

Spotlight on T LEVELS

Welcome to OCR's 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 edition includes:

- Latest T Level developments
- Know your AGQs from your T Levels
- T Levels: creating pathways for success
- The Last Word: the case for digital skills within T Levels



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

OFQUAL CONSULTATION UNDERWAY

Ofqual is currently consulting on draft rules and guidance for the technical qualifications within T Levels. These rules and guidance have been drafted following a previous consultation on Ofqual's 'regulatory approach' to T Levels and reflect the decisions made following that consultation. It's a chunky consultation made up of 23 newly-minted regulatory conditions, some chunky requirements on assessment, standards setting and the creation of Assessment Strategies and a further document packed with 23 pages of guidance.

There are few surprises as the content mirrors decisions already made including Ofqual's decision to be less restrictive about the number of sessions and re-sits that will be allowed. The conditions also allow for the use of teacher assessment, but only where all other approaches have been ruled out. The devil, of course, will be in the detail.

Full details can be found [here](#). The consultation closes on 28 October 2018.

NEW T LEVEL PANELS ANNOUNCED

The DfE has revealed the membership of nine new [T Level panels](#). These panels will cover the 2022 and 2023 routes, namely:

- Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
- Creative and Design
- Hair and Beauty
- Business and Administration
- Catering and Hospitality.

T Level panels, made up of employers, professional bodies and providers, are responsible for developing the outline content for T Levels.

This further wave of panels adds to the members already announced for 2020 and 2021 in:

- Digital
- Education and Childcare
- Construction
- Health and Science
- Legal, Financial and Accounting
- Engineering and Manufacturing.

A total of 25 panels is now up and running.



KNOW YOUR AGQS FROM YOUR T LEVELS

We put these post-16 vocational options side by side

Once T Levels have been developed, the options available to young people at age 16 will increase.

The first option is the academic route. This includes A Levels but it also includes Applied General Qualifications (AGQs). AGQs are vocational qualifications, typically studied at key stage 5, designed to enable access and progression to higher education. One of the most prominent examples is OCR's Level 3 Cambridge Technicals. This autumn, the DfE will begin an extended review of all existing vocational qualifications – it will no doubt be looking closely at the relationship between AGQs and T Levels.

The second option, the technical route, will include T Levels or a work-based apprenticeship option. This technical route is designed to prepare people for further employment and training.

We take a look at some of the key differences between AGQs and T Levels, ahead of the DfE's review of vocational qualifications this autumn.

DIFFERENTLY DEFINED SECTORS

Those opting for the technical route will be able to choose from sectors ranging from Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care to Transport and Logistics. These disrupt some of the sector groupings traditionally used in Further Education. For example, Health and Social Care now finds itself split between Social Care and Health and Science.

AGQs are not bound by defined sectors. Typical AGQ subjects include Health and Social Care, Engineering and Sport. Furthermore, a young person opting for a particular AGQ is not necessarily making a choice about their future career. They could go on to study something different.

TWO YEAR PROGRAMMES

Whereas some AGQs are large enough to take up a whole two year programme of study, they also come in smaller sizes which can be taken alongside a clutch of A Level subjects. T Levels, however, will always take up the major part of a 16-19 programme alongside maths and English and a substantial industry placement.

Like AGQs, T Levels are mainly envisaged as Level 3 qualifications to be taken over two years. The plan is that there should be higher level technical qualifications to support progression from T Level routes.

Within the technical routes, there will be a common core for the first year of study. This will allow individuals to develop a broad set of knowledge, skills and behaviours common to the range of occupations within that route. In their second year, individuals will specialise.

AGQs do not require the level of specialisation expected of T Levels. However, the knowledge requirements and the ability to apply these critically are likely to be a greater feature of AGQs than you would expect to see in the 'common core' for T Levels.

CERTIFICATES

Learners taking T Levels will receive a certificate that records their achievements from the T Level programme including the technical qualification, maths and English attainments, and the industry placement.

By contrast, AGQs are certificated as stand-alone qualifications, separate from other qualifications and other activities that may feature in a young person's programme of study.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

T Levels will be developed by panels of employers under the direction of the Institute for Apprenticeships. The Institute will franchise the awarding of qualifications to a single body or organisation for each of the routes.

AGQs are qualifications that already exist with an established track record and are valued by universities. In recent years they have been modified to include a greater proportion of external assessment.

Once T Levels are developed, it is vital that clear advice and guidance is available to young people about their options and the implications of the choices they make.



T LEVELS: CREATING PATHWAYS FOR SUCCESS

We hear from the [Collab Group](#) of large FE colleges who recently published a [report](#) with labour market analytics company [Emsi](#) looking into some of key issues around T Level implementation. Here, they focus on the potential for T Levels to offer transferable skills.

