there remained considerable work to do to improve the quality and effectiveness of both. The report said that, at their worst, T Level courses are not what students expected, and many students have been misled and ill-informed about their content and structure. It also noted issues around teaching, staff recruitment and retention, and the quality of industry placements.

# 1 Background

## 1.1 Level 3 qualification reform

The Department for Education wants to make A Levels and their new technical alternative, T Levels, the main further education qualifications at age 16 in England. They'll sit alongside apprenticeships and a range of complementary level 3 qualifications, including applied general qualifications such as BTECs. Funding for many other existing qualifications will be removed.

These reforms, initially announced in July 2021 and recently reviewed by the new Labour government, are part of wider efforts to overhaul the further education system, and particularly the technical education system. More detail is available in the Commons Library briefing [The reform of level 3 qualifications in England](#) and [The review of level 3 qualifications reform](#).

### What are level 3 qualifications?

Most qualifications have a difficulty level. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland there are nine qualification levels, ranging from entry level (which has three sub-levels) to level 8. The higher the level, the more difficult the qualification.

#### Box 1: Qualification levels

A list of qualification Levels and examples is available on gov.uk at [What qualification Levels mean](#). Examples of qualifications include:

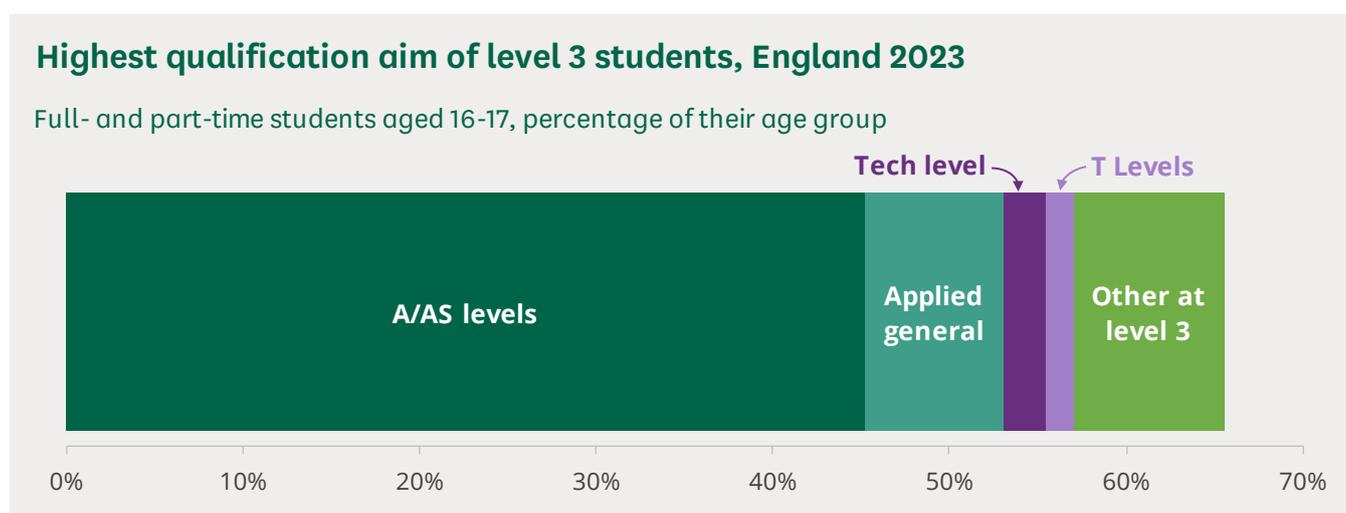
- Entry Level: Skills for Life.
- Level 1: GCSE grades 3-1 (D-G).
- Level 2: GCSE grades 9-4 (A\*-C).
- Level 3: A Levels, AS Levels, T Levels, BTECs.
- Level 4: Higher National Certificate (HNC), Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).
- Level 5: Higher National Diploma (HND), Level 5 Diploma, Foundation Degree, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).
- Level 6: Undergraduate Degree.
- Level 7: Master's Degree, Postgraduate Diploma.
- Level 8: Doctorate (for example, a PhD).

Level 3 qualifications are mainly taken by young people after their GCSEs (level 2), but some are also funded for adults.<sup>1</sup> They can precede higher education qualifications at levels 4 and 5 (such as higher technical qualifications, higher national certificates, and higher national diplomas) and at level 6 (undergraduate degrees and [higher and degree apprenticeships](#)).

Most young people pursuing a level 3 qualification in England are studying academic qualifications, with AS/A Levels the most popular. These qualifications help students to progress into further study in higher education. In 2023, of the 886,000 16- and 17-year-olds studying for a level 3 qualification (65.6% of the total 16- and 17-year old population), 611,000 were studying AS/A Levels (45.2% of the total 16- and 17-year old population).<sup>2</sup>

138,000 of those studying A/AS Levels were doing so alongside an applied general qualification (10.2% of the population). These are qualifications that allow students to develop transferable knowledge and skills through applied learning. They are often in technical or vocational subjects and are known by their brand name, such as BTECs and Cambridge Technicals. In 2023, there were 107,000 16- and 17-year-olds studying solely Applied General qualifications (7.9%), as well as 33,000 (2.4%) studying Tech Level qualifications.

There were 20,740 16- and 17-year-olds (1.5%) studying T Levels. The following chart shows the relative number of students taking each different type of level 3 qualification.



Source: Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, 2023](#), 26 September 2024

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, [Free courses for jobs](#)

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, Calendar year 2023](#), 26 September 2024

## Why does the government want to reform level 3 qualifications?

Between March and June 2019, the Department for Education consulted on the principles that should apply to level 3 qualifications and below in England.<sup>3</sup>

The Department for Education said its aim was to create “a more streamlined, simplified and ambitious technical qualifications system”, in which all publicly funded qualifications demonstrated the principles of “quality, purpose, necessity and progression.”<sup>4</sup>

As part of this consultation, the Department for Education published a case for change,<sup>5</sup> which drew on independent reviews of the further education system commissioned by the government in 2011 (the ‘[Wolf Review](#)’) and in 2016 (the ‘[Sainsbury Review](#)’).<sup>6</sup>

The Department for Education argued reforms were necessary for the following reasons:

- High quality qualifications are needed to address significant skills gaps and aid social mobility.
- The existing system is complex and of variable quality. At July 2018, there were 4,000 level 3 qualifications eligible for public funding.<sup>7</sup> Many were duplicates in the same subject, including over 200 different engineering qualifications.
- The system is not working for all students.
- Recent controls have not been fully effective in raising quality and have limitations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England](#), March 2019

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England: Government consultation document](#), March 2019, p8

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England: The current system and the case for change](#), March 2019

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, [Review of vocational education: The Wolf report](#), March 2011; Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education \(PDF\)](#), April 2016

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education, [Students and qualifications at Level 3 and below in England](#), March 2019

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England: The current system and the case for change](#), March 2019

## How will the new system work?

Following a [consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 3](#) in 2020/21, the Conservative government [published a policy statement](#) in July 2021 that set out changes to level 3 qualifications in England.<sup>9</sup>

The government's policy statement said it wanted to create "clearly defined academic and technical routes" for post-16 progression.<sup>10</sup> The government hopes the reforms will remove "[low-quality qualifications](#)" from the system, and ensure students have confidence in the outcomes of their choices.<sup>11</sup>

The government said A Levels would be central to the academic route, which is intended to lead to higher education study at university,<sup>12</sup> while T Levels would become the main qualification option for the technical route, supporting progression into skilled employment (requiring specialist training or expertise), further technical study or apprenticeships, and potentially higher education courses.<sup>13</sup>

Other level 3 qualifications, including applied general qualifications, will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels, but the Conservative government said they would [need to demonstrate their quality and distinct purpose](#) to continue to receiving public funding, with overlapping qualifications, including BTECs that overlap with T Level subjects, set to no longer receive public funding.<sup>14</sup>

## Labour government review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3

In June 2023, the then-Shadow Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, pledged that a future Labour government would pause and review the removal of funding from many level 3 qualifications.<sup>15</sup>

On 25 July 2024, the new Labour government announced a "short review" of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below that would conclude before the end of the year.<sup>16</sup> The removal of funding from qualifications in construction and the built environment; digital; education and early years;

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<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement](#), 14 July 2021

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement](#), 14 July 2021, p4

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, [Clearer choice of high-quality post-16 qualifications](#), 14 July 2021

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement](#), 14 July 2021, p11

<sup>13</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement](#), 14 July 2021, p11

<sup>14</sup> Department for Education, [Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond](#), April 2023

<sup>15</sup> "[Labour pledges to pause and review BTECs cull](#)", FE Week, 27 October 2023

<sup>16</sup> [HCWS22 \[Technical Qualifications Reform update\] 25 July 2024](#)

and health and science, which was due to happen from August 2024, was paused.

As part of the review, the Department for Education (DfE) considered all level 3 qualifications that were in scope to have public funding removed from 1 August 2025. This included:

- qualifications that overlap with [T Levels in waves 1, 2, 3 or 4](#)
- level 3 qualifications that were in scope to have funding removed because they did not meet new quality criteria
- qualifications that providers identified as being replaced by a reformed qualification.

The point of the review was to determine if any qualifications in line to be defunded should be retained, and to consider how long they should be kept available. In September 2024, the Minister for Skills, Jacqui Smith, said she recognised there was a need to retain other qualifications alongside T Levels and A Levels. She said:

Where the review identifies the balance of learner and employer needs within a sector requires level 3 qualifications other than T Levels and A levels, we will maintain the relevant qualifications. This may well be in areas that overlap with T Levels, which is a change from the approach taken by the last government.<sup>17</sup>

## Outcomes

On 12 December 2024, the government announced the outcomes of its review and said the new position was fixed until 2027.<sup>18</sup> The outcomes included:

- 157 qualifications due to lose their funding will instead have it extended to allow reformed qualifications to be established and embedded in the system. The retained qualifications include:
  - 57 qualifications in digital, construction, and health and science (now due to be funded until July 2026)
  - 100 qualifications in engineering, agriculture, business, and creative (now due to be funded until July 2027).
- Funding will continue to be withdrawn for the other qualifications in scope of the review, including more than 200 qualifications with low or no enrolments.

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<sup>17</sup> [“How we’ll go about reforming the level 3 landscape”](#), FE Week, 30 September 2024

<sup>18</sup> [HC Deb \[Qualifications reform review\] 12 December 2024](#)

- Previously proposed funding rules limiting providers and students on which types of qualifications can be combined have been dropped.
- The [government's curriculum and assessment review](#) will take a view on qualifications in the long term, but the DfE will invite awarding organisations to submit further new level 3 qualifications in the spring in health and science, construction, digital, and education and early years, as well as in the care services route.

Informing the House of Commons of the review outcomes, the Education Minister Janet Daby said the government believed T Levels were “an excellent qualification that should be available to more young people”, and that the decision to retain funding for some qualifications would allow for the needs of learners and employers to be met while the transition to T Levels being “the large technical qualification of choice” continued.<sup>19</sup>

Decisions on each qualification in the scope of the review are available in Department for Education guidance.<sup>20</sup> See the Commons Library briefing [The review of level 3 qualifications reform](#) for more information.

## 1.2

## Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022

### Skills for Jobs white paper

On 22 January 2021, the Conservative government published a further education white paper, [Skills for jobs: Lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#), which set out reforms to post-16 technical education and training.<sup>21</sup>

The government hoped these reforms will support people to develop the skills needed to get good jobs and improve national productivity. The white paper included plans to:

- give employers a greater say in the development of skills;
- provide higher level technical skills;
- provide a flexible, lifetime skills guarantee;
- simplify and reform funding and accountability for providers;
- support teaching.

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<sup>19</sup> [HC Deb \[Qualifications reform review\] 12 December 2024](#)

<sup>20</sup> Department for Education, [Review of level 3 qualifications reform: provisional outcomes](#), 12 December 2024

<sup>21</sup> Department for Education, [Skills for jobs: Lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#), 21 January 2021

The white paper also highlighted T Levels, saying they were a “prestigious technical programme”, which the government wanted as many people to benefit from as possible.<sup>22</sup>

## Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022

The [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#) was introduced in the House of Lords on 18 May 2021 and received royal assent on 28 April 2022.

The Act implements reforms set out in the Skills for Jobs white paper and aims to improve how the skills and post-16 education system functions in England.

More information is available in the Library briefings:

- [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill \[HL\]](#)
- [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill \[HL\]: Progress of the Bill](#)

## What are Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)?

The Skills and Post-16 Education Act created a framework to facilitate stronger employer and education provider involvement in local skills systems.

The Act placed duties on local education providers to cooperate with designated ‘Employer Representative Bodies’ to develop Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). LSIPs will then help colleges to shape their provision to ensure it is responding to local labour market skills needs.

Eight LSIP ‘trailblazers’ [were announced in July 2021](#) and the plans were published on 19 April 2022.<sup>23</sup> The specified area an LSIP covers will be largely based upon functional economic areas that providers and other relevant stakeholders (including institutions with devolved powers) already operate across. In areas where devolution is already in place, LSIPs will mirror the boundaries of Combined Authorities, Mayoral Combined Authorities, and the Greater London Authority. In other areas of the country, LSIP areas will follow existing Local Enterprise Partnership areas.

