

Spotlight on T LEVELS

Welcome to OCR's new, regular update on T Levels. This newsletter will keep you informed as T Levels develop and provide some food for thought, both from OCR and from other interested stakeholders keen to be involved at the start of this exciting time for technical education.

This first edition includes:

- **T Levels: what are they?** We provide a brief overview of the context and structure.
- **Ofqual decisions:** A chance to look at the outcomes of the latest T Levels consultation from Ofqual.
- **The Last Word: *Time to get with the programme*** – Paul Steer, OCR's Head of Policy, sets out some principles for T Level success.



If there is anything you would like us to cover in future editions of *Spotlight on T Levels*, or perhaps your organisation would like to contribute, we'd love to hear from you via policy@ocr.org.uk

T LEVELS: WHAT ARE THEY?

We take a look at the background to T Levels and provide a brief overview of their structure.

WHY T LEVELS?

The [Industrial Strategy](#) set out the government's long-term plan to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK.

A key part of this – the [Skills Plan](#) – was the government's vision for reforming the skills system and technical education in particular. In 2016, an independent panel commissioned by the government and chaired by Lord Sainsbury, proposed an overhaul of technical/vocational education, recommending new qualifications be developed as preparation for skilled employment.

All the recommendations in the [Sainsbury review](#) were accepted by the government, and T Levels were born.

WHO ARE T LEVELS FOR?

After completing their 14-16 options, young people will choose from:

- a technical option (primarily through a T Level, college-based study programme, or a work-based apprenticeship) *or*
- an academic study route (made up of A Levels, and/or Applied General Qualifications such as OCR Cambridge Technicals).

Students who are not ready to access a technical education route at age 16 will be offered a 'transition year' to help them prepare.

WHAT ARE T LEVELS FOR?

T Levels will be high quality, rigorous, Level 3 study programmes. T Levels will be designed primarily to support entry to skilled employment in technical occupations at Level 3 and above.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A T LEVEL PROGRAMME?

- An approved technical qualification with a common core across each route and occupational specialism parts, equal to the size of 3 A Levels in total
- An industry placement of at least 45 days
- Maths, English and digital requirements
- Other occupation-specific requirements
- Any further employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.

WHO WILL DEVELOP T LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS?

The Institute for Apprenticeships will manage the process of developing the content for T Levels based on the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out by [T Level panels](#) – experts in relevant occupations and industries.

The Institute for Apprenticeships will franchise the awarding of qualifications to a single body or organisation for each of the pathways under an exclusive licence that will be awarded for a fixed time-period following open competition.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Interested in coming to our T Levels forum? We'd particularly love to hear from employers who want to share views as T Levels develop, or who simply want to know more about how industry can get engaged. Contact us via policy@ocr.org.uk to find out more.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

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WHAT AREAS WILL BE COVERED BY T LEVELS AND WHEN WILL THEY BE AVAILABLE?

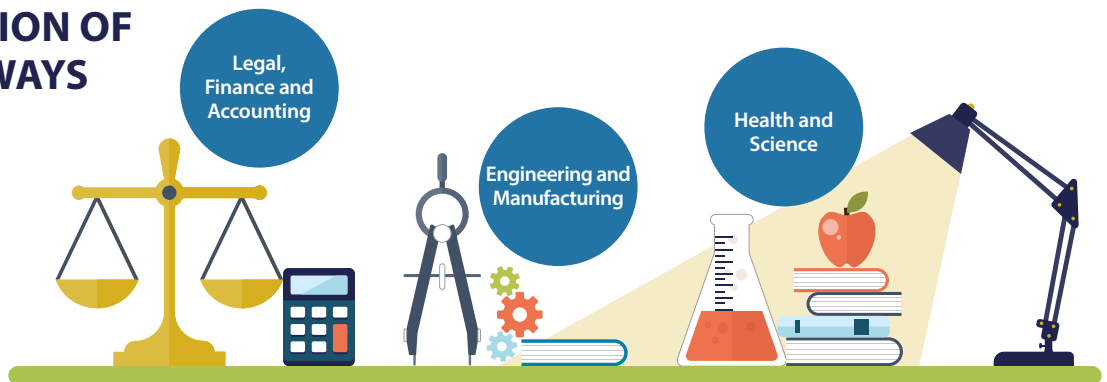
T Levels will be phased in from 2020, initially starting with a limited number of providers.

