

INTRODUCING T LEVELS : Background to Technical Education Reform in England

Background

- The [Post 16 Skills Plan](#), published in July 2016, formed the government's response to the recommendations made by the Independent Panel on Technical Education. This panel, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, advised Ministers on how to improve technical education in England.
- The Post 16 Skills Plan confirmed the government's acceptance of all of the recommendations of the Sainsbury panel. It outlines a radical reform of post-16 education, which will transform the technical education landscape.
- The aim is to streamline the current system, by addressing the problem of the bewildering choice of qualifications for young people and ensuring that there is a clear line of sight between the qualification and their intended job role.
- At age 16, young people will be able to choose either an academic option for those targeting undergraduate study, or a technical option for those seeking to enter skilled employment or higher level technical study.
- A common framework of 15 technical education routes that encompass all employment-based (apprenticeships) and college-based (T Levels) training has been established. T Level courses, alongside apprenticeships, will form the basis of our new technical education offer.
- The Institute for Apprenticeship's [Occupational Maps](#) articulate this common framework by documenting all the skilled occupations that can be achieved through an apprenticeship or T Level qualification. Occupations are grouped together to show linkages between them and possible routes for progression.

T Levels

- [T Levels](#) are new, two-year, level 3, technical study courses that will be available full time in colleges, and other education providers.
- T Level courses will be classroom based with a substantial industry placement element. The primary purpose of a T Level is to help students progress into skilled employment.
- Although the primary purpose of T Levels is to prepare students for entry into skilled employment, they will also facilitate progression to higher levels of technical education. In recognition of the size and complexity of the courses, UCAS will allocate tariff points in line with 3 A levels to T Levels. We are discussing with UCAS exactly how these will be awarded.
- A key element of T Levels is a high-quality, structured industry placement of around 45 days. There is an extensive programme of support in place for this,

including a capacity and delivery fund for providers and the investment of £5m into the National Apprenticeship Service to raise awareness and promote industry placements through their employer networks.

- An industry placement pilot programme, which ran in 2017-18, tested different models of placements and the resulting good practice is published on the [Association of Colleges website](#). The evaluation of the pilots was published in December and can be found [here](#).
- The outline content of the new courses is being devised by [T Level panels](#), consisting of employers and other professionals representing occupations within the route, with input from education experts.
- T Level courses comprise a technical qualification, a placement in industry together with maths, English and digital requirements, as well as other occupation-specific requirements / qualifications, and employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.
- T Level courses are substantial. They are likely to be equivalent in size to 3 A levels and will have more teaching time built in, giving all students a consistently high quality education programme.
- The first teaching of three T Levels by a [small number of providers](#) will start in September 2020, with the remaining 22 launched in a phased approach from 2021 onwards. This approach allows government to work with [providers](#), employers, awarding organisations and other partners to design the new system.

The Technical Qualification (TQ)

- The TQ aspect of T Levels will comprise two separate components:
 - A core component that assesses underpinning knowledge, understanding and core skills relevant to the occupations covered by the T Level;
 - One or more occupational specialist components focussed on assessing occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to each occupation covered by the T Level.
- Providers will need to design their curriculum in a way that supports students to make a choice between different occupational specialisms. We do not expect students to have decided at the outset of their T Level course which occupational specialism they wish to pursue, and providers will play an important role in facilitating that decision.

Maths and English Requirements

- The minimum T Level exit requirement will be GCSE grade 9-4 or a Functional Skills level 2 pass, to align with the existing policy on maths and English requirements for level 3 apprenticeships.

- For some T Levels where higher levels of achievement are required for the associated occupations, the maths and/or English requirement may be higher.
- The policy relating to the condition of funding that applies to providers delivering other 16 to 19 year study programmes will not apply to T Level students.
- In line with the requirements for apprenticeships, our policy is that the maths and English exit requirement for some T Level students with SEND will be Entry Level 3 in Functional Skills.

