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T Levels: Reforms to Technical Education

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Further education
Apprenticeships (section 1.2)

Summary

Major reforms are being made to the technical education system in England. The proposed reforms were first set out in the [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), and the legislative framework for them was provided by the *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*. In November 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) published a [consultation](#) on implementation, which it [responded](#) to in May 2018.

Under the reforms, a new technical education option will be created to sit alongside the academic option (e.g. A Levels and a degree). The technical option will comprise 15 routes based around occupations with shared training requirements. Some routes will be further sub-divided, with closely-related occupations grouped together into pathways.

The technical option will be delivered by a combination of college-based education and apprenticeships, with four of the 15 routes delivered primarily through apprenticeships.

New level 3 study programmes – T Levels – will be created to sit at the start of technical routes (apart from four apprenticeship only routes), with a T Level for each pathway (i.e. some routes will have more than one T Level). They will be primarily aimed at 16 year olds. A ‘transition year’ is being developed for those students who are not ready to start a T Level at age 16, but who could achieve one by age 19.

T Levels will be equivalent to a 3 A Level programme and will, on average, consist of 1800 hours studied full-time over two years – around 50% more than the average 16-19 study programme at present. They will all follow the same broad framework and will consist of five components:

- A technical qualification
- An industry placement with an employer of at least 315 hours (around 45 days)
- Maths, English and digital requirements
- Any other occupation-specific requirements/qualifications (e.g. a license to practise).
- Any further employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.

Three T Levels within the construction, digital, and education and childcare routes will be delivered at a small number of providers from September 2020. A further seven T Levels will be available from September 2021, with another eight available from September 2023. It is aimed for the remaining T Levels to be introduced from September 2023, but this is to be confirmed.

T Levels will not be available in all subjects where level 3 qualifications currently exist. The DfE is in the process of reviewing post-16 level 3 qualifications with the aim of simplifying the current qualification landscape.

It is intended that the technical option will extend from T Levels up to higher skill levels. The DfE is currently reviewing technical qualifications at level four and five and launched a consultation on proposed reforms in July 2019.

1. Background: current technical education system

1.1 16-19 study programmes

Following Alison Wolf's [2011 review of vocational education](#), the Coalition Government made a number of reforms to 16-19 education. These included removing a large number of vocational qualifications from the 16-19 performance tables, and replacing the system of funding learning providers per qualification with a system of funding per student.¹

As part of the reforms, since the 2013-14 academic year all 16-19 year old students, whether they are studying academic or vocational qualifications, are expected to be given the opportunity to take a study programme that usually includes:

- substantial academic or applied and technical qualifications;
- non-qualification activity, such as work experience; and
- the study of English and maths where they do not hold a GCSE 9-4 (reformed grading) or A*-C (legacy grading) in these subjects.²

Under the 16-19 funding formula introduced in 2013-14, a single basic funding rate per full-time student, currently £4,000 for 16 and 17 year olds, is intended to fund a study programme of around 600 guided learning hours, regardless of where and what the student studies.³ The formula also provides a number of funding uplifts, including for large programmes and disadvantaged learners, and an area costs adjustment. Further information on the funding of 16-19 education is provided in Library Briefing 7019, [16-19 education funding in England since 2010](#).

Technical qualifications

While any qualification that has been approved for teaching to 16-19 year olds (section 96 approval) may be taught as part of a study programme, the Government has published three lists of approved applied and technical qualifications that will be reported in performance tables alongside academic qualifications (e.g. A-Levels).

An outline of the three categories of qualifications is provided in [guidance on 16-19 study programmes](#) published by the Department for Education (DfE):

- **Applied General qualifications:** these are level 3 qualifications that equip students with transferable knowledge and skills. They are for post-16 students wanting to continue their education through applied learning and fulfil entry requirements for a range of HE courses – either by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside other qualifications at the same level.

¹ HC Deb 2 July 2012, [cc34-5WS](#).

² Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes](#), January 2016, p3.

³ Department for Education and Education Funding Agency, [16-19 Funding formula review](#), July 2012, p12.

- **Tech Level qualifications:** these are level 3 technical qualifications that are recognised by employers. They equip young people with the specialist knowledge and skills they need for a job in occupations ranging from engineering to computing, hospitality to agriculture. The Technical Baccalaureate (TechBacc) is a performance table measure that includes a Tech Level, a level 3 mathematics qualification and an extended project qualification (designed to extend students' writing, communication, research and self-motivation skills).
- **Technical Certificates:** these are level 2 qualifications that provide students with a route into a skilled trade or occupation where employers recognise entry at this level (for example, construction trades, social care or hairdressing). Technical Certificates also provide access to Tech Levels or an apprenticeship.⁴

In order to be included in the performance tables, tech levels and technical certificates have to be recognised by a trade or professional body, or by at least five employers. Alternatively, they may be accepted by a national licensed professional registration scheme.⁵ A university must have pledged support for an applied general qualification for it to be included in the performance tables.⁶

For students who are not yet ready for a level 2 qualification, providers should offer "a tailored study programme that supports them to progress either to further education or employment, or to prepare for adult life."⁷

Box 1: Qualification levels

Most qualifications have a difficulty level – the higher the level the more difficult the qualification is. Qualifications at the same level may, however, cover different amounts of the same subject and so may be different lengths.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are 9 qualification levels, ranging from entry level (which has three sub-levels) to level 8. A list of the qualifications at each level is available on Gov.uk at [What qualification levels mean](#). Some examples are:

- Entry Level – Skills for Life.
- Level 1 – GCSE grades 3-1 or D-G.
- Level 2 – GCSE grades 9-4 or A*-C.
- Level 3 – A Levels; AS Levels; tech levels; T Levels.
- Level 4 – Higher National Certification (HNC); Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE).
- Level 5 – Higher National Diploma (HND); Level 5 Diploma; Foundation Degree.
- Level 6 – Undergraduate Degree.
- Level 7 – Master's Degree; Postgraduate Diploma; Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).
- Level 8 – Doctorate.

⁴ Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2019 to 2020 academic year\)](#), updated 15 May 2019.

⁵ Department for Education, [2018 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the tech level category](#), August 2016, p3.

⁶ Department for Education, [2018 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the applied general category](#), August 2016, p3.

⁷ Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2018 to 2019 academic year\)](#), March 2018, p9.