The first T Level programmes from autumn 2020 will be:

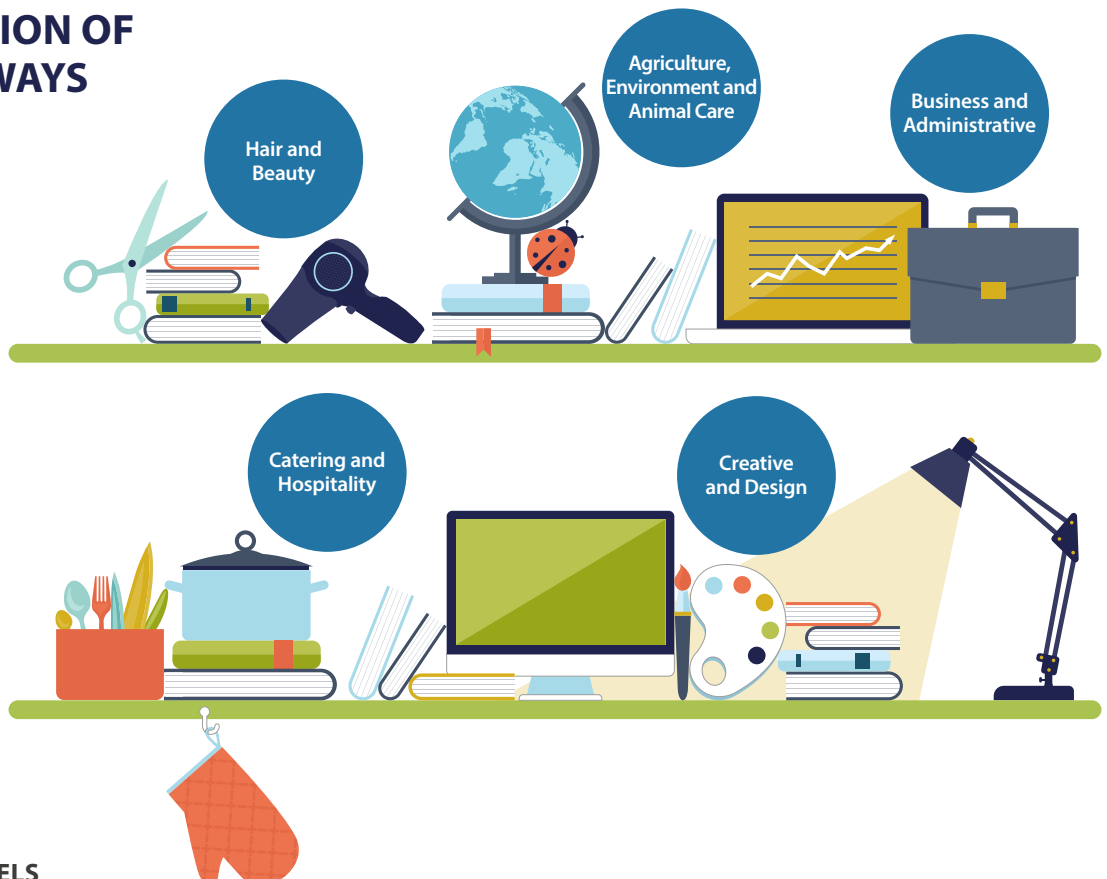
2020 – LIMITED PATHWAYS



2021 – ADDITION OF THESE PATHWAYS



2022 – ADDITION OF THESE PATHWAYS



OFQUAL DECISIONS

Earlier this summer, Ofqual consulted on further proposals for regulating the technical qualifications within T Levels. The consultation covered issues such as assessment, grading and certification. So what have we learnt from the outcomes to this consultation? We take a close look at some of the key decisions that will shape these important qualifications.

ASSESSMENT, AVAILABILITY AND RETAKES

Following feedback, Ofqual has amended its original approach – awarding organisations will be required to provide a minimum of one assessment series for the core and the occupational specialisms (either in a single series or a separate series for each) but now with the option for one additional assessment series, if appropriate.

Each assessment series can be used both for students sitting assessments for the first time and those re-taking assessments. This means that students will not have to wait a whole year to re-take – particularly important for those wishing to re-take after their second year of study.

Ofqual will not specify when in the year these will take place. Some respondents to the consultation felt that restricting the assessments to May/June may impact on the industry placements part of the T Level, and on the availability of enough suitably qualified assessors.

Some of the original proposals in the consultation still stand; the whole of the core will be assessed together and the whole of each occupational specialism will be assessed together. This means that a student wishing to re-take an assessment must re-take all associated assessments for that part of the technical qualification (the whole of core knowledge and understanding, and/or the whole of core skills, and/or the whole of an occupational specialism).

MARKING

The consultation outcomes have confirmed that the core knowledge and understanding elements will be assessed by an exam and marked by the awarding organisation.

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However, in exceptional circumstances, Ofqual's rules will allow for centre marking of core skills assessments and occupational specialism assessments where an assessment cannot be validly marked by an awarding organisation. Awarding organisation marking however, will be the 'starting point'.

'WORKING TOWARDS' GRADE

Due to its perceived limited value, Ofqual will not be moving forward with the 'working towards' grade below pass for the occupational specialisms. The decisions made about additional re-take opportunities have now addressed the original thinking behind the 'working towards' grade.