On 3 May 2022, the Department for Education invited Employer Representative Bodies to apply to lead the development of LSIPs.<sup>24</sup> Employer representative bodies are not being asked to take a direct role in funding or commissioning skills provision. Those powers will remain with the [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) or bodies with devolved powers.

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<sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [Skills for jobs: Lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#), 21 January 2021

<sup>23</sup> Department for Education, [Local skills improvement plan trailblazers and strategic development fund pilots](#), 19 April 2022

<sup>24</sup> Department for Education, [Local skills improvement plans: Submit an expression of interest](#), 3 May 2022

The application guidance for employer representative bodies set out the expected timeframe for the full roll-out of LSIPs:

June 2022	Expressions of interest to lead LSIP development closed
Autumn 2022	First tranche of ERBs designated
Summer 2023	LSIPs from first tranche of designated ERBs to go to the Secretary of State for sign off
By Spring 2024	First annual review and update of LSIPs completed to ensure they are still current
By Spring 2025	Annual review and update of LSIPs completed to ensure they are still current. <sup>25</sup>

On 1 September 2022, designated employer representative bodies were announced for 37 of the 38 specified LSIP areas.<sup>26</sup> The Department for Education has published statutory guidance for the development and review of LSIPs.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Education, [Local skills improvement plans: Application guidance](#), 3 May 2022

<sup>26</sup> Department for Education, [Designated employer representative bodies](#), 1 September 2022

<sup>27</sup> Department for Education, [Statutory guidance Local skills improvement plans](#), updated November 2023

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## 2

# The development of T Levels

### 2.1 Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016)

In November 2015, an Independent Panel on Technical Education was established by the then-Minister for Skills, Nick Boles. The Panel was chaired by Lord Sainsbury and tasked with advising the Government on actions to improve the quality of technical education in England.

In April 2016, the [Panel completed its report](#) (PDF) and it was published by the government in July 2016. In setting out the need for reform, the report said the UK's economy was being held back by a "long-term productivity problem" and years of undertraining had led to "a chronic shortage of people with technician-Level skills."<sup>28</sup> The report argued investment in the development of technical skills was essential to enhancing productivity.

In addition to this economic rationale for reform, the report outlined a social need for change. It said individuals should have access to a national system of technical qualifications that is easy to understand, has credibility with employers, and remains stable over time.<sup>29</sup> The current system, the report argued, failed on all three counts, comprising "a confusing and ever-changing multitude of qualifications", many of which "hold little value in the eyes of individuals and are not understood or sought by employers."<sup>30</sup>

### Recommendations

The Panel put forward 34 recommendations in its report, which were aimed at "systematically reform[ing] technical education for the long term" and "ensuring individuals can develop the technical knowledge and skills that industry needs through education and training."<sup>31</sup>

The recommendations included the introduction of a new framework of 15 technical education routes, which would "provide training for skilled

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<sup>28</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p22

<sup>29</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, pp22-3

<sup>30</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p23

<sup>31</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p8

occupations where there is a substantial requirement for technical knowledge and practical skills.”<sup>32</sup>

The report also said the government should develop a “coherent technical education option which develops the technical knowledge and skills required to enter skilled employment, which leads from Levels 2/3 to Levels 4/5 and beyond”.<sup>33</sup>

Alongside an employment-based mode of learning (typically an apprenticeship), the report said a college-based technical education option should also be available:

[T]his is typically a two-year, full-time study programme which should include work placements appropriate to the technical education route and individual student.<sup>34</sup>

The report said while it would be necessary for the government to design the overall system of technical education, “employer-designed standards must be put at its heart to ensure it works in the marketplace.”<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2

### The Post-16 Skills Plan (2016)

Alongside the publication of the report by the Independent Panel on Technical Education, the Conservative government published its Post-16 Skills Plan in July 2016, which accepted the Panel’s recommendations and committed to their implementation.<sup>36</sup> A [document outlining the rationale for the proposed changes](#), which echoed much of the argument set out by the Independent Panel’s report, was also published.<sup>37</sup>

The Plan outlined the government’s desire for academic and technical options at age 16 to be held in similar esteem. Under the proposed reforms, every young person would be presented with two choices of education route at age 16: an academic route and a technical route. The Skills Plan argued the

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<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p10

<sup>33</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, pp22-3

<sup>34</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p9

<sup>35</sup> Department for Education, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#) (PDF), July 2016, p9

<sup>36</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016

<sup>37</sup> Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: the case for change](#), July 2016

academic option is “already well regarded” and so focused on developing a reformed technical option, which, it said, “must also be world-class.”<sup>38</sup>

The Plan said:

Our ambition is that every young person, after an excellent grounding in the core academic subjects and a broad and balanced curriculum to age 16, is presented with two choices: the academic or the technical option. The academic option is already well regarded, but the technical option must also be world-class. As with the reforms in higher education, we want to improve both the quality of education and student choice. There should be appropriate bridging courses to make movement between the two options easily accessible.

The technical option will prepare individuals for skilled employment which requires technical knowledge and practical skills valued by industry. It will cover college-based and employment-based (apprenticeship) education, building on our apprenticeship reforms.

Employers will sit at the heart of the system and take the lead in setting the standards. Crucially, standards will be designed by considering what is needed to move to skilled employment and then working backwards.<sup>39</sup>

As proposed by the Panel, the government committed to developing high-quality, two-year, college-based programmes for 16–18-year-olds, which would sit within 15 technical education routes. The Plan said each programme would comprise a ‘common core’, including English and maths requirements and digital skills, and “quality work placements”.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.3

### T Level action plans and 2017/18 consultation

#### 2017 action plan

In October 2017, the government published its first T Level action plan, which set out its policy on T Levels and the progress on developing the first T Levels to be introduced from September 2020. Annual T Level action plans are published by the Department for Education and are [available on gov.uk](#).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7

<sup>39</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7

<sup>40</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24

<sup>41</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan](#)

## Consultation on implementing the T Level programme

Between November 2017 and February 2018, the government consulted on how best to implement the proposals for T Levels it had set out in its Post-16 Skills Plan and 2017 T Level action plan.<sup>42</sup>

In her foreword to the consultation document, the then-Education Secretary Justine Greening, outlined the government's ambition for the new technical qualification. She said:

The technical option – T Levels, will be a distinctive and prestigious offer in its own right, with high standards and rigour, which will be designed to prepare individuals for skilled employment. They will have credibility with employers, who will be involved in designing them, and will prepare our young people for jobs of the future and for increasing automation in our economy, supporting the aims of the Government's Industrial Strategy.<sup>43</sup>

The government's consultation covered the principles and components of the T Level programme (including qualification design, work placements, and maths, English, and digital skills requirements), progression, delivery, quality assurance, and funding.<sup>44</sup>

## Government response to the consultation

The government responded to the consultation in May 2018.<sup>45</sup> It said the main findings of the consultation included:

- Respondents wanted clearer information about the purpose of T Levels and their positioning within the education system.
- T Levels need to be rigorous, adding value for employers, as well as inclusive of students with additional needs.
- There was support for simplification of the existing qualifications system, but only where this was employer-led and did not leave gaps in high quality provision.
- T Levels need to be as accessible as possible to students with special educational needs or a disability (SEND), including reasonable adjustments in assessments and industry placements.

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<sup>42</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation](#), November 2017

<sup>43</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation](#), November 2017, p3

<sup>44</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation](#), November 2017

<sup>45</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation response](#), May 2018

- Industry placements are an important part of T Levels, but will be challenging to deliver on a national scale and it would be important to mitigate inequality of opportunity.
- There was support for a transition offer to support progression to Level 3 provision.<sup>46</sup>

The government's response also revealed the views of students about T Levels, which the government said it would continue to take on board as T Levels were designed and implemented. The government spoke to over 700 students from years 10 to 13 from 13 different education institutions, including further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, and school sixth-forms. The students said:

- They would prefer to start a T Level course by obtaining broad knowledge about their chosen subject, then gradually focus on specialist work skills.
- The opportunity to obtain experience in industry is the most valuable feature of the T Level programme, because of how it would improve confidence and employability.
- They were worried there would not be enough good employers offering industry placements in their local area, which could discourage them from starting a T Level.
- They have constraints on where they can get to for an industry placement because of available public transport links, travel time, and cost.
- They want T Levels to be as well respected as A Levels, with the option to move onto further study, including university.
- Choosing an occupational specialism is a difficult decision and they would want experiences of different occupations so they can try a range of specialisms before they commit to just one.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.4

# The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and Skills England

## Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

In 2018, the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships was expanded to cover all technical education, both college-based and apprenticeships, and it was

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<sup>46</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p9

<sup>47</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p11

accordingly renamed the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).

The [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#), which received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017, provided the legislative basis for these changes. As well as providing for the renaming of the Institute for Apprenticeships, the Act, among other things:

- Enabled the Secretary of State to specify broad groups of occupations with shared training requirements (which may be referred to as ‘routes’). IfATE is required to map occupations in relation to these routes and must publish information to show how standards for occupations relate to the occupational map.<sup>48</sup>
- Requires IfATE to publish standards for occupations and to describe the expected outcomes required to successfully achieve the standard. Standards will be drafted by groups approved by the Institute.<sup>49</sup>
- Allows IfATE to approve technical education qualifications in relation to one or more occupations, and requires the Institute to maintain a list of approved technical education qualifications.<sup>50</sup>

The Department for Education [publishes annual strategic guidance](#) for IfATE. In 2022-23, the Institute was asked to ensure T Levels are developed in accordance with the overarching technical education programme and are of a “consistently high quality”, with the content and performance standards meeting employers’ needs and providing a strong progression pathway for learners.<sup>51</sup>

## Skills England

Skills England is a new body that was launched in July 2024 in shadow form and will be fully established in phases over the next 9 to 12 months as the successor to Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.<sup>52</sup> It will operate as an executive agency of the Department for Education, which will take on the functions of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. These functions will include:

- Working with employers to develop, approve, and review [occupational standards](#). These are used in the development of apprenticeships, T Levels, and other IfATE-approved technical qualifications.

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<sup>48</sup> [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#), Schedule 1, paragraph 7.

<sup>49</sup> [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#), Schedule 1, paragraph 8.

<sup>50</sup> [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#), Schedule 1, paragraphs 15 and 21.

<sup>51</sup> Department for Education, [Strategic guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education 2022 to 2023](#), April 2022, p15.

<sup>52</sup> Department for Education, [Skills England to transform opportunities and drive growth](#), 22 July 2024

- Create and maintain [occupational maps](#) which group together occupations into 15 routes.
- Responsibility for the technical qualification of a T Level, which is the main, classroom based element of the T Level. IfATE approve the outline content that is [put together for each T level](#) by a T Level panel.
- Approve, review and ensure quality of approved technical qualifications, and their alignment with the occupational standards.

Skills England will also having an expanded remit to look at skills gaps and demand.

In October 2024, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill was introduced in the Lords and will transfer IfATE’s powers to the Department for Education.<sup>53</sup> It confirmed that Skills England will operate as an executive agency within the Department for Education, so will not have the independence that IfATE had. The Department for Education has said the transfer of IfATE’s powers to the Education Secretary may enable closer integration of employer input with broader government strategies and policies.<sup>54</sup>

## 15 technical routes

As recommended by the Independent Panel on Technical Education, the government created a framework of 15 technical routes, which include areas such as ‘business and administration’, ‘construction’, and ‘hair and beauty’.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education developed an [occupational map for each of the 15 technical routes](#). The maps detail the occupations linked to each of the 15 routes, with closely related occupations grouped together into pathways. Each T Level and apprenticeship is directly linked to a pathway. The maps and pathways bring T Levels and their related occupations together to show where technical education can lead.

Route	Pathways
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal Care and Management</li> <li>• Agriculture, Land Management, and Production</li> </ul>
Business and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Resources</li> <li>• Management and Administration</li> </ul>
Care Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care Services</li> </ul>

<sup>53</sup> [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education \(Transfer of Functions etc\) Bill \[HL\]](#); Department for Education, [IfATE \(Transfer of Functions etc\) Bill: policy summary](#), 10 October 2024

<sup>54</sup> [“From IfATE to Skills England via DfE: What you need to know”](#), FE Week, 10 October 2024

Catering and Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catering</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> </ul>
Construction and the Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design, Surveying, and Planning</li> <li>• Onsite Construction</li> <li>• Building Services Engineering</li> </ul>
Creative and Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craft and Design</li> <li>• Media, Broadcast, and Production</li> <li>• Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions</li> </ul>
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Support and Services</li> <li>• Digital Production, Design, and Development</li> <li>• Digital Business Services</li> </ul>
Education and Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Early Years</li> </ul>
Engineering and Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering, Design, and Development</li> <li>• Engineering, Manufacturing, Process, and Control</li> <li>• Maintenance, Installation, and Repair</li> </ul>
Hair and Beauty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hair, Beauty, and Aesthetics</li> </ul>
Health and Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Healthcare Science</li> <li>• Community Exercise, Physical Activity, Sport and Health</li> </ul>
Legal, Finance, and Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Accountancy</li> </ul>
Protective Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protective Services</li> </ul>
Sales, Marketing, and procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Services,</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Procurement</li> <li>• Sales and Retail</li> </ul>
Transport and Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Logistics</li> </ul>

## Developing the qualification content

The outline content for each T Level has been developed by T Level panels appointed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and made up of employers, practitioners, providers, and representatives of trade organisations.

