

Briefing Note for the Careers Development Institute (October 2018)

INTRODUCING T LEVELS : Background to Technical Education Reform in England

This is the first in a series of quarterly briefing notes for the CDI about T Levels. Further notes will build on this, providing updates on progress with T Level implementation and answering any questions that might be relevant to the careers community.

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 programmes, alongside apprenticeships, will form the basis of our new technical education offer.

T Levels

- [T Levels](#) are new, two-year, level 3, technical study programmes that will be available full time in colleges, and other education providers.
- New T Level programmes will be classroom based. The primary purpose of a T Level is to help students progress into skilled employment. T Levels will prepare students for higher level training in their particular subject area. They are not designed to support access to a wide range of HE courses in the same way as A levels.
- The Department is working with UCAS to explore the allocation of UCAS points to T Levels, and with HE providers to facilitate progression from T Levels to HE courses.
- 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. A 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 content of the new programmes are being devised by [T Level panels](#), consisting of employers and other professionals representing occupations within the route, with input from education experts.
- The T Level programme comprises 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 programmes are substantial. They are likely to be equivalent in size to 3 A level programmes 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.

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.
- 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

Wider review of qualifications

- T Levels and reformed Apprenticeships will only be a success if we simplify the overall technical education landscape. That is why the Department has announced a review of qualifications at level 2 and 3.
- The qualifications review will follow the principle that all qualifications must have a clear purpose and be of high quality – offering real progression opportunities. This two-stage consultation process will allow us time to engage widely and work closely with schools, colleges and others who will be affected by the review.

- First we will consult on the principles, scope and broad process of the reviews. The second consultation will set out the proposed criteria that will be used to determine qualifications' suitability for public funding. We will confirm the timescales for the review in due course.
- 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

- Following an expression of interest process, 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 on Gov.uk.
- 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. DfE officials will visit all the 2020 providers, along with their dedicated ESFA local contacts, before the end of this year.

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 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 maths and English requirements?

Students will need to pass English and maths at level 2 in order to achieve a T Level. We will confirm the detail of this requirement in the forthcoming Action Plan, which will be published in the Autumn.

Q: If this is a Level 3 qualification can a student pass onto a L4 apprenticeship from a T Level?

We expect T Levels to provide progression into skilled employment at level 3, as well as into further relevant training at level 4, 5 or 6, including apprenticeships.

Q: What are the advantages of doing a T Level over a standard L3 qualification?

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 programmes 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: 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 personal advice and guidance they need to progress into employment or further technical training.

Q: Beyond the pilot will all T levels be available in all parts of England or will they be limited to certain geographical areas?

Yes. The first three T Levels will be taught in a small number of providers (the list can be found [here](#)), which will allow us to provide them with the support they need to implement the programmes successfully. This first rollout 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 – the Action Plan to be published in the Autumn will give more details on this.