1.2 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are full-time paid jobs which incorporate on and off the job training. They take between one and four years to complete and are available in 1,500 occupations across more than 170 industries. A successful apprentice may receive a nationally recognised qualification on the completion of their contract.⁸

Apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 16 living in England, although employers may set different entry requirements depending on the sector and job. Over 900,000 funded apprentices participated on an apprenticeship in the 2016 to 2017 academic year, and at the time of publication over 16,000 apprenticeship vacancies were posted on the government's [Find an Apprenticeship](#) website.^{9 10}

There are two different types of apprenticeship schemes, frameworks and standards. Apprenticeship frameworks are being progressively phased out and replaced by the newer apprenticeship standards. By 2020, the ESFA expect all apprenticeship starts to be on standards, and will not allow any starts on frameworks.¹¹

Apprenticeship qualification levels

Apprenticeships can be studied at different qualification levels:¹²

Name	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	3	2 A level passes
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

Apprenticeship Levy

On 6 April 2017 the apprenticeship levy came into effect with all UK employers with a pay bill of over £3 million per year paying the levy. The levy is set at 0.5% of the value of the employer's pay bill, minus an apprenticeship levy allowance of £15,000 per financial year. The levy is paid into an apprenticeship service account, and funds in this account have to be spent on apprenticeship training and assessment.

The Institute for Apprenticeships

The [Institute for Apprenticeships](#), now named the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (see section 2.11), was established in May 2016 by the [Enterprise Act 2016](#). The executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the DfE, went live in April 2017. The aim of the institute is to ensure high-quality apprenticeship standards and to advise the government on funding for each standard.

Further detail on apprenticeships is provided in the library briefing note [Apprenticeships and skills policy in England](#) (January 2019).

⁸ Gov.uk, [Key facts about apprenticeships](#), 21 Feb 2017.

⁹ DfE/ESFA, [FE data library: apprenticeships](#)

¹⁰ Vacancies as of 23 August 2019. Not all vacancies are advertised through the Find an Apprenticeship website.

¹¹ ESFA, [Information about the withdrawal of apprenticeship frameworks](#)

¹² Gov.uk, [Become an apprentice](#).

2. T Levels

2.1 Background

Major reforms are being made to the technical education system in England, including the introduction of new technical study programmes at level 3 – T Levels – from September 2020 onwards.

The proposed reforms were first set out in the [Post-16 Skills Plan](#). They are based on recommendations made in the [report of an independent panel on technical education](#), led by Lord Sainsbury, which was established by the then Government to “advise on measures which could improve technical education in England.”¹³ A [consultation](#) on the implementation of T Level programmes (hereafter referred to as the T Level consultation) followed in November 2017, with the [Government response](#) published in May 2018. The legislative framework for the reforms was provided by the *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*.

This briefing provides an overview of the proposals and their implementation. Further information is available in the DfE’s [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), published in December 2019.

2.2 Rationale

In setting out the need for reform, the independent panel’s report stated that the UK’s economy was being held back by a “long-term productivity problem” and that years of undertraining had led to “a chronic shortage of people with technician-level skills.” Investment in the development of technical skills was, the report argued, essential to enhancing productivity.

In addition to this economic rationale, the report outlined a social need for change: that 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. The current system, it 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.” The report added that learners, teachers and the public have “long regarded technical education qualifications as inferior to academic qualifications”, and higher level technical qualifications “have too often become divorced from the actual occupations they should be preparing individuals for.”¹⁴

The report’s recommendations were, it said, 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.”¹⁵

¹³ [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), July 2016, p11; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016.

¹⁴ [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), July 2016, pp22-3.

¹⁵ As above, p8.

A [document outlining the rationale for the proposed changes](#) and echoing much of the argument set out by the independent panel was published by the DfE alongside the Post-16 Skills Plan. The then Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, made similar arguments when outlining the reforms in a [speech](#) in December 2018.¹⁶

2.3 A new technical option

Under the proposed reforms, every young person will be presented with two choices of education route at age 16: an academic route and a technical route; it will be possible to switch between the routes via “appropriate bridging courses.”¹⁷ The Skills Plan argued that the academic option is “already well regarded” and so focused on the technical option, which, it said, “must also be world-class.”¹⁸

The 15 routes

The proposed technical option will consist of 15 routes based around occupations with shared training requirements.

[Occupational maps](#) developed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education detail the occupations linked to each of the 15 routes, with closely-related occupations grouped together into pathways.

Technical education will continue to be delivered by a combination of college-based education and apprenticeships, with four of the 15 routes delivered primarily through apprenticeships.

2.4 T Levels

New two-year level 3 college-based programmes - T Levels – will be created at the start of each of the 11 non-apprenticeship only routes. T Levels will sit at the pathway level and so there will be more than one T Level at the start of some routes, with 25 in total. They will sit alongside apprenticeships as one half of the technical education offer for 16-19 year olds and will be based on the same set of employer designed standards (developed by apprenticeship trailblazer groups). There will, however, be

The 15 technical routes and their associated pathways		
Route	Pathways	Date of first T Level delivery
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care	Animal Care and Management	September 2023 (TBC)
	Agriculture, Land Management and Production	September 2023 (TBC)
Business and Administration	Management and Administration	September 2022
	Human Resources	September 2022
Care Services	Care Services	Apprenticeship only
Catering and Hospitality	Catering	September 2023 (TBC)
	Hospitality	Apprenticeship only
Construction	Design, Surveying and Planning	September 2020
	Onsite Construction	September 2021
	Building Services Engineering	September 2021
Creative and Design	Craft and Design	September 2023 (TBC)
	Media, Broadcast and Production	September 2023 (TBC)
	Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions	September 2023 (TBC)
Digital	Digital Production, Design and Development	September 2020
	Digital Support and Services	September 2021
	Digital Business Services	September 2021
Education and Childcare	Education	September 2020
Engineering and Manufacturing	Maintenance, Installation and Repair	September 2022
	Design and Development	September 2022
	Manufacturing, Processing and Control	September 2022
Hair and Beauty	Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics	September 2023 (TBC)
Health and Science	Health	September 2021
	Healthcare Science	September 2021
Legal, Financial and Accounting	Science	September 2021
	Legal	September 2022
	Financial	September 2022
Protective Services	Accountancy	September 2022
	Protective Services	Apprenticeship only
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	Customer Service	Apprenticeship only
	Marketing	Apprenticeship only
	Procurement	Apprenticeship only
	Retail	Apprenticeship only
Transport and Logistics	Transport	Apprenticeship only
	Logistics	Apprenticeship only

¹⁶ Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: the case for change](#), July 2016; [Damian Hinds Technical Education Speech](#), Department for Education, 6 December 2018.