CERTIFICATION

As originally proposed by Ofqual, awarding organisations will not issue certificates for the technical qualifications. Instead, certification will be for the overall T Level by the government. However, a statement of achievement will be implemented for students who do not successfully pass all elements of the T Level, to ensure students' achievements are recognised.

Ofqual says that it will continue to work closely with the DfE and the Institute for Apprenticeships on this approach due to the strength of feeling amongst respondents that students who complete the technical qualification should receive a separate certificate.

MORE CONSULTATION

No sooner had one set of decisions been made, than another set of questions has been posed. Ofqual is moving forward with the rules, conditions and guidance for the technical qualifications within T Levels via their latest consultation. We'll bring you more details on that in the next issue of Spotlight on T Levels.

AND THEN OF COURSE, THERE'S THE TENDER

In conjunction with the consultation outcomes, the government's Invitation to Tender for the first three T Levels from September 2020 has been issued with awarding organisations now committing to the future development, delivery and award of T Levels. It's all suddenly becoming very real with learners just entering year 10 only two years away from being the candidates for these exciting new technical qualifications.

THE LAST WORD: TIME TO GET WITH THE PROGRAMME



Paul Steer, OCR's Head of Policy, sets out some principles for T Level success.

Somewhere in the depths of the DfE offices, civil servants will be working hard on a massive programme plan, covering all the projects, risks and contingencies associated with the implementation and roll out of T Level programmes. The DfE has responded to concerns by limiting roll out in the first year to a pilot of three of the eleven routes. It is still an epic 'to do' list and there isn't much time in which to get it all done – the very first T Level students are due to start in September 2020. That's real flesh and blood students with dreams and aspirations – they will have chosen a T Level because we will have told them they will get an engaging, stretching, learning experience and excellent job prospects. We can't let them down, so it is imperative that everyone in the education and skills system does what they can to make sure those students get the very best.

Once the T Levels are launched, they have to be sustained. The stakes are highest for the T Level students themselves, but with the uncertainty of Brexit, growing skills shortages and the looming fourth industrial revolution, T Levels have a wider role to play in supporting the UK economy. Nobody wants to see a repeat of past failures in this sphere such as the 14-19 Diplomas.

So how do we get it right? Well, a lot of it is about painstaking programme management and dogged chasing down of risks but there are some higher level principles that need to be applied as well. Here are a few of them:

BE CLEAR OF PURPOSE

T Levels are designed to address a shortage of technical skills in the UK labour market. They will enable T Level students to progress to further technical training and to find rewarding employment opportunities.

They are not intended as another route into higher education. Other qualifications have been designed to prepare students for undergraduate study but T Levels are driven by the disciplines of the workplace. It should be of no concern if some HEIs won't recognise T Levels for access to some degrees, nor should T Levels be seen as just another way of collecting UCAS points.

SET THE BAR HIGH

The bar should be set high for schools and colleges selected to deliver T Levels. They will need to be able to source teachers with a strong technical background; they will need to have access to state of the art equipment and to high quality industry placements. Student entry to T Level programmes should also be carefully controlled. Selection shouldn't be on the basis of prior academic achievement, but prospective students should be clear-eyed about what will be expected of them and the seriousness of the commitment they are making.

The demands of T Level programmes should also be fitted to the technical standards on which they are based. Nobody should see T Levels as a soft option or something for those who aren't up to the rigours of an A Level.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

A lasting quality technical education system can't be built in a day. If, in the first years of T Levels, the numbers need to be kept small, so be it – an uncontrolled roll out could do irreparable damage. We should learn from the ill-fated '3 million starts' target that was applied to apprenticeships.

KEEP THINGS UNDER REVIEW

The first years of T Level delivery should be regarded as a pilot. With the proviso that the core purpose of T Levels is immutable, everything else should be subject to review and changes should be made where there is solid evidence that change is desirable. There should be no ideological or policy-driven sacred cows – whether that be in relation to externally set exams, the size and nature of the industry placement or any of the other design features of the prototype T Level.

DON'T THROW THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER

A Levels and T Levels alone won't serve the needs of all young people. There are many established qualifications for 16-19 year olds which are truly necessary. In our desire to make T Levels a success we should not neglect such qualifications and we certainly shouldn't withdraw funding of any of them unless we are absolutely certain of the implications.

AND FINALLY... GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

Government, its agencies, regulators, employers, providers and many other stakeholders all need to pull together, respecting and understanding their respective roles and expertise. Now is the time to start building something that will serve those first T Level students well and set the platform for a bright future in technical education.

For more information visit ocr.org.uk/t-levels or call our Customer Contact Centre on 02476 851509

Alternatively, you can email us on vocational.qualifications@ocr.org.uk