The panels identified the content common across the route and pathway, as well as the specialist content required for each occupation listed on the relevant occupational map. Panels also advised on broader programme requirements, including the study of further qualifications where needed and the maths, English, and digital requirements.<sup>55</sup>

T Level panels for the first 16 T Levels were convened in autumn 2017, with panels for the remaining nine T Levels established from September 2018.<sup>56</sup> The outline content created by the T Level panels was tested with providers, higher education institutions, and employers. This was to test progression options and ensure T Levels would equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed by an industry.

When the outline content of a T Level was approved, Awarding Organisations (also known as qualification providers, exam boards, or awarding bodies) were able to bid for the qualification, and then develop the content into a qualification specification that sets out in detail what is to be taught and assessed.

Outline content for the T Level technical qualifications approved to date is [available on the website of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan 2017](#), October 2017

<sup>56</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan 2020](#), January 2021

<sup>57</sup> Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, [Approved T Level qualifications](#)

## 3

## How do T Levels work?

T Levels are two-year technical courses taken after GCSEs and broadly equivalent in size to three A Levels. Launched in September 2020, they offer students practical and knowledge-based learning at a school or college and on-the-job experience through an industry placement of approximately 45 days (20% of the course).

T Levels are intended to sit alongside apprenticeships within a reformed skills training system. They will be based on the same set of employer-designed standards as apprenticeships, but while apprentices will train for a single occupation, T Level students will undertake a broader programme, gaining skills and knowledge relevant to a range of occupations.

In April 2024, the Department for Education said it would oversee a route-by-route review of the content and assessment of all T Levels on an individual basis.<sup>58</sup>

## 3.1

### Structure and core components

T Level programmes are equivalent to a study programme of 3 A Levels and will, on average, comprise 1,800 hours of full-time study over two years, including an industry placement of at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days).

#### Box 3: Study programmes

Alison Wolf's [2011 review of vocational education](#) recommended the Department for Education should introduce 'study programmes' to offer students breadth and depth, without limiting their options for future study or work.<sup>59</sup>

Study programmes were introduced in September 2013. All 16-19 year old students, whether they are studying academic or vocational qualifications, are now expected to be given the opportunity to take a [study programme](#) that usually includes:

- substantial academic or applied and technical qualifications;

<sup>58</sup> Department for Education [T Level action plan 2023 to 2024](#), April 2024, pp17-18

<sup>59</sup> Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, [Review of vocational education: The Wolf report](#), March 2011.

- English and maths, where students have not yet achieved a GCSE grade 4 (previously a C);
- work experience;
- other non-qualification activity “to develop students’ character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence, and support progression”.<sup>60</sup>

T Levels all follow the same broad framework and primarily consist of:

- A **technical qualification**. This is the main, classroom-based element. Students will learn about their chosen sectors through a curriculum designed by employers and developed by an awarding organisation.
- An **industry placement** with an employer. This runs for a minimum of 315 hours (45 days) overall and will give students practical insights into their sector and an opportunity to embed the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom.
- **English and maths provision**. This is built into the classroom-based element of the T Level with the aim of giving those students who need it a solid foundation of transferable skills.

T Level students are required to work towards the attainment of maths and English if they have not already achieved grade 4 at GCSE, as they do on other 16 to 19 study programmes. T Level students were initially required to achieve either a grade 4 in English and maths GCSE or Level 2 in functional skills to pass their programme, but this is no longer the case.<sup>61</sup> Students may need to have already achieved a grade 4 in these subjects to get on the course, because entry requirements are generally at the discretion of further education providers.

## The technical qualification

Each technical qualification is based on content devised by T Level panels. This includes core content followed by specialisation. The core content will “develop the underpinning knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to the T Level”, including selected numeracy, literacy, and digital skills. The specialism will focus on occupationally specific knowledge, skills, and behaviours.<sup>62</sup>

The underpinning knowledge of the core component will be assessed through external examination, with core employability skills assessed through

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<sup>60</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2022 to 2023 academic year\)](#), July 2022

<sup>61</sup> Department for Education, [Introduction of T Levels](#), June 2022

<sup>62</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp12-15

employer-set projects. For occupational specialisms, students will demonstrate their competence through practical assignments.

The government's Skills Plan argued competition between awarding organisations had led to "a race to the bottom" where awarding organisations compete to offer easier and lower value qualifications. To mitigate this, the government has decided there will only be one approved technical qualification for each T Level. Exclusive licenses will be granted for the development of the qualifications following a bidding process.<sup>63</sup>

### The role of Ofqual

Ofqual will be responsible for regulating the T Level technical qualification with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.<sup>64</sup> In July 2018, Ofqual [launched a consultation](#) on the regulation of the technical qualification and the [outcome was published](#) in September 2018.<sup>65</sup>

Also in September 2018, Ofqual published a further technical consultation to give interested parties the chance to feed back on the detail of its proposed rules. The [response to the technical consultation](#) was published on 12 December 2018.<sup>66</sup> Further information is available in [guidance published by Ofqual](#).<sup>67</sup>

### Industry placements

A substantial industry placement, lasting at least 315 hours (around 45 days, or 20% of the course), with an employer will be a part of each T Level. The Department for Education has said the longer duration will ensure "students are given enough time to master the essentials, and that the employer has the opportunity to develop and shape young people's skills."<sup>68</sup>

Employers can offer industry placements as a block, series of blocks, day release, or a mix of these. They can also discuss sharing part of the placement with another employer if necessary. Students on placements will not be entitled to a salary and there is no expectation they will be paid. However, employers will be able to pay students should they wish to do so.

In December 2024, the government announced that, going forward, most students would be able to complete up to 20% of their placement hours

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<sup>63</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24

<sup>64</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, pp7-8

<sup>65</sup> Ofqual, [Ofqual's approach to regulating Technical Qualifications](#), 3 September 2018

<sup>66</sup> Ofqual, [Implementation of Technical Qualifications](#), 12 December 2018

<sup>67</sup> Ofqual, [Technical qualifications within T Levels](#), 31 October 2019

<sup>68</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, p30

remotely, rather than having to do them from a physical workplace, with the allowance increased to 50% for Digital T Levels.<sup>69</sup>

### Development and delivery of placements

A pilot scheme was run throughout the 2017-18 academic year to trial the delivery of effective industry placements.<sup>70</sup> The Department for Education [published an evaluation of the pilot scheme](#) (PDF) in December 2018.<sup>71</sup>

In May 2019, the Department for Education published an [Industry Placement Policy Statement](#) setting out models and approaches for the delivery of placements to help ensure they are meaningful and reflective of differing industry needs and practices, as well as accessible for all students. This included setting out some additional flexibilities in the delivery of industry placements, including allowing placements to be split across two employers. These changes were in response to concerns about the difficulty of delivering substantial work placements to all T Level students.<sup>72</sup>

In response to concerns about costs acting as a barrier to employers offering industry placements, a £7 million Employer Support Fund was launched in the 2019-20 academic year to trial “the limited provision of employer financial support for tangible costs.”<sup>73</sup> A £12 million Employer Support Fund provided support for employers offering Industry Placements in the 2023-24 financial year.<sup>74</sup>

The Department for Education has published [guidance for delivering placements](#), as well as industry-specific models and approaches, including in Construction and Engineering and Manufacturing.<sup>75</sup> In November 2022, it launched a new service, [Connect with employers interested in T Levels](#), which aims to develop relationships between providers and employers, so they can discuss opportunities to engage on T Levels, such as career talks and hosting industry placements.

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<sup>69</sup> Department for Education, [T Level placements reformed to open up new qualification](#), 2 December 2024. The new flexibilities will apply to all T Levels except Education and Early Years, and Dental Nursing specialisms, which have specific requirements related to licenses to practice.

<sup>70</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Industry Placement Pilot 2017-18](#), 26 September 2018

<sup>71</sup> Department for Education, [Evaluation of the Industry Placement Pilot: Research report](#), December 2018

<sup>72</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels Industry Placements: Update on delivery models and support](#), May 2019, pp3-6; Department for Education, [More support to help employers offer T Level industry placements](#), 19 May 2019

<sup>73</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels Industry Placements: Update on delivery models and support](#), May 2019, p20; Department for Education, [More support to help employers offer T Level industry placements](#), May 2019

<sup>74</sup> Department for Education, [Employer support fund for T Level industry placements](#), updated August 2023; Gov.uk, [Industry Placement - Employer Support Fund \(ESF\) update – T Levels support for schools and colleges](#)

<sup>75</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [T Level industry placements delivery guidance](#)

## English and maths provision

On 15 November 2021, the then-Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, announced his department was removing with immediate effect the requirement for all T Level students to achieve either a grade 4 (previously a C) in maths and English GCSE, or level 2 in functional skills, in order to pass their T Level. Nadhim Zahawi said:

As many young people as possible should have the advantage of studying and successfully completing a T Level. We hear consistently that some students are being put off taking a T Level because they are worried that they will fail it if they do not reach Level 2 in English and maths. We want to change this and bring T Levels in line with other qualifications, including A Levels.

[...] we do not want to unnecessarily inhibit talented students from accessing T Levels simply because of the additional hurdle that reaching Level 2 in English and maths represents.<sup>76</sup>

While the maths and English exit requirement is no longer in place, from September 2022, the [Condition of Funding](#) will apply to T Levels, as it does for other level 3 post-16 programmes. This means students with a grade 3 GCSE must work towards attaining a grade 4 GCSE, while students with a grade 2 or below can choose to study a GCSE or Functional Skills qualification. The Department for Education's 2021 T Level action plan said: "Maths and English attainment will remain of central importance to T Levels".<sup>77</sup>

## Grading

To pass a T Level and be awarded a certificate, students need to pass all components of the programme.

A student's overall T Level grade will be calculated by combining core component grade, occupational specialism grades, and industry placement completion status. They will then receive a T Level certificate, which will include:

- an overall grade for the T Level, shown as pass, merit, distinction or distinction\*
- a separate grade for the core component, using A\* to E
- a separate grade for each occupational specialism, shown as pass, merit or distinction

It will also confirm the student has:

- completed the industry placement

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<sup>76</sup> Department for Education, [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill: Second Reading Opening Speech](#), 15 November 2021

<sup>77</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021

- met any additional mandatory requirements
- where relevant, attained maths and/or English qualifications at Level 2<sup>78</sup>

Students who do not meet the requirements for certification, or leave a programme part-way through, will get a T Level statement of achievement showing the elements they have completed.

More detail on the grading of T Levels, including an example T Level certificate, is provided in the 2019 T Level Action Plan.<sup>79</sup>

## Content and assessment reviews

In April 2024, the Department for Education said it would oversee a route-by-route review of the content and assessment of all T Levels on an individual basis.<sup>80</sup> This will take place over 12 months. The reviews of T Levels covering Education, Digital, Construction, and Health and Science pathways were due to conclude by summer 2024.

The reviews will include:

- IfATE, in conjunction with Ofqual, reviewing specifications and content to identify any areas of possible duplication, or content that could be better delivered in alternative parts of the T Level. IfATE will work with awarding organisations on any potential changes.
- Curriculum Reference Groups, involving colleagues teaching the T Levels and industry experts, to suggest improvements to T Levels and form a sounding board for potential changes.
- IfATE and awarding organisations, in conjunction with Ofqual, exploring opportunities to reduce the administrative burden (including around assessments) through standardisation of processes where possible.

## 3.2

## Rollout timetable and student numbers

The following table sets out which T Levels were made available and when, as well as the planned delivery for the next waves of T Level courses. [Finalised content](#) for all T Levels currently available can be found on the website of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Department for Education, [Introduction of T Levels](#), June 2022

<sup>79</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp19-20

<sup>80</sup> Department for Education [T Level action plan 2023 to 2024](#), April 2024, pp17-18

<sup>81</sup> Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education, [Approved T Level qualifications](#)

Date available	Route	T Level
September 2020	Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital Production, Design, and Development</li> </ul>
	Education and Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and Early Years</li> </ul>
	Construction and the Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design, Surveying, and Planning for Construction</li> </ul>
September 2021	Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital Support Services</li> <li>Digital Business Services</li> </ul>
	Construction and the Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Onsite Construction</li> <li>Building Services Engineering for Construction</li> </ul>
	Health and Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health</li> <li>Healthcare Science</li> <li>Science</li> </ul>
September 2022	Business and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management and Administration</li> </ul>
	Legal, Finance, and Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finance</li> <li>Accounting</li> </ul>
	Engineering and Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engineering and Manufacturing Design and Development</li> <li>Maintenance, Installation, and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing</li> <li>Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control</li> </ul>
September 2023	Agriculture, Environmental, and Animal Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agriculture, Land Management, and Production</li> </ul>
	Legal, Finance, and Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Services</li> </ul>
September 2024	Creative and Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Craft and Design</li> <li>Media, Broadcast, and Production</li> </ul>
	Agriculture, Environmental, and Animal Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animal Care and Management</li> </ul>
September 2025	Sales, Marketing, and Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing</li> </ul>

From September 2024, enrolments to the T Level in Onsite Construction will cease. The Department for Education has said:

Although this T Level is providing valuable education and industry experience, and a positive route into employment for students undertaking it, on the whole

its success and uptake have been limited due to the overall lack of demand for a large level 3 qualification in this area.<sup>82</sup>

Learners will still be able to access the apprenticeships and other classroom provision in this area, while T Levels in Design, Surveying, and Planning for Construction, and Building Services Engineering for Construction will continue.