T Levels could be a game-changer for technical education in the UK. According to the Sainsbury Review, published in 2016, the vocational education system contained over 13,000 post-16 technical courses some of which, it claimed, were not valued or understood. We have known for a long time that we need to make technical education more accessible and prestigious and this ambition was at the heart of the Review.

But the Sainsbury Review was never just about a new qualification, it was about creating the kinds of pathways that would lead people to success. T Levels on their own will not be enough to create a high class technical education system. The government is currently reviewing provision at levels 4/5 but we will also need to consider provision at lower levels (1/2) to ensure that learners have appropriate options to lead into T Level study. This is undoubtedly where the transition period will be important but, to date, fairly little detail around how this will work has emerged. Ensuring suitable entry and exit options will be crucial to create the pathways to lead learners into long term and sustainable employment.

One of the risks with T Levels is that learners will be unsure what they are getting whilst the qualifications are so new. T Levels are not occupation specific like apprenticeships, but learners may worry that undertaking a T Level within one of the 11 routes may mean that they are being boxed into a particular sector.

However the mapping that Collab/Emsi undertook in their recent paper, based on the Occupational Information Network database (O*NET), showed that in fact when we compare seemingly dissimilar pathways, learners are gaining a set of highly transferable skills.

To take one example, the Collab/Emsi paper showed that when the importance and relevance of certain types of skills are factored in, Media, Broadcast and Production pathways and Community Exercise, Fitness and Health pathways, show a higher degree of correlation in the underlying skills than might otherwise be expected. Although it might seem that undertaking a T Level and choosing a certain pathway will prepare learners for a specific set of occupations, they will also be acquiring skills that support a range of progression options. What we need to ensure is that there are mechanisms to facilitate transferability across pathways. Not only do different pathways have employability skills that are transferrable to numerous occupations, but comparison

of skills can also be used to highlight where there are employability gaps, and therefore which areas a person would need to upskill, in order to pursue a different career.

At heart, T Levels needs to be about creating pathways into employability. Learners and their parents need to know that undertaking a T Level will prepare them for the changing world of work and give them the skills they need to succeed. T Levels present the latest and best chance we have of shaping a system of technical education that provides learners with opportunity, and business with the talent it needs. @collabgrp



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Interested in coming to our OCR 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.

THE LAST WORD: EQUIPPING THE FUTURE DIGITAL WORKFORCE



As the digital revolution gathers pace, our guest commentator, Andrew Griggs of Prodigy Learning, sets out the case for the inclusion of digital skills within T Levels.

**“76% of CEOs are concerned about the lack of digital skills within their own workforce”.
(The talent challenge: Rebalancing skills for the digital age: PwC’s CEO survey 2018)**

This sobering statistic reinforces the increasing importance of digital skills within the UK economy as the pace of the digital revolution relentlessly accelerates. Moreover, it reaffirms the importance of ensuring that our future workforce is equipped with these skills to increase their personal productivity and support their employability and career aspirations.

Across all sectors of the economy, gaining a strong foundation of digital skills is now recognised as essential. The drive towards adopting technology solutions entails that all employees must constantly improve their digital literacy, and the innovative application of technology is increasingly a ‘game-changer’ in any sector. All young people should have the opportunity to develop their digital skills, therefore the inclusion of a digital skills element alongside numeracy and literacy should form a mandatory core within all T Level qualifications, and would be welcomed by learners and business alike.

For many years the IT industry has reported a shortage of technically-skilled talent and employers have been keen to develop ‘home-grown’ talent through employer-led apprenticeship programmes. Developing young people

who have strong technical knowledge complemented by the ability to apply that knowledge in the workplace is an attractive option for employers.

The inclusion of globally-recognised certifications from leading industry vendors, including Microsoft, Adobe and Autodesk, within current vocational qualifications and apprenticeships offers employers confidence that learners have developed valuable knowledge and practical skills, and as such are highly employable. Employers value the qualities embodied within these existing vocational qualifications, and therefore T Level developments should ensure that good practice is not lost, rather it is embraced and enhanced.

These qualifications give learners an advantage as they start out in their chosen career. In addition, vendor certifications offer micro-credentials (or digital badges) enabling young people to share their newly acquired skills with employers via social media channels and job search sites.

As an early-adopter, the IT industry has an exciting chance to shape the Digital T Level technical qualification to develop the swathe of technically competent aspiring young IT professionals the IT industry requires. By drawing upon the expertise and experience of vocationally-oriented Awarding Organisations aligned to the valuable industry knowledge and skills available through vendor certifications, the resulting qualifications can be designed to fulfil employer ambitions. @griggsa

Prodigy Learning is an award-winning EdTech business, providing digital skills certifications and learning solutions for Adobe, Autodesk, Microsoft and other technologies.

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T LEVELS INFO

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