¹⁷ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p20.

¹⁸ As above, p7.

differences in the content between T Levels and apprenticeships; 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 a route.

T Level programmes will be equivalent to a 3 A Level programme and will, on average, comprise 1800 hours studied full-time over two years. They will all follow the same broad framework and will consist of five components:

- A technical qualification
- An industry placement with an employer
- Maths, English and digital requirements
- Any other occupation-specific requirements/qualifications (e.g. a license to practise).
- Any further employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.

Box 2: T Level Panels

T Level panels appointed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will develop the content common across each technical route, as well as the specialist content required for each occupation on the occupational map. In November 2017, the Government announced the membership of the panels for 16 T Levels across six routes. The membership of panels for the remaining nine T Levels was announced in September 2018.¹⁹

The technical qualification

The technical qualification component of T Levels will include 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.²⁰

The underpinning knowledge of the core component will be assessed through external examination, with core employability skills assessed through employer-set projects. For occupational specialisms, students will demonstrate that they have competence through practical assignments.

Rather than having an overall grade for a technical qualification, students will receive separate grades for the core component (graded A*-E) and for the specialism (graded Pass, Merit or Distinction), with each recognised separately on the T Level certificate. In order to achieve a T Level, students will have to attain an E or above in the core content component and a pass or above in each relevant specialism.

It is expected that the time for the technical qualification component of T Level programmes will range between 900 and 1400 hours.²¹

¹⁹ [T level panels membership](#), Department for Education, 18 September 2018; [Leading industry experts to design new T Levels](#), Department for Education, 10 September 2018.

²⁰ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp12-15.

²¹ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp16-7.

The Skills Plan argued that competition between awarding organisations had led to “a race to the bottom” where awarding organisations compete to offer easier and lower value qualifications. Under the reforms, 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.²²

The contracts to design, develop and award the first three T Levels were awarded to NCFE (Education and Childcare) and Pearson (Design, Surveying and Planning, and Digital Production, Design and Development) in February 2019.²³ The contracts for the seven T Levels in the second wave, to be taught from September 2021, were awarded in October 2019.²⁴

Ofqual will be responsible for regulating the technical qualification that will sit within T Levels collaboratively with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.²⁵ In July 2018, Ofqual launched a [consultation](#) on the regulation of the technical qualification, the [outcome of which](#) was published in September 2018.²⁶ 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 2018.²⁷ Further information is available in [guidance](#) published by Ofqual in October 2019.²⁸

Box 3: T Levels and existing Level 3 qualifications

T Levels will not be available in all areas where Level 3 qualifications currently exist. The DfE is in the process of reviewing post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below, excluding A levels, T Levels and GCSEs, with the aim of simplifying the current qualification landscape so that all qualifications receiving public funding have a distinct purpose, are good quality, and support progression to good outcomes.

As part of the first stage of its review, in March 2019 the DfE published a consultation outlining proposals to:

- only provide public funding for qualifications that meet key criteria on quality, purpose, necessity and progression; and
- not provide public funding for qualifications for 16-19 year olds that overlap with T Levels and A Levels.

The consultation closed on 10 June 2019. A second consultation is expected to be published in spring 2020, which will “build on the responses to the first and outline detailed proposals for change”, including “proposed changes to the criteria that qualifications must meet to receive funding and supporting regulatory changes.”²⁹

In July 2019, the then Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, additionally announced that the Government would:

- Remove funding from [163 duplicate qualifications](#) from August 2020, to ensure “that students take the newer, more rigorous versions.”

²² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24.

²³ [Contracts awarded to deliver the first T Levels](#), Department for Education, 13 February 2019.

²⁴ [Revealed: The awarding bodies delivering the second wave of T-levels](#), FE Week, 2 October 2019.

²⁵ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, pp7-8.

²⁶ Ofqual, [Ofqual’s approach to regulating Technical Qualifications](#), 3 September 2018.

²⁷ Ofqual, [Implementation of Technical Qualifications](#), 12 December 2018.

²⁸ Ofqual, [Technical qualifications within T Levels](#), 31 October 2019.

²⁹ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p39.

- Stop any new qualification at Level 3 and below from getting approval for funding from September 2020, in order to “avoid adding to the already confusing and complicated system of over 12,000 qualifications already available at these levels.”³⁰

Box 4: Applied general qualifications

The Skills Plan stated that applied general qualifications were not intended to be part of the technical option. It added that the Government intended “to review the contribution of [applied general] qualifications to preparing students for success in higher education; what part they can play in the reformed system; and the impact any reform would have on the government’s ambitions on widening participation.”³¹ The review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below (see box above), includes consideration of the role of Applied General Qualifications.³² Some, including the Chief Executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, have raised concerns about their possible removal as a result of the review.³³

T Level certificates and grading

To pass the T Level and be awarded a certificate, a student will need to pass all components of the programme. Students who do not meet the requirements for certification, or leave a programme part-way through, will receive a transcript recognising the parts of the programme that have been achieved.

The original T Level consultation stated that the Government did not believe it was appropriate to include an overall grade on the T Level certificate. Instead, it proposed that grades for all the separate components should be listed separately. To pass the T Level and be awarded a certificate, the student would need to pass all components of the programme. Students who do not meet the requirements for certification, or leave a programme part-way through, would receive a transcript recognising the parts of the programme that had been achieved.

The consultation response stated, however, that an overall grade of Pass, Merit or Distinction will be awarded for an entire T Level, so that it is clear to an employer that a student has completed all components of the system. The different components of the Technical Qualification will also be graded separately as outlined above. More detail on the grading of T Levels, including an example T Level certificate is provided in the [T Level Action Plan 2019](#).³⁴

UCAS points will be 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 a 3 A Level programme – for example, a starred distinction will attract 168 points, the same as 3 A*s at A Level.³⁵

³⁰ [Further measures announced to boost the quality of post-16 qualifications](#), Department for Education, 22 July 2019; Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p39.

³¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p20.

³² Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p32.

³³ [Making T-levels and A-levels the only options of choice – really?](#), *FE Week*, 16 June 2019.

³⁴ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp19-20.

³⁵ As above, pp21-2.