The T Level in Catering has been deferred to allow time to consult with employers and sector bodies while the government considers whether it will meet the needs of learners and the economy.<sup>83</sup>

Following engagement with representatives of the hair and beauty sectors, the government has said it will no longer roll out a combined T Level in Hairdressing, Barbering, and Beauty Therapy because apprenticeships and level 2 qualifications offer “excellent routes into the hair sector”.<sup>84</sup> The government is exploring a T Level option focussing on the beauty sector.

Any new T Levels in the areas of catering and beauty would not be introduced until at least 2026.<sup>85</sup>

## Provider numbers

The first three T Level courses were launched at 43 providers in September 2020. Seven further T Levels were launched in September 2021 and the total number of providers increased to 102. The Department for Education said at the end of 2021 it had received “over 280” requests to register for the rollout in September 2022.<sup>86</sup> At the end of 2021 the Department for Education said over 400 providers were planning to deliver T Levels from 2023, including all general further education colleges currently offering level 3 vocational mainstream programmes to 16- to 19-year-olds.<sup>87</sup>

The Department for Education has published a [full list of providers delivering T Levels](#) as well as a map for students to [find where the nearest T Levels are available near them](#). These list 367 providers offering T Levels in 2024/25 and 444 in 2025/26. Just over half of the providers in 2025/26 are schools (including University Technical Colleges), most of the rest are further education colleges. There are also a small number of local authorities and independent providers offering T Levels.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Gov.uk, [T Levels and the outcome of the Review of Qualifications Reform](#)

<sup>83</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2022 to 2023](#), March 2023, p8

<sup>84</sup> Department for Education [T Level action plan 2023 to 2024](#), April 2024, p16; [HCWS221 \[T-Levels: Wave 4\] 30 January 2024](#)

<sup>85</sup> Gov.uk, [T Levels and the outcome of the Review of Qualifications Reform](#)

<sup>86</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021, p7

<sup>87</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021, p21

<sup>88</sup> Department for Education, [Providers delivering T Levels and the T Level foundation year](#), September 2024

## Student numbers

The number of T Level students has increased each year as more of the qualifications have been rolled out:

- 2020: 1,235
- 2021: 6,243
- 2022: 13,686
- 2023: 23,336.<sup>89</sup>

In 2023, 1.5% of the 16- to 17-year-old population in England were studying T Levels, compared to 45.2% who were doing A/AS levels and 18.8% who were following other level 3 courses.<sup>90</sup>

## 3.3

## Programme, capital, and placement funding

### Background

T Levels will include more teaching hours and be more prescriptive in the content than average 16-19 study programmes. In 2017, the Conservative government announced additional funding would be provided to take account of this, as well as to organise the industry placements. It stated this will equate to an additional **£500 million** a year once T Levels are fully rolled out.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18. Calendar year 2023](#), September 2024

<sup>90</sup> Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18. Calendar year 2023](#), September 2024

<sup>91</sup> HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), HC 1025, March 2017, p41; Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, p35

## Box 4: 2017 review of funding of technical education in other countries

In July 2017, the Department for Education [published a review of funding and expenditure in post-16 education](#) in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.<sup>92</sup> Among other things, the review found:

- Around 90% of students who study upper-secondary vocational programmes in Germany, Denmark and Norway have a training agreement with an employer.<sup>93</sup> In France and the Netherlands, about two-thirds follow vocational, school-based programmes.
- In Norway, upper secondary vocational education at both colleges and workplaces is mainly supported by state funding. In Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and France, the state funds training at vocational schools, while employers mainly fund on-the-job training.
- Countries are investing considerable resources in post-16 vocational education programmes. They also spend more per student for students following vocational routes than for those following academic routes.

In its response to its [2017/18 consultation on implementing T Levels](#), the Department for Education confirmed it intended to adapt the existing arrangements for funding 16-19 education to distribute funding for T Levels, rather than design a new system.<sup>94</sup>

A [consultation specifically on the funding for T Levels](#) was launched in November 2018 and ran until February 2019.<sup>95</sup> A [response to the consultation](#) was published in June 2019. The consultation response set out, among other things, that:

- The additional planned hours for T Levels will be paid at the same rate per hour as current 16-19 study programmes. A number of new funding bands will be introduced to reflect the different sizes of T Level programmes.
- Funding to organise industry placements would be provided separately at a rate of £550 per placement over the 2 years of a T Level. Additional funding (through the disadvantage element in the funding formula) will

<sup>92</sup> Department for Education, [Funding and expenditure in post-16 education: An international review](#), July 2017, p8

<sup>93</sup> The report explained “upper-secondary” vocational education encompasses young people aged 15 years and over in France, 15/16 years and over in Germany, and 16 years and over in Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands

<sup>94</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes. Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p21

<sup>95</sup> Department for Education, [Provider funding for the delivery of T Levels](#), 27 November 2018

also be provided for disadvantaged students while on an industry placement.

- Maths and English for students who have not yet achieved Level 2 will be funded in addition to the hours required for the other parts of the course, rather than out of the T Levels standard programme hours.
- In contrast to other 16-19 study programmes, T Levels for 18-year-olds will be funded at the same rate as for 16 and 17-year-olds.<sup>96</sup>

An [equality analysis](#) was published alongside the consultation response.<sup>97</sup>

## Programme funding

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has published guidance for providers on how T Levels are funded.<sup>98</sup> It explains T Level students are funded in the same way as other 16-19 students, but there are some important differences to the formula used:

- There are four new funding bands to accommodate the different sizes of T Levels.
- Funding is based on the hours spread over two years because T Levels are two-year programmes.
- There is consistent funding for 18-year-olds because T Levels have fixed hours.
- Industry placement funding is included at a flat rate of £550 with half paid in the first year and half in the second.
- Extra disadvantage funding is available to reflect the additional hours and demands of T Levels.

## Funding to support the initial delivery of T Levels

A package of financial support was made available to try and ensure T Levels were delivered successfully from the start. This included:

- £3.75 million to providers of T Levels in 2020, with providers receiving £30,000 per T Level pathway delivered. The funding was in recognition of “the costs associated with co-creating T Levels and engaging with the

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<sup>96</sup> Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Provider funding for the delivery of T Levels: Government consultation response](#), June 2019

<sup>97</sup> Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Provider funding for the delivery of T Levels: Government consultation response Equality Assessment](#), June 2019

<sup>98</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [T Levels funding guide 2024 to 2025](#), 11 September 2024

department on policy”. The payments were also available to providers delivering T Levels in 2020-21 but were subsequently phased out.<sup>99</sup>

- £20 million to help prepare teachers for the introduction of T Levels. This includes an £8 million T Level Professional Development offer, which is currently being delivered by the Education and Training Foundation, and a £5 million Taking Teacher Further programme aimed at helping providers recruit teachers from industry.<sup>100</sup> A further **£15 million** was made available for 2020-21 to expand the professional development offer.<sup>101</sup>

More information on the professional development offer is available on the [Education and Training Foundation website](#).

- £2,500 per T Level for 2020 providers “to support communication costs such as producing high-quality materials to recruit young people.” The Department for Education said it expected this funding to be short term while awareness of T Levels was still limited.<sup>102</sup>

## T Level Capital Fund

The T Level Capital Fund was established to support further education providers in acquiring facilities and equipment for the delivery of T Level courses. There are two elements to the fund:

- The Specialist Equipment Allocation (SEA), which is awarded to providers using a formula allocation.
- The Buildings and Facilities Improvement Grant (BFIG), which providers bid for.

The Department for Education has said: “All T Level providers will receive funding for state-of-the-art specialist equipment and all providers, apart from independent training providers, can bid for funding to refurbish existing facilities or build new buildings.”<sup>103</sup>

More information is available in the Department for Education document [I Level Capital Fund](#).<sup>104</sup>

### Wave one allocation

On 11 July 2019, the first wave of funding was announced. Eleven colleges and schools shared £8.65 million to prepare their sites for the delivery of the new technical qualifications from September 2020. The successful applicants are

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<sup>99</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p9

<sup>100</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp10 and 36

<sup>101</sup> Department for Education, [T Level providers to benefit from £110 million boost](#), February 2020

<sup>102</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p10

<sup>103</sup> Department for Education, [Introduction of T Levels](#), June 2022

<sup>104</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels Capital Fund](#)

listed in the FE Week article, “[Revealed: 11 T-level colleges sharing £9m to upgrade facilities](#)”, 11 July 2019.<sup>105</sup>

### Wave two allocation

Successful applications for wave 2 of the T Levels capital fund were announced on 13 January 2021, and are available at [T Levels capital fund: wave 2 - successful applications](#).<sup>106</sup> Funding of over £48 million was awarded for 56 projects across 49 further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, and schools.

### Wave three allocation

In January 2021, a third wave of funding was announced with a budget of £135 million to support capital projects for T Level delivery from the 2022 to 2023 academic year. £50 million was made available to support 65 T Levels projects.<sup>107</sup> A further 12 projects totalling £16 million were later announced.

### Wave four allocation

Wave four was intended to support providers delivering T Levels in September 2023, both for specialist equipment and for buildings capital. In July 2022 it was announced over £74 million in funding had been made available to support 86 T Levels projects.<sup>108</sup>

### Wave 5 allocation

Wave 5 of the T Level Capital fund will make over £100 million in funding available to support over 100 T Levels projects for T Level providers delivering in September 2024.<sup>109</sup>

## Placement funding

### Capacity and Delivery Fund

In 2018/19, the Department for Education allocated nearly **£60 million** to providers through the Capacity and Delivery Fund to help them establish the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver substantial industry placements.<sup>110</sup> Another **£55 million** was allocated for 2019/20.

As T Level delivery has been scaled up, the Department for Education has said it is keen to ensure T Level industry placements are prioritised in local areas, rather than competing with Capacity and Delivery Fund industry placements.<sup>111</sup> As such, funding ceased for providers with a ‘good’ or

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<sup>105</sup> “[Revealed: 11 T-level colleges sharing £9m to upgrade facilities](#)”, FE Week, 11 July 2019

<sup>106</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels capital fund: wave 2 - successful applications](#), January 2021

<sup>107</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels capital fund: wave 3 - successful applications](#), December 2021

<sup>108</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels capital fund: wave 4 - successful applications](#), July 2022

<sup>109</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels capital fund: wave 5 - successful applications](#), 7 July 2023

<sup>110</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p10

<sup>111</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021, p43

‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating after the 2022 to 2023 academic year, and providers who have an Ofsted rating of ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ were funded up to the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

### T Levels industry placement funding

Once T Levels are fully rolled out, industry placements will be funded through the T Level funding formula. Providers will get £275 per student for each of the two years of the T Level.<sup>112</sup>

### The Employer Incentive Scheme

Employers who were able to offer an industry placement in the Construction; Digital; Education and Childcare; or Health and Science industries, were [eligible to claim a £1,000 payment](#) if the placement commenced between 27 May 2021 and 31 July 2022.

The Department for Education has said no extension would be made to the scheme.<sup>113</sup>

### Employer Support Fund

The £12 million [employer support fund](#) provided financial assistance to employers offering Level industry placements between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.<sup>114</sup>

Employers could claim funding to cover legitimate costs associated with hosting a T Level industry placement student. This included administrative costs, training costs, such as training existing staff to develop their knowledge and ability to support learners, and tangible costs, such as equipment and insurance.

## 3.4 Destinations of T Level students

The 2021 T Level action plan set out the Conservative government’s ambition for T Levels to support progression directly into skilled employment, an apprenticeship at level 4 or higher, and degrees and other higher education courses in related technical areas.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [T Levels funding guide 2024 to 2025](#)

<sup>113</sup> Department for Education, [Employer incentive payments for employers offering a T Level industry placement](#), September 2021

<sup>114</sup> Department for Education, [Employer support fund for T Level industry placements](#), updated August 2023

<sup>115</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2021](#), December 2021, pp31-7

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has [published progression profiles for the available T Levels](#).<sup>116</sup>

## Higher level technical education

The Post-16 Skills Plan said the 15 technical routes would extend up to higher skill levels, with a wider range of qualifications available at levels 4 and 5 as a reflection of the greater specialisation at tertiary level.

In October 2017, the Department for Education [announced its intention to review higher level technical education](#), covering the whole of level four and five education.<sup>117</sup> The review, it said, would address how “learners can progress from the government’s new T Levels, and other full time education, into the workplace.”<sup>118</sup>

In July 2019, the Department for Education [launched a consultation on proposed reforms to Level 4 and 5 qualifications](#).<sup>119</sup> The [outcome to the consultation](#) was published in July 2020, alongside a policy paper on the Government’s [higher technical education reforms](#).<sup>120</sup> In its response to the consultation, the Department for Education set out its ambition for “high quality, nationally recognised approved higher technical qualifications (approved HTQs) that meet employer needs and are clearly signalled to learners and employers”.<sup>121</sup>

The Department for Education has said it hopes students who have done a T Level would be able to progress onto a Higher Technical Qualification:

Higher Technical Qualifications will provide a natural progression route for young people taking new T Levels from 2020 or A Levels (Level 3) enabling them to take the next step up and gain higher technical skills in key subjects like STEM.<sup>122</sup>

The first approved HTQs were available in Digital from September 2022. See the [website of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#) for more information on approved Higher Technical Qualifications.

