

T Levels: implementation moves forward as government response published

“There is resounding support for T Levels, a genuine desire to make them work and an excitement around the difference they will make”. This is the conclusion made by Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Education, in the government’s much-anticipated [response](#) to its T Level consultation.

We can expect further consultation and details to follow, but the main findings from the public consultation include:

- The DfE must be clear about the purpose and the target audience for T Levels. A [consultation](#) on the outline content for the first three T Level areas has been launched.
- T Levels must be rigorous and add value for employers.
- Industry placements – as they are now named - are important but will be challenging.
- There is support for a transition period offering support and progression to Level 3.
- Support for the infrastructure behind T Levels is required with the DfE committing £20 million over the next two years to upskill the FE workforce. It’s been confirmed that the full roll-out of T Levels will now stretch beyond the original 2022 schedule.
- There is agreement to simplification of the existing technical education system, but only where this does not leave gaps in high quality provision. The DfE has confirmed reviews of other qualifications to remove anything that isn’t “truly necessary” – it will proceed with a review of: other Level 3 qualifications (with the exception of A Levels which have already been reviewed); post-16 Level 2 and below qualifications; and in a new addition, non-GCSE provision for 14-16

year olds.

The consultation outcome also outlined feedback from research with over 700 students. In relation to T Levels, students:

- Want to start a course with broad knowledge about their chosen sector then gradually focus on specialist skills.
- Would like a series of tasters in different sectors before they have to decide on one of them.
- Find the prospect of industry placements the most attractive aspect but worry that there will not be enough good employers offering placements in their local area.
- Would like the option of going on to university. The DfE says that T Levels will attract UCAS points and that they are working with HE providers to facilitate progression from T Levels to relevant HE courses only in similar disciplines. The DfE has confirmed that students will be able to take an A Level alongside their T Level.

What next? Well, the DfE will consult further on T Level funding arrangements in Autumn 2018. Invitations for Awarding Organisations to tender for T Level qualifications will also be launched this Autumn, giving AOs a year to develop the qualifications from spring/ summer 2019. And the 54 [successful providers](#) for the pilot of T Levels from September 2020 have been announced.

430 responses were received to the public consultation which ran from November 2017 to February 2018.

IfA remit for T Levels confirmed as government sets out technical education priorities

The DfE has confirmed the expansion of the Institute for Apprenticeships’ remit in 2018-19 to include technical education.

In the latest [strategic guidance](#), Apprenticeships and Skills Minister, Anne Milton set out a high level steer to the IfA on the government’s priorities for apprenticeships and the delivery of the T Level programme.

The guidance asks the IfA to work, not only in partnership with the DfE and other agencies to agree and clearly define roles and responsibilities, but also with other organisations which do not have a statutory role but represent groups with significant interest, such as professional bodies, providers and assessment

organisations.

Guidance for taking over responsibility for the procurement of T Level qualifications is also confirmed. This will include selecting winning bids for development and delivery, and determining the process for approving technical education qualifications including what should happen in the event that a qualification fails to meet the approval criteria.

The IfA will continue to have responsibility for occupational maps, route panels and the development of outline T Level qualification content. It expects to have agreed a “full implementation timetable” with the DfE by March 2019.

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“Occupational maps will be the driver of the new technical education system”

General support for occupational maps and for the dual pathways of apprenticeships and T Levels were two of the outcomes of the Institute for Apprenticeships’ recent [consultation](#) about its proposed occupational maps.

Following analysis of the 386 consultation responses, relevant revisions have been made to the [occupational maps](#) by the industry experts on the Institute’s [route panels](#).

Other issues raised by the consultation included: some lack of understanding about the purpose of the occupational maps, and in particular what is meant by an occupation; confusion about the difference between

an apprenticeship and a T Level, and specifically the difference between on-the-job training and industry placements; and concern about how the maps will remain current and forward-looking.

Occupational maps document all the skilled occupations that can be achieved through an apprenticeship or T Level qualification. An occupation will only appear once across the occupational maps and will be placed in the map which has the best alignment with its knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The maps are live documents which will be updated on a quarterly basis.

£5million to attract industry experts to teach in FE

A £5million scheme calling on experts from across a range of technical sectors to work in Further Education has been launched by the DfE.