Maths, English and digital

The DfE will not set maths and English entry requirements to enrol on a T Level, but students will have to achieve a minimum level of attainment in order to achieve one. This will be set at level 2 and students may meet the requirement through achievement of a GCSE standard pass in English and maths or a level 2 Functional Skills qualification.³⁶

The T Level consultation additionally outlined the DfE's expectation that occupation-specific digital skills relevant to an industry will be "an integral part of each T Level programme."³⁷

Industry placements

A substantial industry placement, lasting at least 315 hours (around 45 days) will be a part of each T Level. The DfE states that the longer duration will ensure that "students are given enough time to master the essentials, and that the employer has the opportunity to develop and shape young people's skills."³⁸

Students on placements will not be entitled to a salary and there is no expectation that they will be paid. However, employers will be able to pay students should they wish to do so.

The DfE has provided additional support to providers and employers to assist with the delivery of industry placements. This includes:

- funding to help providers build their capacity and capability to deliver work placements (see box below);
- advice and support for employers through the National Apprenticeship Service; and
- additional bursary funding in 2018-19 to help students travel to industry placements.

A pilot scheme was run throughout the 2017-18 academic year to trial the delivery of effective industry placements.³⁹ The DfE published an [evaluation](#) of the pilot scheme in December 2018.⁴⁰

In May 2019 the DfE set 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 (see section 3.5 for more information).⁴¹

³⁶ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p23.

³⁷ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p24.

³⁸ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, p30.

³⁹ [Industry Placement Pilot 2017-18](#), Education and Skills Funding Agency, 26 September 2018.

⁴⁰ Department for Education, [Evaluation of the Industry Placement Pilot: Research report](#), December 2018.

⁴¹ Department for Education, [T Levels Industry Placements: Update on delivery models and support](#), May 2019, pp3-6; [More support to help employers offer T Level industry placements](#), Department for Education, 19 May 2019.

The T level Action Plan 2019 states that an “employer support package will be developed and introduced throughout the 2019 to 2020 academic year to support employers to effectively plan and implement high quality placements.”⁴²

In addition, in response to concerns about costs acting as a barrier to employers offering industry placements, a £7 million Employer Support Fund will be launched in the 2019-20 academic year to trial “the limited provision of employer financial support for tangible costs.”⁴³

More detailed information on how industry placements work is provided in [guidance](#) published by the DfE, last updated in May 2019.⁴⁴

Box 5: Capacity and Delivery Fund

The DfE announced that £74 million of funding would be available for the period from April 2018 to August 2019 to support providers in starting to build their capacity and capability to provide substantive work placements, and to deliver placements in the 2018-19 academic year.⁴⁵ The T Level consultation added that this funding will “increase every year up to and beyond the introduction of T levels.”⁴⁶

In line with the consultation proposals, guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in September 2017 set out that work placements in 2018-19 delivered using the announced funding – the Capacity and Delivery Fund – were required to adhere to a set of eight principles, including that they must last between 45 and 60 days. The guidance stated that the principles were developed in consultation with employers and providers and built on principles being tested in work placement pilots launched in September 2017. It added that the principles will continue to be refined and may change before T Levels are rolled out.⁴⁷ Updated guidance for placements delivered in the 2019-20 academic year was published in June 2019.⁴⁸

The T Level Action Plan 2019 stated that £60 million of capacity and delivery funding was given to providers in the 2018-19 academic year.⁴⁹

2.5 Funding for T Levels

As set out above, T Levels will consist of 900 hours a year on average, 50% more than the current average 16-19 study programme. In 2017, the then Government announced that additional funding will be provided to take account of this, as well as to organise the industry placements. It stated that this will equate to an additional £500 million a year once T Levels are fully rolled out.⁵⁰

⁴² Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p23.

⁴³ Department for Education, [T Levels Industry Placements: Update on delivery models and support](#), May 2019, p20; [More support to help employers offer T Level industry placements](#), Department for Education, 19 May 2019.

⁴⁴ Department for Education, [Industry placements](#), 25 March 2019.

⁴⁵ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p14; [Justine Greening: Speech at the Business and Education Summit](#), Department for Education, 6 July 2017.

⁴⁶ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p19.

⁴⁷ Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Work placements – capacity and delivery fund from April 2018 to July 2019](#), November 2017.

⁴⁸ [Industry placements: capacity and delivery fund \(CDF\) for 2019 to 2020 for providers in receipt of CDF in academic year 2018 to 2019](#), Education and Skills Funding Agency, 19 June 2019.

⁴⁹ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p10.

⁵⁰ HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), HC 1025, March 2017, p41; Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, p35.

In its response to the T Level consultation, the DfE confirmed that it intended to adapt the existing arrangements for funding 16-19 education to distribute funding for T Levels, rather than design a new system. A [consultation](#) specifically on the revenue funding for T Levels was launched in November 2018 and ran until February 2019. 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 will 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 also be provided for disadvantaged students while on an industry placement. The Government will look at funding for industry placements, including as part of the Spending Review.
- 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.
- In recognition of the additional costs unique to early T Level providers, the Government intends to provide one-off additional payments to providers for each new T Level they introduce in 2020.⁵¹

An [equality analysis](#) was published alongside the consultation response.⁵²

Funding to support initial delivery of T Levels

A “package of support” has also been made available “to ensure the new T Levels are delivered successfully from the start.” This includes:

- **£3.75 million to providers of T Levels in 2020, with providers receiving £30,000 per T Level pathway delivered.** The funding is in recognition of “the costs associated with co-creating T Levels and engaging with the department on policy”. The payments, which will also be available to providers delivering T Levels in 2020-21, will be phased out over time.⁵³
- **£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

⁵¹ Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Provider funding for the delivery of T Levels: Government consultation response](#), June 2019.

⁵² Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Provider funding for the delivery of T Levels: Government consultation response Equality Assessment](#), June 2019.

⁵³ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p9.

industry.⁵⁴ In June 2019, *FE Week* reported that the DfE had launched a tender valued between £40 million and £82 million to deliver the second phase of the professional development for teachers of T Levels between April 2020 and July 2024.⁵⁵

- **£38 million of capital funding available to providers of the first T Levels.** The fund was launched in January 2019 and is being delivered in two parts. Providers can bid for funding to refurbish existing buildings or to build new spaces; funding for specialist equipment will be allocated to all providers in spring 2020.⁵⁶ In July 2019, the DfE announced the 11 providers which has been successful in their bids for the first part of the funding.⁵⁷
- **£2,500 per T Level for 2020 providers “to support communication costs** such as producing high-quality materials to recruit young people.” The DfE has stated that it expects the funding to be short term while awareness of T Levels is still limited.⁵⁸

Box 6: Review of funding of technical education in other countries

In July 2017, the DfE published a review of funding and expenditure in post-16 education in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway. The introduction to the report stated that, with the reforms to technical education progressing, it was “timely for the Government to consider what funding structures are needed to ensure technical education meets the needs of employers and this includes learning from international experience.”⁵⁹ Among other things, the review found that:

- Around 90% of students who study upper-secondary⁶⁰ vocational programmes in Germany, Denmark and Norway have a training agreement with an employer. 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 finances training at vocational schools, whilst employers mainly finance on-the-job training.
- Countries are investing considerable resources in post-16 vocational education programmes and spend more per student following vocational tracks than for those following academic routes. Germany, for example, spends £3,038 more.