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<sup>116</sup> Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, [T Level Progression Profiles](#) (accessed 31 October 2022)

<sup>117</sup> Level four qualifications are: Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE); Higher National Certificate (HNC); Level 4 Award; Level 4 Certificate; Level 4 NVQ. Level five qualifications are: Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE); Foundation Degree; Higher National Diploma (HND); Level 5 Award; Level 5 Certificate; Level 5 Diploma; and Level 5 NVQ.

<sup>118</sup> Department for Education, [Level 4 & 5 technical education to be reviewed](#), 31 October 2017

<sup>119</sup> Department for Education, [Higher Technical Education Government consultation](#), 8 July 2019

<sup>120</sup> Department for Education, [Reforming Higher Technical Education. Government consultation response](#), July 2020; Department for Education, [Higher technical education reforms](#), July 2020

<sup>121</sup> Department for Education, [Reforming Higher Technical Education. Government consultation response](#), July 2020, p5

<sup>122</sup> Department for Education, [Proposals launched to boost the quality and uptake of Higher Technical Qualifications](#), 8 July 2019

## University

UCAS points are awarded for T Levels, with points allocated to the overall grade rather than to separate elements of the programme. The number of points attached to a T Level programme will be in line with the number attached to an A Level programme of three A Levels.

In 2021, the Department for Education said over 70 higher education providers said they would consider T Levels for entry onto their courses in 2022, including Newcastle, Cardiff, Reading, York, Nottingham Trent, Lancaster, and Portsmouth universities.<sup>123</sup>

In January 2022, FE Week [reported only half of all UK universities had confirmed they would accept T Levels for entry in the 2022/23 academic year](#), “with most Russell Group members turning their backs on the new technical qualifications”.<sup>124</sup> The report also highlighted the struggles of some T Level students to get clarity over whether universities would accept their qualifications for entry.

The Department for Education has now published a list of higher education providers that have [confirmed they will consider T Levels for entry onto at least one course at their institution](#), and which “will be updated on a regular basis”.<sup>125</sup>

## Destination data

### Higher education

Currently neither the higher education admissions agency UCAS nor the Department for Education routinely publish data on the destinations of T Level students.

UCAS has included some data on T level students in press releases about applicants. 490 T Level students from the first cohort had applied to full-time higher education courses through UCAS by 30 June 2022.<sup>126</sup> On results day (18 August 2022), 370 had been placed at a university.<sup>127</sup> Four weeks later the number of T Level students applying had increased to 510 and the number with a place to 410.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan: 2021](#), December 2021, p35

<sup>124</sup> “[Confused and frustrated: Most universities reject first cohort of T Level students](#)”, FE Week, 14 January 2022 (accessed 31 October 2022)

<sup>125</sup> Department for Education, [Providers that have confirmed T Levels suitable for entry on one course](#)

<sup>126</sup> UCAS, [Record applications from disadvantaged students to higher education](#), 4 July 2022

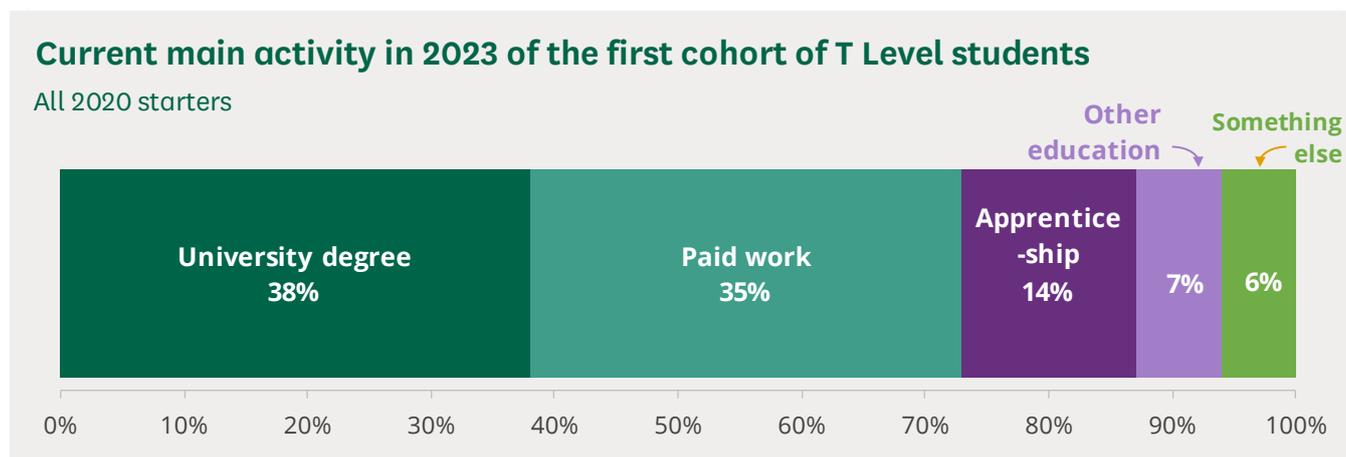
<sup>127</sup> UCAS, [Record progression to higher education for exam-sitting students](#), 18 August 2022

<sup>128</sup> UCAS, [First exam year since pandemic sees record numbers entering higher education](#), 22 September 2022

There were 1,860 applicants to UCAS in the 2023 entry cycle, 1,435 of whom were placed in higher education.<sup>129</sup>

### All destinations

A survey of the first cohort of T Level students in 2023, around nine months after completion of their T levels, found respondents were undertaking the following activities.



Source: DfE, [Technical education learner survey 2023: progression of the first T Level cohort](#) (April 2024)

## 3.5 T Level Foundation Year

The proposals in the 2016 Post-16 Skills Plan focused primarily on learners able to start at the beginning of a technical route and progress upwards. However, the Plan also said up to a year of tailored and flexible support would be available for young people not able to access a route at 16, and the Department for Education intended to carry out further work and to consult on this “transition year”.<sup>130</sup>

The idea for a “transition year” was initially developed into the [T Level Transition Programme](#), a new type of one-year, post-GCSE 16-19 study programme for students who are not ready to start a T Level but who have the potential to progress onto one following a tailored preparation programme.<sup>131</sup> It has since been renamed the T Level Foundation year.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> UCAS, [Higher number of students sharing disability and mental health conditions secure a place at university](#), 7 December 2023

<sup>130</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p28

<sup>131</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2020](#), January 2021, p25; Department for Education, [Introduction of T Levels](#), June 2022

<sup>132</sup> Gov.uk, [What is the T Level Foundation Year? – T Levels support for schools and colleges](#)

The programme gives students the opportunity to study technical content aligned to T Levels and develop their English, maths, and digital skills, alongside work experience and personal development.

## Implementation of the Transition Programme

In July 2019, the Department for Education [announced 35 providers would pilot the T Level Transition Programme](#) in the 2020-21 academic year.<sup>133</sup> The providers worked with the Department for Education to “explore different delivery approaches and gather good practice to inform national implementation.” The [Association of Colleges](#) were also appointed to support T Level providers in their delivery of the transition programme.

Each provider delivering the T Level Transition Programme in 2020-21 received a payment of £20,000 (in 2020-21 only). Funding was also made available for 2021 providers delivering the transition programme for the first time in 2021. The funding was provided in recognition of the costs associated with participating in early phases of the programme and will not be available in the longer term.<sup>134</sup>

The 2021 T Level action plan said just under 70 T Level providers were delivering the T Level Transition Programme for the first four T Level routes, and around 50 further T Level providers had signed up to deliver the programme for the first time from September 2022.<sup>135</sup> Since 2020, over 11,000 students have studied all or part of a T Level or Transition programme course.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Department for Education, [Providers selected to deliver T Levels and providers planning to deliver the T Level Transition Programme](#), 11 July 2019

<sup>134</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p9

<sup>135</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021, pp31-2

<sup>136</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021.

## 4 Reaction, issues, and reports

The Conservative government's proposals for T Levels, as set out in its Post-16 Skills Plan, received a broadly positive response from stakeholders when they were announced.<sup>137</sup> For example, the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges at the time said:

Technical education has for too long been regarded as a poor cousin of academic study. The Government's Post-16 Skills Plan provides a welcome roadmap to redressing this longstanding anomaly.

The Plan rightly sees colleges being at the heart of the reforms with the new qualifications providing them with a cornerstone to build distinctive courses that meet the needs of employers, students and the economy.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, the Director of Employment and Skills at the CBI welcomed the proposals as a "real step forward" in terms of creating a vocational route of equal attraction and prominence to A Levels, and for the emphasis they placed on employer involvement.<sup>139</sup>

The government's response to the 2017/18 consultation on implementing T Levels similarly said there was "strong support for T Levels across different groups of respondents [to the consultation], and optimism about the potential of T Levels to transform the technical education system."<sup>140</sup>

However, there has also been concerns raised about specific aspects of T Levels, particularly the placement element, as well as subsequent developments in technical education policy regarding the decision to remove funding from qualifications that will overlap with T Levels. T Levels have also faced criticism for their student recruitment and retention rates.

### 4.1 Defunding of BTECs

The Conservative government's plan to reform level 3 qualifications to encourage students to choose either A Levels or T Levels at 16 provoked a considerable reaction from the education sector and parliamentarians. Concerns were raised about the decision to remove funding for some applied

<sup>137</sup> Department for Education, [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), 13 July 2016

<sup>138</sup> Department for Education, [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), 13 July 2016

<sup>139</sup> Department for Education, [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), 13 July 2016

<sup>140</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p5

general qualifications, especially BTECs, and the consequences this will have for student choice and accessibility.

The [Protect Student Choice campaign](#), which is a coalition of 30 organisations from across the education and employment sectors, has called on the government to rethink its reforms to defunding many level 3 qualifications.

Combined with cross-party parliamentary scrutiny of the reforms, including a [letter signed by 118 MPs and peers](#) and a series of ultimately unsuccessful amendments tabled to the Skills and Post-16 Education Act, this pressure prompted the government to commit to delaying the removal of funding by a year and issuing a series of clarifications about the policy.<sup>141</sup>

However, the Protect Student Choice campaign argued the delay of a year to the timetable, and the fact the removal of funding for overlapping qualifications will apply to “only a small proportion of the total Level 3 BTEC and other applied general style qualifications”, were insufficient concessions. It has said:

On the first point, delaying a bad idea does not stop it from being a bad idea. And on the second, removing a small proportion of qualifications that a high proportion of students are enrolled on will still have a devastating impact. For example, in the sixth form college sector around 80% of applied general enrolments are in just 20 subject areas.<sup>142</sup>

The arguments that have been made against the government’s reforms to the funding of level 3 qualifications by the Protect Student Choice campaign and others include:

- The current three-route model (A levels, technical qualifications that lead to a specific occupation, and applied general qualifications that combine practical skills with academic learning) works well and should be retained. The 2011 Wolf Review, which the Government has used to justify its reforms to technical education, said BTECs are “valuable in the labour market and a familiar and acknowledged route into higher education”.<sup>143</sup>
- Removing funding from some BTECs may leave disadvantaged students without a viable progression pathway at the age of 16. The Department for Education’s own equalities impact assessment said: “those from SEND backgrounds, Asian ethnic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds, and males [are] disproportionately likely to be affected” because they

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<sup>141</sup> “[118 MPs and peers write to Secretary of State for Education urging him to reassess plan to scrap BTECs](#)”, FE News, 13 October 2021; Department for Education, [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill: Second Reading Opening Speech](#), 15 November 2021; Letter to House of Lords from the Education Secretary, [Skills and Post-16 Education Bill: technical education qualification reforms](#) (PDF), 6 April 2022

<sup>142</sup> Protect Student Choice campaign, [MP briefing: Protect Student Choice debate](#) (PDF), July 2022

<sup>143</sup> Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, [Review of vocational education: The Wolf report](#), March 2011, p33

are highly represented on qualifications likely to no longer be available in future.<sup>144</sup>

- Many universities believe removing funding for BTECs will reduce participation in higher education among disadvantaged groups.<sup>145</sup> [Research published by the Social Market Foundation in 2018](#) showed students accepted to university from working-class backgrounds and/or minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to hold a BTEC qualification than their peers.<sup>146</sup> The Foundation’s report said:

a quarter of Asian students (24%), just over one in five (22%) of mixed students, and 37% of black students were accepted to university after completing only BTEC qualifications at Level 3.<sup>147</sup>

Research from the Nuffield Foundation, published in 2021, similarly found a quarter of students enter university with BTEC qualifications, and that they are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>148</sup> It concluded by saying “...without the availability of BTECs many disadvantaged students might not have attended university at all”.<sup>149</sup>

- T Levels are a welcome development and will strengthen the current suite of technical qualifications, but they are very different qualifications that students will pursue for very different reasons. BTECs should not have their funding removed “to make a success of T levels”, but instead should sit alongside the new qualifications.<sup>150</sup>

In September 2023, the [Protect Student Choice campaign published a report](#) (PDF) that accused the government of using data “in a partial and misleading way” to understate the performance of applied general qualifications and overstate the performance (and potential uptake) of T Levels.<sup>151</sup> The report estimated 155,000 young people (13% of all sixth form students in England) could be left without a suitable study programme from 2026 given the planned reduction in applied general qualifications and current growth of T Levels. The Protect Student Choice campaign said while it welcomed T Levels as another option for learners, the government should “pause and review the

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<sup>144</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022, p13

<sup>145</sup> NEON, [Will abolishing BTECs mean reversing widening access to higher education?](#) (PDF), February 2022

<sup>146</sup> Social Market Foundation, [Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: The role of vocational routes into higher education](#), January 2018

<sup>147</sup> Social Market Foundation, [Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: The role of vocational routes into higher education](#), January 2018, p18

<sup>148</sup> Nuffield Foundation, [Education Choices at 16-19 and university outcomes](#), January 2022

<sup>149</sup> Nuffield Foundation, [Education Choices at 16-19 and university outcomes](#), January 2022, p63

<sup>150</sup> See Protect Student Choice campaign, [Protect Student Choice campaign briefing](#) (PDF), October 2023; [MP briefing supplement: Protect Student Choice debate](#) (PDF), July 2022

<sup>151</sup> Protect Student Choice campaign, [Desperate measures: data and the reform of Level 3 qualifications](#) (PDF), September 2023

implementation of its reforms and adopt an evidence-based approach to policymaking in this area”.<sup>152</sup>

Following the election of the new Labour government, Labour announced a short review of the reforms which included pausing the defunding of a limited number of level 3 qualifications that were due to lose their funding in August 2024.<sup>153</sup>

On 12 December 2024, the government announced the outcomes of its review and said 157 qualifications due to lose their funding will instead have it extended to allow reformed qualifications to be established and embedded in the system.<sup>154</sup>

Decisions on each qualification in the scope of the review are available in Department for Education guidance.<sup>155</sup> See the Commons Library briefing [The review of level 3 qualifications reform](#) for more information.