The [Taking Teaching Further Programme](#) will pay for up to 150 professionals from sectors such as engineering and computing to retrain as FE teachers, in a move linked to the roll out of T Levels from 2020.

The programme has been designed with the Association

of Colleges and the Education and Training Foundation, to create links between education and industry.

The fund will cover the course costs of teacher training as well as support and mentoring. It will also fund 40 innovative projects that will help develop local partnerships and collaborations aimed at supporting an ongoing exchange between industry and FE.

Entries for EBacc GCSE subjects increase

Provisional summer 2018 entry figures show a 5% increase in EBacc GCSE subjects whilst entries in non-EBacc subjects decreased by 13% compared to 2017.

This is one of the findings from Ofqual’s [publication of provisional entries](#) for this summer’s GCSEs, AS and A Levels in England.

The largest increases in EBacc subjects were seen in separate sciences – biology, chemistry and physics – likely to be due to the introduction of reformed separate sciences and the combined double science. German and Spanish have also seen increases (3% and 8% respectively).

Entries for all non-EBacc subjects except art and design showed a decline in 2018.

Other findings include:

- GCSE entries in 2018 (5.1m) increased by just under 1% compared to 2017.
- A Level entries dropped slightly by 3% from 2017. Most subjects saw a decrease but the largest percentage decreases were seen in small entry subjects and those available for the last time this year. The most notable increases were seen in computing, the sciences and maths, but increases were also seen in economics, PE, political studies and psychology.
- AS entries continued to fall (almost 60% fewer than 2017) from 659,880 to 269,090 following the decoupling of the AS from the A Level.

Final entry numbers may differ from these provisional reports.

AS/A Level subject choice: impacts of reform

On the whole, decoupling the AS from the A Level has not yet affected students’ AS and A Level subject choices, according to recent research from Ofqual.

However, some schools try to influence subject choice more than prior to reform, discouraging students from studying subjects seen as being harder, or subjects which students have not studied before.

The [research](#), carried out to inform Ofqual’s thinking around the maintenance of standards over time, also found:

- Some students were less motivated to do well in AS than previous cohorts because the results no longer count towards the A Level
- Where schools were entering some students but not whole cohorts for the reformed AS, these tended to be lower ability students who were not carrying the

subject on to A Level

- Following reform, some schools were encouraging lower ability students to study AS/A Level alternatives
- Schools who had decided to start students on 3 subjects in year 12 instead of 4 had increased the

amount of teaching time and/or enrichment.

The report goes on to detail the work Ofqual has carried out with exam boards to develop principles to support the awarding of the reformed AS qualifications.

Bidding open for Maths Centres for Excellence

The DfE has launched the application process to become a maths Centre for Excellence.

Centres for Excellence aim to support the post-16 sector to develop and share pedagogical approaches to improve maths for students with low prior attainment. The programme will provide grant funding to build teaching capacity and spread best practice on what works to improve basic maths for learners over the age of 16.

The DfE expects to fund around 20 post-16 maths centres over an initial three-year period, each receiving up to £300,000 per year.

The Centres for Excellence programme is part of the government's response to the **Smith Review** of post-16 maths education.

Additional funding pilot for GCSE maths re-sits

And continuing the theme of post-16 maths, the DfE has announced a basic **maths pilot** to assess if additional funding can improve GCSE maths re-sit outcomes.

The basic maths premium pilot will be open to post-16 providers based in low attainment areas.

The pilot aims to:

- Assess which funding approach is most effective at improving outcomes for students with prior attainment of a grade 3 or below in GCSE maths
- Identify how the additional funding is used by institutions, and to build up an evidence base on

which activities lead to improvements in teaching and learning

- Support some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country with additional funding during the pilot.

Institutions will have flexibility over how to spend the £500 additional funding per student, but can only use it for programmes and approaches known to be effective, such as more teaching hours, smaller class sizes, and use of technology.

The pilot will run from autumn 2018 for 2 years.

Schools continue to feel the impacts of qualifications reform

54% of schools and colleges have changed the range of subjects or qualifications offered as a result of qualification reform, according to the latest **UCAS qualifications survey**.

The annual survey aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the response to qualification reform across the UK.