2.6 Implementation timetable

The rollout timetable for T Levels has been changed on a number of occasions (see section 3.4 for further information). Under current plans:

- [52 providers](#) will begin delivering T Levels in Digital Production, Design and Development (digital route); Design, Surveying and

⁵⁴ As above, pp10 & 36.

⁵⁵ DfE begins search for provider of £80m T-level support programme, *FE Week*, 19 June 2019.

⁵⁶ [£38 million T Level Capital Fund launches](#), Department for Education, 30 January 2019; Department for Education, [T Levels capital fund guidance](#), January 2019.

⁵⁷ [T Level providers to benefit from multi-million pound fund](#), Department for Education, 11 July 2019.

⁵⁸ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p10.

⁵⁹ Department for Education, [Funding and expenditure in pos-16 education: An international review](#), July 2017, p8.

⁶⁰ The report explains that “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. The majority of the programmes are at levels equivalent to Level 2 (GCSE A*-C) and level 3 (UK A level) on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

Planning (Construction route); and Education (Education and Childcare route) from 2020-21. [Finalised content](#) for these first three T Levels is available on the website of the Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education.

- 7 more T Levels (the remaining T Levels in the construction and digital routes, and all T Levels in the Health and Science route) will be available for delivery from 2021-22, with [an additional 60 providers](#) delivering T Levels.
- 8 more T Levels will be delivered from September 2022 (all T Levels within the Legal Finance and Accounting; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Business and Administration routes). The number of T Level providers will be expanded further.
- The DfE has said that it aims for all remaining T Levels to be introduced from September 2023, but this is to be confirmed.

The table on page 9 provides an overview of the planned rollout for each T Level. Further information is provided on pages 9-18 of the T Level Action Plan 2019.

2.7 Learners not ready to access a T Level

The proposals in the Skills Plan focused primarily on learners able to start at the beginning of a technical route and progress upwards. However, the Plan stated that “up to a year of tailored and flexible support” would be available for young people not able to access a route at 16, which would be “based on their prior attainment and aspirations.” It added that the DfE intended to carry out further work and to consult on this “transition year”.⁶¹

The transition year will be aimed at students who are not ready to start a T Level at age 16, but who can realistically achieve one by age 19. The DfE will issue a framework for delivery setting out the key components, which are:

- **Diagnostic and guidance period:** to assess students’ capability and support needs in order to tailor the programme to their needs. Also help students decide which T Level route they want to prepare for.
- **English and maths:** for students who do not hold at least a GCSE grade 4 in English and/or maths.
- **Work experience and preparation:** to develop the skills, behaviours, attitude and confidence needed to complete a T Level industry placement.
- **Introductory technical skills:** to prepare students for the T Level route they wish to prepare for.
- **Pastoral support and development:** support to address barriers to education, support emotional and/or mental health difficulties, and support the development of study skills.⁶²

⁶¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p28.

⁶² Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p25.

In July 2019 the DfE [announced](#) the 35 providers who would pilot the T Level Transition Programme in 2020-21.⁶³ The providers will work with the DfE to “explore different delivery approaches and gather good practice to inform national implementation.” It was announced in May 2019 that the Association of Colleges had been appointed to support T Level providers in their delivery of the transition programme. The DfE expects to identify providers who wish to develop their T Level Transition Programme for first delivery from 2021 in the new year.⁶⁴

Each provider delivering the T Level Transition Programme in 2020-21 will receive a payment of £20,000 (in 2020-21 only). Funding will also be available for 2021 providers delivering the transition programme for the first time in 2021. The funding is provided in recognition of the costs associated with participating in early phases of the programme and will not be available in the longer term.⁶⁵

Students with special educational needs

The Skills Plan noted that many students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) “could achieve a high level of technical skill with the right support.” It stated that the Government would ensure that the technical routes are “accessible, inclusive and sufficiently flexible to be adapted to individual needs” and that learners with SEND should receive the support and reasonable adjustments they need to access a route. 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.⁶⁶

The T Level Action Plan 2018 stated that the maths and English exit requirement for some T Level students with SEND will be Entry Level 3 in Functional Skills, rather than Level 2.⁶⁷

2.8 Adult learners

While T Levels are primarily intended for learners aged 16-19, the DfE’s consultation stated that it wanted to consider how they can be adapted so that they are appropriate for adult learners.⁶⁸

In response to a parliamentary question in July 2019 the then Minister, Anne Milton, stated that the DfE “would consider whether [T Levels] might be appropriate for some adults to study”, but was currently focused on rollout to the “core 16-19 demographic.”⁶⁹

⁶³ [Providers selected to deliver T Levels and providers planning to deliver the T Level Transition Programme](#), Department for Education, 11 July 2019.

⁶⁴ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp25-6; [AoC wins secretive T-levels transition offer tender](#), FE Week, 14 May 2019.

⁶⁵ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p9.

⁶⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp30-1.

⁶⁷ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, pp15-6.

⁶⁸ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p32.

⁶⁹ [PQ 272971](#), 10 July 2019.

2.9 Progress to higher skill levels

The Skills Plan stated that the 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. The 2015 Government did say, however, that it expected “to see a reduction in the number of regulated qualifications that exist at levels 4 and 5”.⁷⁰

In October 2017, the DfE announced that it intended to conduct a review into higher level technical education, covering the whole of level four and five education.⁷¹ The review, it said, was intended to look at “how technical qualifications at this level can better address the needs of learners and employers”, including that learners can progress from T levels into the workplace.⁷² The T Level consultation said that as part of the review of level 4 and 5 technical education, the DfE would consider how bridging provision will allow individuals to progress to both academic and higher level provision.⁷³

In July 2019 the DfE launched a [consultation](#) on proposed reforms to level 4 and 5 qualifications. Under the proposals, level 4 and 5 qualifications will be reviewed and those that meet set standards will be renamed Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and awarded a quality mark. The consultation additionally includes proposals aimed at ensuring that HTQs are only delivered by high-quality providers, where they will be eligible for student finance. The DfE wants HTQs to be available to be taught from 2022, when the first T Level students will complete their courses.⁷⁴ The consultation closed on 29 September 2019 and a response has not yet been published.