## 4.2 Recruitment and retention of students

A survey carried out by the Association of Colleges in October 2023 found that in 11 of the 18 T Level subjects being taught at that time, at least 50% of colleges surveyed had recruited fewer students than expected.<sup>156</sup> Reporting by FE Week has revealed that several colleges have had to cancel T Level courses because of low student numbers,<sup>157</sup> while lower than expected enrolments had cost NCFE, a major T Level awarding organisation, £2.5 million.<sup>158</sup>

In addition to concerns about attracting students to T Level courses, dropout rates have also been an issue, with a 34% drop out rate recorded for the 2021 cohort, and a 29% drop out rate for the 2022 cohort.<sup>159</sup> Retention rates on other level 3 qualifications, including A Levels, are generally above 90%.

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<sup>152</sup> Protect Student Choice campaign, [Desperate measures: data and the reform of Level 3 qualifications](#) (PDF), September 2023, p4

<sup>153</sup> [HCWS22 \[Technical Qualifications Reform update\] 25 July 2024](#)

<sup>154</sup> [HC Deb \[Qualifications reform review\] 12 December 2024](#)

<sup>155</sup> Department for Education, [Review of level 3 qualifications reform: provisional outcomes](#), 12 December 2024

<sup>156</sup> Association of Colleges, [Enrolment survey summary report](#) (PDF), November 2023. See “[UK’s flagship vocational qualification failing to attract students, colleges say](#)”, Financial Times, 10 November 2023

<sup>157</sup> “[T Level courses canned as low GCSE grades bite](#)”, FE Week, 9 October 2023

<sup>158</sup> “[DfE launch T Level reviews amid ‘worrying’ drop-out rates](#)” FE Week, 25 April 2024

<sup>159</sup> “[T Level results 2024: Fewer dropouts but pass rate falls below 90%](#)”, FE Week, 15 August 2024

In November 2024, the Education Policy Institute published a report analysing student access and outcomes for T levels and the T Level Transition Programme (which has now become the T level Foundation Year).<sup>160</sup> It found:

- T level students have a lower likelihood of completing a full level 3 qualification by the age of 18 compared to those taking other qualifications, but are more likely to progress to advanced apprenticeships or higher technical qualifications.
- Disadvantaged and female students are more likely to withdraw from T Levels, and only around one-third of students who drop out from T Levels transition to another full level 3 programme in the following year.
- The dropout rate of first-year health and science T Level students was 31%, behind only the rate for students on legal, finance and accounting courses with 33%.
- In the 2020/21 cohort, only 15% of transition programme students moved on to T Levels, and this number dropped to just 8% for the 2021/22 cohort. Of those who do progress to a T Level, more than 25% drop out within their first year.

## 4.3 Perceptions and experiences of T Levels

### [What do students think about T Levels? | Edge Foundation](#)

Ofqual commissions a survey on the perceptions of vocational and technical qualifications. Wave six of this survey was conducted by YouGov in 2022 and the results were published in August 2023.<sup>161</sup>

Section five of the report on the 2022 survey results covered perceptions of T Levels. Approximately three in ten (27%) learners reported having very or quite good understanding of T Levels, and the proportion who stated that they had no understanding at all (26%) was down from 43% since wave 3 of the survey. 34% of learners agreed they understand the purpose of T Levels, and similar proportions agreed they value T Levels (32%) and they are good preparation for work (37%).

End of course surveys with T Levels students carried out in summer 2023 found a small majority of them were satisfied with their programme (57%) and likely to recommend it (51%).<sup>162</sup> Satisfaction varied significantly by T Level route, however, with it being highest for Education and Early Years learners (79%)

<sup>160</sup> Education Policy Institute, [A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression](#), 14 November 2024. The report is discussed in the FE Week article "[Abolish 'overwhelmingly negative' T Level transition programme, DfE told](#)", 14 November 2024

<sup>161</sup> Ofqual, [Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications in England - wave 6](#), 3 August 2023. Wave 7 results will be published in 2025.

<sup>162</sup> Department for Education, [Technical education learner survey 2023](#), 27 September 2024

and lowest for Health and Science learners (39%). The low satisfaction with the new Health and Science route meant the proportion of T Level students satisfied overall was 14 percentage points lower than the first wave of students who started in 2020. ‘Lack of materials for study’ continued to be the most commonly reported barrier to learning, with 42% of learners recording this as a barrier.

In July 2023, Ofsted published its findings of a thematic review that examined the implementation of T Levels and the transition programme.<sup>163</sup> Staff in providers were concerned T Levels were not well known, and worried that problems with exams in 2022, as well as the delay in rolling out the new qualification in different subjects, had damaged the brand’s reputation.

Ofsted said students were not well prepared for T Levels, with some reporting being misled about what the course would entail. For example, many students on the health and science T Level were surprised at the complexity and the academic nature of the course.<sup>164</sup>

Students and teachers are also concerned about the amount of external assessment on courses, which can affect the teaching of the curriculum, particularly if students must re-sit tests. With regards to exams themselves, students have had very negative experiences, particularly in health and science. For example, exams contained topics that had not been included in the specification and so had not been taught. Students and teachers also expressed disappointment with awarding organisations because the availability and quality of specimen exam questions has been extremely limited.<sup>165</sup>

See also a report by the Edge Foundation, published in November 2024, on what students think about T Levels.<sup>166</sup>

## 4.4 Industry placements

Some in the further education sector, including the Association of Colleges, have raised concerns colleges will struggle to fit in industry placements lasting a minimum of 45 days. There have also been concerns that by making a work placement a mandatory part of T Levels, access to certain subjects for learners in rural areas, where there are no local employers relevant to a subject, might be limited.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>164</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>165</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>166</sup> Edge Foundation, [Student Voices: What Are Students Saying About Their Experiences of T Levels?](#), 21 November 2024

<sup>167</sup> [Don't 'punish' young people with mandatory T-Level work placements. AoC pleads](#), FE Week, 10 November 2017; [T-Levels funded work placement plans criticised](#), FE Week, 7 October 2017

Responses to the 2017/18 T Level consultation suggested industry placements would be challenging to deliver on a national scale, and students were concerned there would not be enough good employers offering placements in their area.<sup>168</sup>

At a hearing of the Commons Education Select Committee in June 2022, the then-Minister for Higher and Further Education, Michelle Donelan, was asked about help for removing the financial barriers preventing businesses, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), from offering industry placements for T Level students. She said:

We've had a financial award of £1,000 for employers that take T Level students and the future of that we will be announcing shortly.

I can't say any more at this stage, but it is important that we don't price employers out of having T Level students.<sup>169</sup>

Ofsted's thematic review of the implementation of T Levels, published in July 2023, found most students enjoy their industry placements and gain valuable insights into what it is like to work in the sectors they are studying.<sup>170</sup> However, it also said a few students reported having to arrange their own placements while some health students described spending a lot of time 'standing about and watching'.<sup>171</sup>

Providers are also finding it difficult to secure placements for some courses. For example, providers of the digital T Level had trouble setting up placements that included web design, programming, and coding, with many employers in this sector also operating remote working arrangements, which are a further barrier to finding suitable placements.<sup>172</sup>

A few students told Ofsted they were unsure whether the activities on their placements would enable them to develop the knowledge and skills required by their course.<sup>173</sup> For example, students who completed placements in care homes did not have the opportunity to experience clinical settings. Ofsted also reported a difference between the quality of various health and science placements offered around the country, while some construction placements involved considerable travel, which was not possible for all students.

Ofsted's review found work experience for students on the T Level Transition Programme was often poor, with many providers not giving Transition

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<sup>168</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p11 & 56

<sup>169</sup> "[Donelan hints at more employer incentives for T Level placements](#)", FE Week, 18 June 2022 (accessed 31 October 2022)

<sup>170</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>171</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>172</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>173</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

Programme students the same priority as their T Level counterparts when finding placements.<sup>174</sup>

## Employer attitudes to T Level placements

In August 2018, the Chartered Institute for Professional Development reported the results of a survey with employers about their attitudes to T Levels. The report noted many employers are, in principle, highly supportive of the reforms, but questioned whether most employers will be able to offer work placements without some financial incentive:

Although many employers already offer work experience places to young people, many of these opportunities are aimed at graduates rather than school or college students, and currently most opportunities are quite short in terms of duration, with the majority lasting less than two weeks.

This is considerably shorter than the work placements required for the new T-Level routes, and it is clear from this data that most employers would not be able to offer a placement of the length needed to fulfil T-Level requirements, either at all, or without some type of financial incentive.<sup>175</sup>

Also in August 2018, the Department for Education [published a research report concerning employer engagement and support for industry placements](#).<sup>176</sup> The report said, overall, employers welcomed the idea of industry placements, but some said they would be unwilling to offer placements, either because they could not see the benefits of T Levels over other qualifications (more typical for employers in industries with more established apprenticeship routes), or because they did not think they would have the capacity.

In April 2019, Make UK, the manufacturers organisation, reported survey results that [one third of manufacturers were willing to offer industry placements in their current form](#), with a further 21% willing to offer them if they were more flexible. However, 60% of manufacturers surveyed doubted whether they had the capacity to manage work placements.<sup>177</sup>

A survey of 5,000 employers, carried out on behalf of the Government between July and November 2021, found only 24% had heard of T Levels, and just 3% of employers surveyed felt they had a good knowledge of T Levels and what they involve.<sup>178</sup> Most employers thought offering T Level placements would be difficult (64%) rather than easy (30%), with fewer employers interested in providing placements in 2021 than when they were last surveyed in 2019 (30% vs 36% in 2019).<sup>179</sup> When employers were told about the £1,000

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<sup>174</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

<sup>175</sup> Chartered Institute of Professional Development, [Reforming Technical Education: Employers' views of T Levels](#), August 2018, p8

<sup>176</sup> Department for Education, [Employer engagement and capacity to support T Level industry placements: Research report](#), August 2018, pp5-9

<sup>177</sup> Make UK, [T Levels: Make or break for Manufacturers?](#), 15 April 2019

<sup>178</sup> Department for Education, [Employer pulse survey 2021](#), April 2022, p9

<sup>179</sup> Department for Education, [Employer pulse survey 2021](#), April 2022, p9

incentive payments that were available at the time for offering high-quality placements, the proportion who said they would be interesting only rose to 34%.<sup>180</sup>

## Reforms to industry placements

In December 2024, the government announced that, going forward, most students would be able to complete up to 20% of their placement hours remotely, rather than having to do them from a physical workplace, with the allowance increased to 50% for Digital T Levels.<sup>181</sup> The new flexibilities will apply to all T Levels except Education and Early Years, and Dental Nursing specialisms, which have specific requirements related to licenses to practice.

The government has said these changes will ensure placements are “accessible, practical, and better tailored to prepare students for the modern workplace.”<sup>182</sup> The Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships, Jacqui Smith, said the government had listened to employers:

We are cutting red tape to make it easier than ever for employers and providers to take part in T Level Industry Placements while ensuring students benefit from meaningful, high-quality experiences.

We’ve listened to businesses and these changes reflect what they need to help them offer T Levels and our missions of boosting economic growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity.

Whether it’s offering remote placements in the fast-evolving digital sector or enabling more simulated environments for industries like engineering, we’re giving students more opportunities to gain the skills and experience they need for their future careers.<sup>183</sup>

## 4.5

## Delays to the T Level rollout timetable

The proposed implementation schedule for T Levels has been changed since the publication of the initial proposals in the Post-16 Skills Plan in 2016. The changes followed concerns the proposed timetable was unachievable.