Awarding Organisation Procurement

- T Levels will be delivered through exclusive license. This single licensing model will help to provide clarity for students, employers and providers, making a confusing qualification landscape easier to navigate.
- On 3 September 2018 we published the Invitation to Tender for the development of the first three T Levels. The successful bidders will have exclusive rights to deliver each T Level qualification, to make sure it is high-quality, as recommended by Lord Sainsbury in his independent review of technical education.
- We expect to award the contracts for the first three T Level qualifications in early spring next year. For the wave two pathways, our intention is that the ITT will be published in spring 2019 and the contracts awarded in autumn 2019.

T Level Rollout

- The first three T Levels to be delivered in September 2020 are: Education and Childcare (Education), Construction (Design, Surveying and Planning pathway) and Digital (Digital Production, Design and Development).
- We have selected a relatively small number of high performing providers for first delivery in September 2020, to ensure that they get the support they need, and that T Levels are high quality courses from the very start.
- Delivery of T Levels in 2021 will complete delivery of the Digital and Construction routes and add the full suite of T Levels from the Health and Science route.
- The remaining T Levels will be introduced from 2022 onwards and we will set out further details in due course of our plans for delivery in 2022 and 2023. Our aim is for all remaining T Levels to be introduced by September 2023.

Funding

- In the 2017 Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced an additional £500 million a year for T Levels once they are fully rolled out, which will support the increase in learning hours.

- On 27 November 2018 we launched a [consultation](#) on how funding will be distributed to providers from the 2020/21 academic year. This includes indicative funding rates and the related funding policy considerations.
- Up to 2020, the Department committed up to £20 million to help providers prepare for the delivery of T Levels – and nearly £60m has already been allocated to help post-16 providers build their capacity to deliver industry placements.
- The Secretary of State recently announced a further £38 million capital fund to support providers of the first T Levels, which will ensure they have the facilities and equipment to make a success of T Levels
- We are working through the details of how the capital funding will be delivered and distributed and will make more details available on this at the beginning of next year.

Wider review of qualifications

- The Department has announced a review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below, excluding A levels and GCSEs. The review aims to simplify the current qualification landscape so that all qualifications continuing to receive public funding meet 3 principles: have a distinct purpose; are good quality; and support progression to good outcomes. The consultation will address how these principles will apply to qualifications from entry level to level 3.
- We will consult in two stages. The first stage of the consultation will be published in early 2019 and will focus on the principles, scope and the broad process the review will follow. The second consultation will follow later in 2019, and will set out the proposed criteria that will be used to determine whether a qualification continues to receive public funding.
- The Department is also undertaking a review of level 4 and 5 education, focusing on how technical qualifications at this level can better address the needs of learners and employers

2020 Providers and 2021 Delivery

- Following an expression of interest process in early 2018, the [selected list of providers](#) who will be delivering the first T Levels from the Construction, Digital, and Education & Childcare routes in 2020 was published.
- This small group of providers were selected because they met a set of quality criteria, and are therefore starting from a good position to prepare to deliver high-quality T Levels.
- The Department is working closely with the 2020 providers to test and shape different elements of the T Level programme – through ongoing communication and a series of engagement events and workshops.

- The criteria to select providers for T Level delivery in 2021 (set out in the [2018 Action Plan](#)) has been developed to focus on larger providers, to increase the number of students taking T Levels in the second year of rollout. This reflects our ambition to ensure high quality delivery which grows coverage across the country in a managed way.
- We will launch the expression of interest process in January 2019 for providers wishing to deliver T Levels in 2021. The EoI will remain open until the end of February, and we expect to announce the successful providers in June 2019.