Box 7: Costs of providing further education at levels 4 and 5

In December 2017, the DfE published a [research report](#) looking at the costs of providing further education at levels 4 and 5 in STEM subjects. The report concluded that higher apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5 face wide variations in their operating margins, the main driver of which is staff salaries. It added that the findings did not support the assumption that providers may choose not to offer STEM qualifications due to the investment required in equipment.⁷⁵

2.10 Accountability

The T Level consultation set out the measures that the DfE thinks should form the basis of the accountability system for providers of T Levels:

⁷⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp25-7.

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² [Level 4 & 5 technical education to be reviewed](#), Department for Education, 31 October 2017.

⁷³ As above, p30.

⁷⁴ DfE, [Improving higher technical education](#), 8 July 2019; [Proposals launched to boost the quality and uptake of Higher Technical Qualifications](#), DfE, 8 July 2019.

⁷⁵ Department for Education, [The costs of providing levels 4 and 5 in further education](#), December 2017, pp9-10.

- A completion measure.
- An attainment measure for the qualification component of T Levels, just for those students who complete the full T Level.
- Destination measures, which will show how well T Levels enable progression to skilled employment or higher technical education.
- Maths and English – to measure the progress that students are making in attaining basic skills.

The consultation additionally proposed that it will be necessary for Ofsted to evaluate the delivery of T Level routes as a separate provision type and give a grade for T Level provision.⁷⁶ The DfE expects T Levels to be included in Ofsted's inspection framework once they have been fully rolled out.⁷⁷

A [T Level accountability statement](#), setting out the responsibilities of each government organisation with a role in the introduction of T Levels, was published by the DfE in March 2019.⁷⁸

2.11 Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

The remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships has been expanded to cover all technical education, both college-based and apprenticeships, and it has been renamed the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

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

- Enables the Secretary of State to specify broad groups of occupations with shared training requirements (which may be referred to as 'routes'). The Institute 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.⁷⁹
- Requires the Institute 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.⁸⁰
- Allows the Institute 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.⁸¹

In March 2019 the DfE published its annual strategic guidance for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. The document

⁷⁶ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp41-2.

⁷⁷ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2018](#), December 2018, p27.

⁷⁸ Department for Education, [T Level accountability statement](#), 8 March 2019.

⁷⁹ *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*, Schedule 1, paragraph 7.

⁸⁰ *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*, Schedule 1, paragraph 8.

⁸¹ As above, Schedule 1, paragraphs 15 and 21.

explains the role of the Institute and provides directions for it to consider when carrying out its duties in 2019-20.⁸²

2.12 2019 Conservative manifesto

The Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2019 general election did not specifically mention T Levels. However, in November 2019 the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, denied that this indicated a softening of the Government's commitment to them. He stated:

No, not at all. It's like all manifestos, it can only have so many pages and it is almost impossible to mention absolutely everything.

It is not because they're not important, it is just an absolute given that T-levels are there.

T-levels are absolutely the centre point of what we are doing in technical education. I have talked extensively about it as education secretary and it is something we are backing up with cold, hard cash as well.⁸³

⁸² Department for Education, [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education: strategic guidance](#), March 2019.

⁸³ [Williamson taken to task on Conservative manifesto](#), FE Week, 29 November 2019.

3. Reaction, issues and reports

The reform proposals received a broadly positive response from stakeholders, a number of which were collated in a blog posted on the Gov.uk website following publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan: [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#). For example, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, stated that:

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.⁸⁴

Similarly, Neil Carberry, 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.⁸⁵

The Government's response to the T Level consultation similarly stated that 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.”⁸⁶

There has also been commentary regarding specific aspects of the proposals, with some concerns raised. A number of these are briefly outlined below.

Box 8: Government assessment of the equalities impact of the proposals

The 2015 Government published an [assessment of equalities impacts](#) alongside the Skills Plan. This stated, among other things, that:

- Although the proposals would primarily affect young people aged 16-19, the Government expected that they would also help adults to access technical education.
- Individuals with SEND would be expected to be over-represented on technical routes and the flexibility built into the transition year would “allow students with SEND to be offered the additional support they need.”
- The transition year would likely disproportionately affect young mothers and learners who are pregnant. Moving towards two-year programmes could make it more difficult for people to re-enter education and it was expected that transition years will make this easier.⁸⁷

3.1 A choice of routes at 16

While there has been support expressed for the division between an academic option and a technical option, concerns have been raised about

⁸⁴ [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), Gov.uk, 13 July 2016.

⁸⁵ As above.

⁸⁶ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p5.

⁸⁷ Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: assessment of equalities impacts](#), July 2016, pp5-8.

young people potentially being faced with a binary choice at 16 between academic or technical pathways.⁸⁸ Gordon Marsden, Shadow FE and Skills Minister contended following publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan, for example, that “people will be worried it’s going to be another form of the 11-plus” and stated that more details were needed to reassure people that the technical route will be as prestigious as the academic route.⁸⁹

In his Edge Foundation report, [14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate](#), Lord Baker, welcomed the 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:

However, while 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 18/19.⁹⁰

3.2 Coverage of the 15 routes

Concerns were also raised following publication of the Skills Plan regarding the coverage of the proposed 15 technical routes. For example, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the AoC, contended that the creative arts and sports were “under-represented” in the 15 routes and Rob May, Director at YMCA Awards, argued that the “proposed technical routes cover only half of occupations, meaning they’re at risk of ostracizing an enormous part of the labour market.”⁹¹

3.3 Awarding bodies

As mentioned, it is proposed the technical qualification that will sit within T Levels will be offered and awarded by a single awarding body under an exclusive licence.⁹²

There has been some support for this simplification of technical qualifications. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), for example, welcomed the “move to streamline the immensely messy landscape of

⁸⁸ For example, [Post-16 Skills Plan published by Government](#), Association of Colleges, 8 July 2016.; [Tread carefully in taking forward Sainsbury](#), Association of Employment and Learning Providers, 20 July 2016; [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁸⁹ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), TES, 8 July 2016.

⁹⁰ Kenneth Baker, [14-19 Education A new Baccalaureate](#), September 2016, p9.