### Initial rollout timetable

The initial rollout timetable for T Levels, as set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan, was for a small number of ‘pathfinder’ technical routes and T Levels to be

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<sup>180</sup> Department for Education, [Employer pulse survey 2021](#), April 2022, p75

<sup>181</sup> Department for Education, [T Level placements reformed to open up new qualification](#), 2 December 2024.

<sup>182</sup> Department for Education, [T Level placements reformed to open up new qualification](#), 2 December 2024.

<sup>183</sup> Department for Education, [T Level placements reformed to open up new qualification](#), 2 December 2024.

available for first delivery from September 2019, with additional routes becoming available in phases between 2020 and 2022.<sup>184</sup>

## First T Levels pushed back to 2020

The 2017 T Level action plan said the Department for Education intended to introduce three T Levels from September 2020, another 13 T Levels in 2021, and the remaining nine in 2022.<sup>185</sup> It added the Government expected providers to expand their ‘T Level offer’ as overlapping qualifications are phased out, and for the majority of providers to be offering T Levels by 2024.<sup>186</sup>

## Full rollout pushed back to 2023

The Government’s response to the 2017 T Level implementation consultation noted the concerns of some respondents, including the CBI, about the pace of the T Level rollout, and said the Government had decided to extend the full rollout of T Levels beyond 2022.<sup>187</sup> It added the Government wanted to take “an agile approach”, which, in some cases, could mean slowing plans to get a T Level into delivery, and in other cases accelerating delivery.<sup>188</sup>

On 17 May 2018, the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, Jonathan Slater, [wrote to the Education Secretary to raise concerns about the planned timetable for the roll-out of T Levels](#) (PDF), and to advise deferring the start date to 2021. Mr Slater said the Secretary of State could “quite legitimately decide” to stick to 2020 as the initial rollout date, but he would need a formal written direction from the Minister if this was the case.<sup>189</sup>

In response, the then-Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, [wrote it was important to “keep up momentum” behind the reforms](#) (PDF) and none of the advice had indicated teaching from 2020 could not be achieved. The then-Education Secretary added:

the delivery of T Levels in 2020 is focused in a measured way on a small number of T Levels in a small number of providers. I want us now to put all out collective weight behind delivering these T Levels to begin in 2020.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p42

<sup>185</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan 2017](#), October 2017, p10

<sup>186</sup> Department for Education, [T Level action plan 2017](#), October 2017, p11

<sup>187</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p20

<sup>188</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p20

<sup>189</sup> Letter to the Education Secretary from the Permanent Secretary, [T-Level timetable: Direction](#) (PDF), 17 May 2018

<sup>190</sup> Letter to the Permanent Secretary from the Education Secretary, [T-Level timetable: Direction](#) (PDF), 24 May 2018

The T Level Action Plan 2019 restated the Department for Education’s aim for all T Levels to be available from 2023.<sup>191</sup>

## Full rollout pushed back again

Despite the changes outlined above, concerns continued to be raised by some that the rollout timetable may be too tight. In January 2019, Sir Gerry Berragan, Chief Executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, was reported as saying everything was “on schedule” for the delivery of T Levels but that the timetable was still “worryingly tight.”<sup>192</sup>

The 2021 T Level action plan said the Human Resources (HR) T Level, which was to be launched in 2023, was now not being taken forward, following the non-award of the contract in the wave 4 procurement exercise. The Department for Education said:

At this stage, we are unable to commit to a date when work on the HR T Level might resume but we will keep this under review.<sup>193</sup>

In June 2022, the Department for Education announced plans for a new T Level in marketing, which would be available from 2025.<sup>194</sup>

In August 2022, the awarding organisation for the Animal Care and Management T Level, City and Guilds, said [more work was needed on the technical qualification element of the course](#). City and Guilds said:

The development of the T Level Technical Qualification has been underway since October 2021, and over recent months it has become apparent that in order to ensure the final product meets the expectations of both employers and higher education providers, the content and structure of the qualification needs further work and engagement.<sup>195</sup>

In September 2022, the T Level guidance for providers was updated to say the introduction of the Animal Care and Management T Level was to be deferred until September 2024.<sup>196</sup>

## Four more T Levels deferred

In March 2023, the government announced it was pushing back the roll out of T Levels in Hairdressing, Barbering and Beauty Therapy; Craft and Design; and Media, Broadcast and Production from 2023 to 2024.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp13-4

<sup>192</sup> [“T-Levels timescale still ‘worryingly tight’, IfA boss says ahead of technical education takeover”](#), FE Week, 28 January 2019 (accessed 27 October 2022)

<sup>193</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2021](#), December 2021, p18

<sup>194</sup> Department for Education Blog, [T Levels: What courses are available?](#), 20 June 2022

<sup>195</sup> City and Guilds, [Employer and industry T Level update: Animal Care and Management Technical Qualification \(TQ\)](#), 19 August 2022

<sup>196</sup> Department for Education, [T Levels: next steps for providers](#), September 2022

<sup>197</sup> [HC Deb \[T Levels update\] 9 March 2023 WS619](#)

The Catering T Level was also deferred beyond 2024, “to allow time to consult with employers and sector bodies to ensure that this T Level meets all the needs of the sector”.<sup>198</sup> The catering T Level and any new T Level focussing on the beauty sector will now not be introduced until at least 2026.<sup>199</sup>

## 4.6

### A choice of routes at 16

Concerns were raised following the publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan in 2016 about young people potentially being faced with a binary choice between academic or technical pathways at 16 years old.

For example, the then-Shadow Further Education and Skills Minister, Gordon Marsden, suggested “people will be worried it’s going to be another form of the 11-plus”, and said more details were needed to reassure people the technical route will be as prestigious as the academic route.<sup>200</sup>

In his Edge Foundation report, [14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate \(PDF\)](#), Lord Baker welcomed the Post-16 Skills Plan as an “excellent plan for simplifying post-16 technical routes”, but raised concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide between academic and technical education:

[W]hile simplicity is more than welcome, I have concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide at 16 between the academic and technical routes. England is in a minority of European countries in making young people make such far-reaching choices at 16, and in expecting young people to narrow their curriculum quite so dramatically.

I am convinced that many young people would benefit from taking a mixture of technical and academic programmes, in varying proportions according to their talents and ambitions, throughout the period from 14 to 18/19.<sup>201</sup>

In the Department for Education’s two-stage consultation on level 3 qualification reforms, which took place between 2019 and 2021, and the subsequent policy statement published in July 2021, the Government made clear its ambition for A Levels and T Levels to be the “programmes of choice for 16 to 19 year olds taking level 3 qualifications”, within “clearly defined academic and technical routes”<sup>202</sup>

Despite these statements, in October 2021, the then-Minister for Higher and Further Education, Michelle Donelan, sought to play down the idea of a binary

<sup>198</sup> [HC Deb \[T Levels update\] 9 March 2023 WS619](#)

<sup>199</sup> Gov.uk, [T Levels and the outcome of the Review of Qualifications Reform](#)

<sup>200</sup> “[New plans for post-16 education ‘will be seen as another form of the 11-plus’](#)”, TES, 8 July 2016 (accessed 1 November 2022)

<sup>201</sup> Kenneth Baker, [14-19 Education A new Baccalaureate \(PDF\)](#), September 2016, p9

<sup>202</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement](#), 14 July 2021, p4; Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Second Stage. Government consultation](#), 23 October 2020, p4

choice between academic A Level and technical T Level pathways at 16. She said:

I would like to bust a myth here, because the media has sold a story that we are abolishing all BTECs and there will be a binary choice between A-levels and T Levels, which is certainly not the direction of travel.<sup>203</sup>

During the Westminster Hall debate on BTEC qualifications in July 2022, several MPs, including Rachel Hopkins and Kate Green, raised concerns for students and employers if A Levels and T Levels define student choice at 16.<sup>204</sup>

### Coverage of the 15 technical routes

Concerns were also raised following publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan regarding the coverage of the proposed 15 technical routes.

The then-Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, Martin Doel, said the creative arts and sports were “under-represented” in the 15 routes.<sup>205</sup> Rob May, then-Director at YMCA Awards, argued the “proposed technical routes cover only half of occupations, meaning they’re at risk of ostracizing an enormous part of the labour market.”<sup>206</sup>

## 4.7

## T Levels and SEND learners

### Post-16 Skills Plan

The Post-16 Skills Plan said many students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) could achieve a high level of technical skill if they were given the right support. In the plan the Government said it would ensure the 15 technical routes are “accessible, inclusive and sufficiently flexible to be adapted to individual needs”. It added that the transition year would be “crucial” for the “significant proportion” of students with SEND who are unlikely to be able to access routes because of poor prior attainment.<sup>207</sup>

### Box 5: Equalities impact of Post-16 Skills Plan proposals

The Government published an [assessment of equalities impacts](#) alongside the Skills Plan. This stated, among other things:

<sup>203</sup> “[Ministers play down BTECs cull](#)”, FE Week, 5 November 2021 (accessed 1 November 2022).

<sup>204</sup> [HC Deb \[BTEC Qualifications\] 18 July 2022 cc189-90WH](#)

<sup>205</sup> “[Sainsbury review triggers ‘biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years’](#)”, TES, 8 July 2016 (accessed 1 November 2022)

<sup>206</sup> “[Government’s Post-16 skills plan overlooks a number of key issues](#)”, FE News, 8 August 2016 (accessed 1 November 2022)

<sup>207</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp30-1

- Individuals with SEND were expected to be over-represented on technical education routes, to be over-represented on transition years, and more likely to be affected by the English and maths exit requirements (which have since been abolished).
- To be accessible and inclusive in their design, provision on the new technical education routes would need to be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to individual need, including SEND. Providers and employers would need to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate young people with SEND.
- Young people who take part in a technical education route will complete work placements and in addition to this may also complete work experience. Supported internships have shown that work experience can be a productive and positive experience for young people with complex and profound SEND.
- Young people with complex SEND will need highly tailored provision and to be supported by high-needs funding. The design and delivery of such provision was outside of the remit of the Sainsbury Review and thus the recommendations accepted in the Skills Plan.<sup>208</sup>

## T Level implementation consultation equalities analysis

In May 2018, the government [published an equalities analysis](#) alongside its response to the 2017/18 consultation on implementing T Levels.<sup>209</sup> This outlined how students with SEND may struggle with the industry placement aspects of the T Level:

Feedback from consultation respondents suggested that in some T Levels, it may be more difficult for those with a disability to undertake an industry placement and therefore complete their T Level. For example, industry placements in more physically active occupations such as in the construction industry may be more difficult for students with physical disabilities.

Other occupations may be more difficult for those students with autism who may need support adjusting to a new environment and routine. It is also possible that some employers may seek to avoid providing placements to students with disabilities.<sup>210</sup>

The government said a degree of flexibility would be available within industry placements to accommodate the needs of students with SEND, for example,

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<sup>208</sup> Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: assessment of equalities impacts](#), July 2016, pp6-7

<sup>209</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes Government consultation response: Equalities Analysis](#), May 2018

<sup>210</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes Government consultation response: Equalities Analysis](#), May 2018, p8

in the hours they attend the placement and the support they receive. It added:

We will continue our engagement with specific industries and providers where there may be greater challenges for students with SEND on a T Level to ensure we are putting in place any additional support that might be needed. We will draw on existing good practice, including supported internships.<sup>211</sup>

The equalities analysis also highlighted possible issues regarding students with SEND being able to complete the technical qualification aspect of the T Level.<sup>212</sup> To mitigate these concerns, the Government said the grading model of T Levels has been “designed to minimise negative impacts” and awarding organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure protected groups, including students with SEND, are not disadvantaged.<sup>213</sup>

## English and maths requirements

The 2018 T Level Action Plan said the English and maths exit requirement for some T Level students with SEND would be entry level 3 in functional skills, rather than a pass at GCSE (level 2).<sup>214</sup> This was to bring flexibilities for T Level students in line with apprentices.

The requirement for all T Level students to achieve either a grade 4 in maths and English GCSE or level 2 in functional skills, in order to pass their T Level, has now been removed. Students, including SEND students, are still required to work towards the attainment of such grades, however, and T Level course admission requirements, which are set by providers, may require certain grades in English and maths.

## Level 3 qualification funding reforms

The government’s impact assessment for its reforms to funding for level 3 qualifications acknowledged students from SEND backgrounds were disproportionately represented on courses at risk of losing funding, and some might be unable to achieve a level 3 qualification in the future.<sup>215</sup>

However, the Department expects those students who are most likely to be affected by changes are the ones who actually “have the most to gain” from level 3 reform.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes Government consultation response: Equalities Analysis](#), May 2018, p8

<sup>212</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes Government consultation response: Equalities Analysis](#), May 2018, p10

<sup>213</sup> Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes Government consultation response: Equalities Analysis](#), May 2018, p10

<sup>214</sup> Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, pp15-6

<sup>215</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022, p13.

<sup>216</sup> Department for Education, [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: Impact assessment](#), July 2022, p13.