Outcomes from the survey in England include:

AS and A Level

- 55% of respondents will not offer the AS at all in the 2017-18 academic year. In the 2016-17 survey, this was 36%.
- 14% are offering the AS in all reformed subjects, and 29% in some. The previous survey indicated that 29% would offer the AS in all subjects, and 30% in some.
- 73% of respondents have changed their AS and A Level provision since 2015-16, and 59% since 16-17.

GCSE

- Where respondents have a GCSE requirement in English and maths to study post-16, the majority ask

for a grade 4.

- 75% of respondents feel confident in identifying the standard that a student is performing at under the 9-1 grading scale.

Vocational qualifications

- 23% of respondents do not feel that HE providers have a good understanding of these qualifications, a slight increase on 2016-17 (22%).
- Schools and colleges offer a range of vocational qualifications awarded from different organisations and it is important for HE providers to reflect this diversity.
- The 360 GLH qualification is the most popular size of vocational qualification on offer, followed by the 720 GLH.

Whilst, in the main, respondents felt informed when making decisions about reformed qualifications, there is still confusion over HE entry requirements and offer making with regards to reformed qualifications. The survey makes a number of recommendations for the HE sector to improve clarity around entry requirements.

Inter-subject comparability: the debate goes on

The debate about adjusting grade standards to make subjects more comparable continues.

Speaking at the summer symposium, Richard Garrett, Ofqual's Director of Policy and Strategic Relationships, shared some of the evidence Ofqual has gathered to judge if there is a compelling case to make an adjustment to grade standards on the basis of inter-subject comparability.

The A Level subjects currently under consideration for changes to grade standards in the future are physics, chemistry and biology, as well as French, German and Spanish, which experienced [adjustments to standards](#) setting in summer 2017.

Further details from the inter-subject comparability study will be made available in the autumn.

Changes to post-school funding urgently required, says House of Lords

There should be a better distribution of public funding across all higher and further education institutions, according to the latest report from the House of Lords Economics Affairs Committee.

[Treating Students Fairly: The Economics of Post-School Education](#) calls for a new deal for post-school education funding which promotes all types of learning regardless of where or how it takes place. It recommends the abolition of the Institute for Apprenticeships, increasing the powers of the Office for Students to act as a single regulator for all Level 4 and above qualifications, including for higher and degree apprenticeships, and the introduction of a single regulator for all other post-school qualifications at

Level 3 and below.

The report says that reforms to university financing have failed to create an effective market in recent years allowing undergraduate degrees to dominate when this might not be in the student or the country's best interest.

The report also claims that reforms have led to a collapse in flexible and part-time learning, recommending that maintenance support should be available for all students studying at Level 4 and above.

The government has yet to respond to the report.

Institutes of Technology applicants reach next stage

The "competition" to become one of the first Institutes of Technology has reached the next stage as the original 35 applicants are [narrowed down to 16](#).

These providers are competing for a share of the £170m on offer to establish new Institutes of Technology which will be employer-led institutions specialising in the delivery of higher level technical skills.

It is expected that the first institutes will open in 2019.

Careers advice is improving says Ofsted

A sample of 120 school inspection reports from the past two years has found that careers guidance within schools is improving, according to [Ofsted](#).

Ofsted says it has seen evidence of more integrated, coherent and effective careers strategies in more schools, with more frequent opportunities for pupils to access workshops, themed events, work experience and contact with employers.

Inspectors believe that the DfE's [statutory guidance](#) published earlier this year, which includes a legal duty for students to have access to providers of technical education and apprenticeships, is contributing to the improvement in careers advice.

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T Levels: latest proposals for the technical qualifications released

The latest [consultation](#) on the proposed approach to regulating the technical qualifications within T Levels has been launched.

Ofqual's detailed, 71-page consultation sets out the latest thinking on the rules and regulations for T Level qualifications.

Given the short, 4 week turn-around time for responses – deliberately set to keep in line with the government's timescales for first teaching of the first 3 T Level programmes from September 2020 – Ofqual is particularly encouraging responses on how assessments should be set and marked, retakes and results/certification requirements.

Following this policy consultation, Ofqual will analyse responses in collaboration with the Institute for Apprenticeships and consult on the wording of the rules to be applied to Technical Qualifications. A further 8 week technical consultation will follow in early September.