⁹¹ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), TES, 8 July 2016; and [Government’s Post-16 skills plan overlooks a number of key issues](#), FE News, 8 August 2016.

⁹² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24. See [PQ 49316](#), 3 November 2016, for more on the Government’s rationale for the change.

technical education.”⁹³ The Managing Director of City and Guilds was more equivocal, however, and questioned whether it was right to take away choice altogether:

At first glance, we would support the idea of streamlining qualifications so that there is one high quality route per occupation. While vocational options remain so fragmented and confusing they will never achieve parity of esteem among young people, or even with their parents, compared with the apparently simple and more recognisable academic routes. However, is it right to take choice away altogether in terms of awarding organisations who can deliver the pathways? We don't with academic routes. Is there a risk that we fixate too much on rationalisation rather than quality as the driver for change, resulting in some unintended consequences and wrong behaviours?⁹⁴

The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) rejected that a market-based approach had led to large numbers of competing qualifications and raised concerns that “single licences will create monopolies with all of the associated disincentives and perverse results.”⁹⁵

In July 2018, the FAB formally wrote to the DfE proposing to launch a judicial review to the T Level reform programme. The FAB raised a number of concerns, including the single-provider model for awarding organisations.⁹⁶ However, in August 2018 the FAB announced that it had decided not to pursue a judicial review.⁹⁷

3.4 Implementation timetable

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

Initial rollout timetable

The initial rollout timetable for T Levels, as set out in the Skills Plan, was for a small number of ‘pathfinder’ routes to be available for first delivery from September 2019, with additional routes becoming available in phases between 2020 and 2022. Some commentators questioned this proposed timescale; the UK Managing Director of City and Guilds, for example, highlighted “the totally unrealistic timing set out in the Skills Plan” as probably their biggest concern with the proposals.⁹⁸

⁹³ [Small firms support streamlining of technical education](#), Federation of Small Businesses, 8 July 2016.

⁹⁴ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁹⁵ [Post-16 skills plan and the Report of the independent panel on technical education \(Sainsbury Review\) released](#), Federation of Awarding Bodies, 8 July 2016.

⁹⁶ [The Federation of Awarding Bodies launches a judicial review of the Government's T Level Implementation Plans](#), Federation of Awarding Bodies, 18 July 2018.

⁹⁷ [Exclusive: T-level legal challenge dropped after DfE offer to 're-set the relationship' with awarding bodies](#), FE Week, 2 August 2018.

⁹⁸ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

First T Levels pushed back to 2020

In July 2017, the then Skills Minister announced that the first routes were now expected to be introduced at pilot providers in September 2020, but with all routes still available by 2022. This timetable was set out in more detail in the T Level consultation. This added that 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 2024.⁹⁹

Full rollout pushed back to 2023

On 17 May 2018, the Permanent Secretary at the DfE, Jonathan Slater, [wrote](#) to the Secretary of State to raise concerns about the planned timetable for the roll-out of T Levels, and to advise deferring the start date to 2021. Mr Slater stated that 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.

In response, the then Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, [wrote](#) that it was important to “keep up momentum” behind the reforms and none of the advice had indicated that teaching from 2020 cannot be achieved. The Minister added that “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 our collective weight behind delivering these T Levels to begin in 2020.”

The Government’s response to the T Level consultation did, however, note the concerns of some respondents, including the CBI, about the pace of roll-out, and stated that the Government had “therefore decided to extend the full roll-out of T Levels beyond 2022. It added that 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. The final sequencing of the roll-out of T Levels would, the response said, be outlined once the outline content is finalised by T Level panels.¹⁰⁰

The T Level Action Plan 2019 sets out the T Levels that will be introduced in 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23. It lists the T Levels and from 2022 onwards (see the table on page 9 for details). It states that the DfE’s aim “is for all remaining T Levels to be introduced from September 2023”, but notes that this is to be confirmed.¹⁰¹

Further concerns

Despite the changes outlined above, concerns have continued to be raised by some that the rollout timetable may be too tight.

For example, in January 2019, Sir Gerry Berragan, Chief Executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, was reported as saying that everything was “on schedule” for the delivery of T Levels but

⁹⁹ [Implementing changes to Technical Education](#), letter from the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills to FE stakeholders, 20 July 2017; Department for Education, [Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan](#), October 2017, pp10-13.

¹⁰⁰ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p20.

¹⁰¹ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, pp13-4.

that the timetable was still “worryingly tight.”¹⁰² The tight timescale was also reported as one of the concerns raised by providers of the first wave of T Levels in a report published by the National Foundation for Educational Research in June 2019 (see section 3.9 below).¹⁰³

Box 9: Previous reform of vocational education – 14-19 Diplomas

14-19 Diplomas were introduced in 2008 following recommendations in the 2004 report: [14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform](#) (The Tomlinson Report). Diplomas were designed partly by employers and they aimed to increase post-16 participation in education by providing learners with a qualification which combined work-orientated skills and academic study.

14 diploma lines were introduced covering all major industries and sectors and these lines were available at three different levels - foundation, higher and advanced. The introduction of Diplomas was implemented in phases, the first five Diplomas in 2008 were: Engineering; IT; Society, Health and Development; Construction and the Built Environment; and Creative and Media. Further Diplomas were rolled out in 2009 and 2010.

Diplomas were a composite qualification, the three main components of the qualification were principal learning, generic learning and additional learning. Principal learning was a single qualification, based on the chosen specialism, generic learning covered functional skills in English, Mathematics, ICT and work experience and additional learning enabled students to include other qualifications in their diploma such as GCSEs or A levels. OCR awarded its final 14-19 Diplomas in July 2014.

In its consultation response, the Government outlined why it believes that T Levels are better placed to succeed than 14-19 Diplomas. The reasons offered included:

- Diplomas were not widely taken up in part because they lacked a clear purpose and tried to chart a ‘middle course’ between vocational and academic qualifications. T Levels are different as they are “part of a new, distinct technical offer.”
- Only some of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report were implemented, which led to “Diplomas adding a layer of complexity” to the existing system rather than simplifying it. The Government is implementing all the recommendations of the 2016 Sainsbury Report, “making T Levels part of a new, streamlined technical option.”