## 4.8

## Reports on T Levels and technical education

**Education Policy Institute report 2024**

In November 2024, the Education Policy Institute published a report analysing student access and outcomes for T levels and the T level Transition Programme, which has now become the T level Foundation Year.<sup>217</sup> It noted several issues around the retention of students and made some recommendations to the government:

- The government should consider extending the pause on defunding overlapping qualifications, with T levels currently unsuitable for many Level 3 learners.
- The current curriculum and assessment review should consider introducing a smaller version of the T level (approximately one A level in size).
- The ongoing independent review of T level content should put a particular emphasis on the T level pathways that appear to be performing less well, such as the Health and Science, and Education and Early Years pathways.
- The government should consider either overhauling or discontinuing the T level transition programme (TLTP), as it is currently not meeting its goal of helping students move on to T levels.

**Ofsted report (2022/23)****Interim report on T Level providers (2022)**

In October 2022, Ofsted published an interim report review the quality of T Level courses after visiting a sample of providers that were among the first to offer the qualifications.<sup>218</sup> Ofsted found providers were committed to making T Levels a success, but the report also highlighted a number of issues.

On T levels, Ofsted found:

- Not all learners felt prepared for how much work they had to do for a T Level course.
- Although some teachers were well prepared for teaching T Level courses, many did not receive comprehensive training and found teaching the new curriculum challenging. Recruitment and retention of staff with sufficient

<sup>217</sup> Education Policy Institute, [A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression](#), 14 November 2024. The report is discussed in the FE Week article "[Abolish 'overwhelmingly negative' T Level transition programme, DfE told](#)", 14 November 2024

<sup>218</sup> Ofsted, [A review of the quality of T-level courses: Interim report](#), October 2022.

knowledge and experience were challenging due to the pandemic and sector workforce challenges.

- Some providers did not have access to resources such as textbooks and practice exam papers.
- The more effective providers of T Levels had already used the flexibility in the courses to sequence different components in a coherent way that develops learners' knowledge and skills.
- learners were appreciative of the quality of teaching on their T-level course. However, teachers faced challenges in balancing all the requirements of the course.
- The more effective T Level curriculums were developed by providers in collaboration with employers.
- At the time of Ofsted's visits, many learners were experiencing delays in starting industry placements, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and course providers were struggling to find employers.

On the T Level Transition Programme (TLTP), Ofsted found:

- Teaching on the Transition Programme was generally of a high standard, but the programme did not always result in learners progressing to a T level as intended.
- The quality of work experience for learners on the Transition Programme was not always high, with providers not always helping learners to find meaningful work experience relevant to their course.

Ofsted said it would visit the same providers again, and some new ones, in 2023 to see how T Level courses have been developed further.

### **T-level thematic review: final report (2023)**

Ofsted [published its final report in July 2023](#), saying:

There remains considerable work to do to improve the quality and effectiveness of T-level courses and the TLTP [T Level Transition Programme], to make sure that they fulfil their potential and can be offered at scale.<sup>219</sup>

The report found:

- Rather than after extensive engagement with employers and as part of a well-considered curriculum planning process, providers have generally introduced T Levels and the Transition Programme because they are expecting similar courses will not be eligible for public funding in the future.

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<sup>219</sup> Ofsted, [T-level thematic review: final report](#), 20 July 2023

- At their worst, T Level courses are not what students expected, and many students have reported being misled and ill-informed about content and structure.
- Initial assessment of students' abilities at the start of their T-level courses and on the TLTP is weak in most providers.
- The physical resources used to support the teaching of T Level courses and the TLTP are good in most providers. Providers have used capital funding appropriately to invest in high-quality, up-to-date resources.
- The practical aspects of courses are generally taught well. However, vocational teachers often struggle to teach theoretical content in sufficient depth or to set work that is appropriately challenging. Many providers have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff who have the required experience and expertise.
- Teachers expressed concern about the high volume of content in T Level courses. They are particularly concerned about the assessment requirements and the length of the industry placement, both of which limit the available teaching time.
- T Level Transition Programme curriculums have generally improved since Ofsted's first visits. However, the least effective programmes are not fit for purpose. They do not include work experience and do not prepare students to move on to a T Level course. Indeed, few students on the TLTP do move on to a T Level course.
- The quality of industry placements varies considerably across individual providers and on different T Level courses. Finding suitable placements is a barrier to increasing the number of T Level places available in many providers.

In September 2023, FE Week interviewed the Ofsted deputy director for further education, Paul Joyce, ahead of Ofsted starting to inspect T Levels as part of its regular inspections of further education providers.<sup>220</sup> Paul Joyce raised issues around public and employer awareness of T Levels and the ability to scale up placements as learner numbers increase.

## Education Committee Inquiry (2021-23)

In April 2023, the Commons Education Committee published a report on the future of post-16 qualifications.<sup>221</sup> It followed an inquiry launched in November 2021 that examined how effectively post-16 level 3 education and qualifications (such as A Levels, T Levels, BTECs, and apprenticeships) prepare young people for the world of work.

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<sup>220</sup> “[Q&A: Ofsted's verdict on T Levels](#)”, FE Week, 11 September 2023 (accessed 11 September 2023)

<sup>221</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23

## Committee report

The committee’s report said it did not believe T Levels currently struck the right balance between rigour and accessibility, with around one-fifth of the first T Level cohort estimated to have dropped out, and lower attaining students and students with special educational needs and disabilities particularly struggling with the new qualification.

The report also criticised the T Level Transition Programme, saying progression rates were “exceptionally low”. It also highlighted issues around placements and noted while up to 250,000 placements could be needed once T Levels are fully rolled out, employer interest in providing placements appears to have declined since 2019.

The report called for a “moratorium” on the defunding of Applied General Qualifications, saying:

Tried and tested Applied General Qualifications should only be withdrawn as and when there is a robust evidence base proving that T Levels are demonstrably more effective in preparing students for progression, meeting industry needs and promoting social mobility.<sup>222</sup>

While the Education Committee did hear some support for the removal of funding from applied general qualifications,<sup>223</sup> the vast majority of oral and written evidence was critical. Indeed, the report said it was rare for an inquiry to receive evidence expressing such a significant degree of consensus on a particular issue.<sup>224</sup>

There was particular criticism of the Government’s definition of ‘overlap’, with calls for T Levels to complement, rather than replace, existing qualifications, because they have a distinct and different purpose.<sup>225</sup> Concerns were also expressed by witnesses to the inquiry about the possible impact on student choice, and the report said:

The removal of a large number of AGQs could therefore decrease choice and opportunities for young people, including those with aspirations to work in a sector to which they have no local access, and those who have not yet decided on their future direction.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23, para. 141

<sup>223</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23, para. 115

<sup>224</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23, para. 119

<sup>225</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23, para. 120-121

<sup>226</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#), 28 April 2023, HC 55 Third Report of Session 2022–23, para. 125

Oral and written evidence provided to the inquiry is [available on the inquiry's webpage](#).<sup>227</sup>

### Government response

In its response to the committee's enquiry, published July 2023, the Government said it will evaluate placement delivery approaches and highlighted a £12 million employer support fund to compensate employers in the 2023/24 academic year for costs incurred when delivering an industry placement, such as administration and support with training staff who will supervise learners.<sup>228</sup>

Among other things, the response also noted the 'Connect with employers interested in T Levels' service, which is intended to help providers to connect and build relationships with employers about T Levels and industry placements.

The Government said it was reforming level 3 qualifications because "too many qualifications have low and no enrolments, are not sufficiently based on IfATE's employer led occupational standards, and do not progress young people to related occupations."<sup>229</sup>

The response argued there was no clear relationship between the qualifications taken by some learners and employment in specific industry sectors, with the retail sector the most likely destination for those in sustained employment for many qualifications. The Government therefore rejected the committee's call for a pause to the reforms and said it was confident they "will increase outcomes for learners and build a strong pipeline of skills for the future."<sup>230</sup>

Commenting on the Government's response, the chair of the Education Committee, Robin Walker, said:

The Government's response to our detailed and strongly evidenced recommendations was disappointing and gives the impression of prioritising saving face over ensuring its reforms are carried out in the interests of young people. The committee has made constructive suggestions and stands by them to ensure that our post 16 qualifications deliver for as many young people as possible.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> House of Commons, [The future of post-16 qualifications](#)

<sup>228</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022-23](#) (PDF), 5 July 2023, HC 1673 Fourth Special Report of Session 2022-23

<sup>229</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022-23](#) (PDF), 5 July 2023, HC 1673 Fourth Special Report of Session 2022-23

<sup>230</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [The future of post-16 qualifications: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022-23](#) (PDF), 5 July 2023, HC 1673 Fourth Special Report of Session 2022-23

<sup>231</sup> Education Committee, [Education Committee blasts 'disappointing' Govt response to T Levels report](#), 5 July 2023

## Policy Exchange report (2019)

In February 2019, Policy Exchange published a report looking at T Levels and the wider vocational system.<sup>232</sup> Issues raised by the report included:

- The viability of T Levels could be a concern if sufficient students do not opt for the new qualifications. Similarly, if T Levels fail to attract students with good GCSE grades, it will be difficult to build their reputation as a prestigious option for young people.
- Many employers appear to be unable or unwilling to offer T Level work placements.
- It is still not clear whether bridging provision between T Levels and university courses will exist when T Levels commence, or what form it will take.
- It remains unclear how T Levels are supposed to link to apprenticeships and applied general qualifications, and they could end up making the system more fragmented and confusing.
- There is a lack of information about the transition year.

The report made ten recommendations aimed, it said, at allowing “the Government to maintain the momentum of the reforms while simultaneously constructing a broader technical education system in which T-Levels can play a central role.” The recommendations included:

- Three qualification pathways, academic, applied, and technical, should be created. All 16-19 qualifications should be rationalised so that each subject only appears in one pathway.
- T Levels and apprenticeships should be designed as ‘parallel’ qualifications, with the same standard, training curriculum, and final assessment.
- The existing ‘Trailblazer’ groups of employers that design apprenticeship standards should be merged with the employer panels designing T Level content to create a ‘Technical Education Council’ for all 15 technical routes.
- Employers who pay the apprenticeship levy should be allowed to use £1,500 of their levy contributions to fund each T Level work placement.<sup>233</sup>

The report concluded by saying:

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<sup>232</sup> Policy Exchange, [A Qualified Success: An investigation into T-Levels and the wider vocational system](#), February 2019

<sup>233</sup> Policy Exchange, [A Qualified Success: An investigation into T-Levels and the wider vocational system](#), February 2019

T-levels have the potential to make a substantial contribution to our education system, but this will only be realised if T-levels are conceived, designed and delivered in the wider context of building a high quality and sustainable technical education route for young people.<sup>234</sup>

## National Foundation for Educational Research reports (2019)

In June 2019, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published a report based on interviews with 25 of the first 50 T Level providers.<sup>235</sup>

The report said providers welcomed the support they had received from the Government and felt confident they have the capacity and expertise to deliver the first three T Levels. However, they also expressed a number of concerns, including:

- The tight implementation timescale does not allow much time for detailed curriculum planning and staff training.
- Practical concerns relating to the delivery of industry placements, including the lack of large employers in rural areas and challenges for students travelling to and from placements.
- Potential challenges around student take-up over the longer term.<sup>236</sup>

### December 2019 follow-up report

In December 2019, the NFER published a follow-up to their June 2019 report, based on discussions that took place at a T Levels roundtable event in October 2019. The report said most of the NFER's earlier findings still resonated and providers "were generally optimistic about the future of T Levels."

However, it also highlighted a number of challenges that remained, including:

- While the T Level communications campaign was welcomed, it was felt there "remained significant work to do to raise the awareness and understanding of T Levels."

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<sup>234</sup> Policy Exchange, [A Qualified Success: An investigation into T-Levels and the wider vocational system](#), February 2019, p69

<sup>235</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, [T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery](#), June 2019

<sup>236</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, [T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery](#), June 2019; [New T Levels research from NFER - Providers say 'good support so far but still room for improvement'](#), National Foundation for Educational Research, 20 June 2019.

- The size of a T Level may make it difficult for young people to access if they are reliant on income from part-time jobs or have caring responsibilities.
- The late availability of the full T Level specifications in March 2020 and the tight timescale for fully developing the qualification.
- A number of practical challenges remained around industry placements, particularly with regards securing them at scale once T Levels are fully rolled-out.
- Providers were “generally positive about meeting their student recruitment targets”, but this “was mainly because they had set conservative targets...”. Concerns also remained around school protectionism and some providers thought they would struggle to promote T Levels in schools with sixth forms.
- While providers felt they had the staff required for delivery from September 2020, they “remained concerned about staff recruitment and retention in the longer-term”.
- Questions were raised regarding whether Russell Group universities will accept T Level students and what type of courses T Level students will be able to progress to.
- There remained some concerns about what is going to happen to other Level 3 qualifications, in particular BTECs.<sup>237</sup>

## Further reading

- Labour Party Council of Skills Advisers, [Learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion and a more equal Britain](#), October 2022.
- Times Education Commission, [Bringing out the best: How to transform education and unleash the potential of every child](#) (PDF), June 2022.
- Higher Education Policy Institute, [Holding Talent Back? What is next for the future of Level 3?](#), April 2022.

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<sup>237</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, [T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery? Follow-Up Report](#), 10 December 2019

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