Support for Providers

- A new £8m bespoke T Level Professional Development offer, led by the Education and Training Foundation, will help staff prepare for and successfully deliver the first T Levels. It will be made available in spring 2019.
- We have allocated nearly £60million to providers through the Capacity and Delivery Fund, to help them establish the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver industry placements

Communications

- The Department has engaged a range of key audiences through a number of different channels and events to increase the awareness of T Levels. We recently launched a [short animated video](#) introducing T Levels, for use on social media.
- We have provided a communications toolkit for the 2020 providers, that they can adapt to suit their local needs to market T Levels in their areas.
- We will work with the CDI and the Careers and Enterprise Company to ensure that careers advisers and teachers have the information about T Levels they need to advise students at the appropriate times.
- As 2020 delivery approaches the scale and pace of this communication will increase. The aims will be:
 - Raising awareness of T Levels, what they are, where they can lead and how they fit in with other 16+ choices
 - Increasing understanding of how T Levels fit with wider technical education reform
 - Building confidence and creating positive perceptions of T Levels and technical education.
- Taking account of the measured introduction of T Levels, this strategy will be implemented in a phased approach, based on estimated student numbers and key decision making times.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the advantages of doing a T Level over current vocational qualifications?

The content of T Levels is designed by employers, so students will know that their qualification will give them the skills needed to get a good job. The courses will be more substantial than existing technical qualifications, with longer teaching time – we expect them to be roughly the size of 3 A levels.

A key aspect of T Levels is the industry placement - a structured period in employment that is expected to last a minimum of 45 days. This will provide learners with the opportunity to develop the specific technical and practical skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for skilled employment in their field of study, ensuring they are 'work ready'. We recognise that industry placements are a step change for both education providers and employers, which is why we are providing extensive support for their implementation well ahead of first teaching in 2020.

Q: How will you ensure parity of esteem with A levels?

T Levels will be level 3 courses, every bit as rigorous as A levels. They will be rated by UCAS in line with 3 A Levels – and the technical qualification component will be externally assessed, in the same way most A Levels are. We expect T Levels to be as sought after as A levels because of the value they will bring to students and employers. This is why we have given employers responsibility for setting the content of T Levels, so that they meet their requirements and will have genuine currency for students seeking employment. The industry placement element of T Levels will also provide students with the opportunity to apply the skills learnt in the classroom to a real-life workplace environment.

Q: What is the career guidance entitlement for young people on a T level and who is providing this?

All FE colleges and sixth form colleges in England are subject to the requirement to secure access to independent careers guidance. We would expect young people on a T Level to receive the advice and guidance they need to progress into employment or further technical training.

Q: Is the first delivery in 2020 a 'pilot'?

The initial rollout of three T Levels in 2020 is not a pilot – as we are not testing out different approaches. Students in 2020 will be taking the final, fully developed qualifications. A further 22 T Levels will be rolled out across England in a measured implementation from 2021 onwards.

Q. Can an A level be taken alongside a T Level and what is the feasibility around this?

T Levels will differ in size depending on their subject. However they will all be substantially larger than current technical qualifications and a 3 A Level programme. In principle, we believe that a student should be able to take an A level alongside their T Level, particularly if it supports progression outcomes for their chosen T Level, including to university. This will however be an exception for the most able students. We will want to work with the 2020 providers to explore the feasibility of this, including the impact on a student's timetable.

Q: What have you learnt from previous reforms, why should T Levels be any different?

Rather than adding new qualifications to an already complex system, the overarching aim of these reforms is to simplify the qualification landscape. We want T Levels to be part of a long-term solution to ensure that employers get the skilled workers they need for future prosperity. We have conducted a review of recent attempts at reforming the technical/vocational education system, in particular the 14-19 Diplomas. We have identified some clear reasons why T Levels are better placed to succeed than the Diplomas. We know that a central reason the Diplomas were not widely taken up was that they lacked a clear purpose, attempting to chart a 'middle course' between vocational and academic qualifications.

T Levels are different – they are part of a new, distinct technical offer, based on a common set of standards with apprenticeships. They will give students the knowledge and skills needed to get a skilled job, either immediately or after higher technical education. In contrast to previous reforms, we are directly involving employers in the development of T Levels, and they are setting out the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for each occupational area.