Diplomas were broadly relevant to whole sectors and did not reflect the specific skills that employers wanted. T Levels set out to equip young people with the skills needed to enter skilled employment.¹⁰⁴

3.5 Industry placements

Some in the FE sector, including the Association of Colleges, have raised concerns that colleges will struggle to fit in industry placements lasting a minimum of 45 days, and also that making a work placement a mandatory part of T Levels could limit the access to certain subjects for learners in rural areas (where there are no local employers relevant to a subject).¹⁰⁵

Concerns were also raised in response to the T Level consultation that industry placements will be challenging to deliver on a national scale and

¹⁰² [T-levels timescale still ‘worryingly tight’, IfA boss says ahead of technical education takeover](#), FE Week, 28 January 2019.

¹⁰³ [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.

¹⁰⁴ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p11.

¹⁰⁵ [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.

there was concern from students that there will not be enough good employers offering placements in their area.¹⁰⁶

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 that 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.¹⁰⁷

Also in August 2018, the DfE published a research report concerning employer engagement and support for industry placements. The report stated that, overall, employers welcomed the idea of industry placements, and the length of placement was seen as providing enough time for the young person to begin to make a positive contribution to the business. The report stated that many employers indicated that they would be willing to offer industry placements if they received clarification on some key points – for example, the objectives of the placement. A small group of employers stated that 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 (usually small businesses).

The report concluded that, in general, employers welcome the introduction of T Levels but that there is a need to “further bridge the gap between employers’ willingness to engage and their capacity and capability to offer the range and volume of placements that will be required.”¹⁰⁸

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.¹⁰⁹

The T Level Action Plan 2019 stated that industry placements represented “the biggest opportunity to make sure that young people leave education better prepared to be successful and productive in the workplace”, but acknowledged the challenges for education providers and employers in

¹⁰⁶ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p11 & 56.

¹⁰⁷ Chartered Institute of Professional Development, [Reforming Technical Education: Employers’ views of T Levels](#), August 2018, p8.

¹⁰⁸ Department for Education, [Employer engagement and capacity to support T Level industry placements: Research report](#), August 2018, pp5-9.

¹⁰⁹ [T Levels: Make or break for Manufacturers?](#), Make UK, 15 April 2019.

delivering them. It stated that this was why the DfE had “started early to build our evidence base by piloting industry placements through the Industry Placement Pilots and by increasing capacity through the capacity delivery fund”. This had, the action plan stated, allowed the DfE to “learn lessons, identify best practice and refine the policy well in advance of the first teaching of T Levels in 2020.”¹¹⁰ The action plan also outlined the other support available for providers and employers to help them deliver placements, including employer support package and the employer support fund (see section 2.4 for more information).

3.6 Funding

Concerns have been raised about the funding of 16-19 education in general – further information can be found in Library Briefing 7019, [16-19 education funding in England since 2010](#). In its response to such concerns, the Government has often highlighted the additional funding being provided for T Levels (see section 3.5).

The Association of Colleges has, however, highlighted the specialist teaching and training that T Levels will offer and argued that colleges will not be able to offer the specialisms required “because they cannot afford to attract and retain staff.” It contends that even if every place is filled on specialist courses such as engineering, construction and science they will be “operating at a significant loss.” The Association has called for the Government to raise the base rate of funding for 16-19 to £5,000 per student.¹¹¹

3.7 Awareness

Concerns have been raised that there may be a lack of awareness about T Levels, particularly from employers. For example, a survey of parents with children aged 11-18, commissioned by the Chartered Management Institute, found three in five parents had not heard of T Levels.¹¹² Similarly, in April 2019, Make UK, the manufacturers organisation, reported survey results that 65% of companies had not heard of T Levels and 28% had heard of them but only with limited knowledge.¹¹³

The T Level Action Plan 2019 states that “communication, marketing and engagement are a critical part of the implementation plan for T Levels.” Following the launch of the T Level brand in May 2019, the main communications plan was launched in October 2019.¹¹⁴ The campaign includes, the action plan stated, both national and local communications and will “ramp up each year as more T Levels are introduced and student numbers increase.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p32.

¹¹¹ [T Levels won't succeed unless they are implemented correctly](#), Association of Colleges, 20 February 2019.

¹¹² [DfE launching T-level campaign next month as over half of parents haven't heard of them](#), FE Week, 3 September 2019.

¹¹³ [T Levels: Make or break for Manufacturers?](#), Make UK, 15 April 2019.

¹¹⁴ [T Level campaign launches to help accelerate young people to 'Next Level'](#), Department for Education, 7 October 2019.

¹¹⁵ Department for Education, [T Level Action Plan 2019](#), October 2019, p37;

3.8 Reports

Policy Exchange report (2019)

In February 2019 Policy Exchange published a report looking at T Levels and the wider vocational system.

The report, *A Qualified Success*, concluded that “T Levels have the potential to make a valuable 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.” 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 they 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.
- There appears to be little recognition of the overlap between T Levels and existing technical qualifications, and the lines separating qualification pathways are too blurred (e.g. some subjects are found in A Levels, applied general and technical pathways).

The report made 10 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.
- The single awarding body model for T Levels should be replaced with a single assessment model to reduce the risk facing T Level reforms.

- Employers who pay the apprenticeship levy should be allowed to use £1,500 of their levy contributions to fund each T Level work placement.¹¹⁶

3.9 NFER report (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.

Based on the interviews, the report stated that providers welcomed the support they had received from the Government and felt confident that 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.

The report additionally found that, while fairly confident they will recruit their target student numbers for 2020, providers reported a number of potential challenges around student take-up over the longer term.¹¹⁷ An article in FE Week also noted that the total number of T Level students in 2020 would be only half the number predicted by the Government if all early providers matched the anticipated recruitment of those interviewed.¹¹⁸

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 stated that most of the earlier findings still resonated and providers “were generally optimistic about the future of T Levels.” It also, however, highlighted a number of challenges that remained, including:

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

¹¹⁶ Policy Exchange, [A Qualified Success: An investigation into T-Levels and the wider vocational system](#), February 2019.

¹¹⁷ 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.

¹¹⁸ [Amidst low take-up predictions DfE to give £30k per T-level and ‘tolerance’ for under-delivery](#), FE Week, 18 June 2019.

- Providers felt positive about being able to secure their target number of industry placements in 2020-21 and welcomed the increased flexibility around placements announced by the DfE. However, a number of practical challenges remained and securing industry placements at scale once T Levels are fully rolled-out remained a concern.
- 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”.
- The UCAS tariff points that have been allocated to T Levels were welcomed, but 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.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ National Foundation for Educational Research, [Follow-Up Report - T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery](#), December 2019, pp7-12; [T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery? Follow-Up Report](#), National Foundation for Educational Research, 10 December 2019.

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