Welcome to OCR’s regular newsletter on T Levels keeping you updated and informed as T Levels develop. We will bring you all the latest news and debates from interested stakeholders keen to be involved at the start of this exciting time for technical education.

This edition includes:

- **T Level news:** We take a look at the latest developments
- **Next steps for T Level professional development**
- **The DfE review of post-16 qualifications:** The importance of choice for learners
- **The Last Word:** What will the T Level Transition Programme look like?

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.
T LEVELS NEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS

T LEVEL BRANDING CONFIRMED
The Department for Education has unveiled the new T Level branding ahead of the 2020 introduction of the first three T Levels.

The ‘NexT Level’ brand logo, was designed in consultation with employer panel members, FE providers, students and parents, to promote T Levels to young people ahead of making decisions about routes into post-16 education.

Providers and stakeholders have now received a brand toolkit, including brand guidelines and leaflets to help recruit the first wave of T Level students and encourage employers to offer industry placements.

T LEVEL PROVIDERS NOW TOTAL OVER 100
The total number of providers preparing to deliver T Levels has reached over 100 as the second wave of providers who will deliver T Levels from 2021 has now been announced.

These providers from the first two phases can offer T Level pathways in Construction, Education and Childcare, Digital and Health and Science.

ADDITIONAL ONE-OFF PAYMENTS FOR EARLY T LEVEL PROVIDERS
In recognition of the additional costs that are unique to early T Level providers, the DfE will introduce additional one-off payments to providers for each new T Level introduced in 2020, and also for providers introducing the Transition Framework in 2020.

This is one of the outcomes from the DfE’s provider funding consultation which closed earlier this year. The additional payments recognise the costs associated with early engagement in T Levels and the development of the Transition Framework. The DfE is considering further one-off payments for providers covering each new T Level introduced in 2021 and those introducing the Transition Framework in 2021.

In general funding terms, the consultation outcome confirmed that the government will fund different T Levels at different rates depending on their size. 18 year old T Level students will be funded at the same rate as 16 and 17 year olds.

Local offer
Following concerns raised during the consultation that students should not be prevented from taking a T Level just because there is not a skills need locally for that particular subject, the DfE has clarified that providers can also take into account factors such as national skills needs, breadth of provision and social mobility when planning what T Levels to offer.

Industry placements
The DfE will continue to consider the funding rate for industry placements following concerns expressed during the consultation phase about this mandatory aspect of T Levels. Additional funding will be made available to students with special educational needs and disabilities.

Maths and English
The DfE is confident that its proposals will provide sufficient funding at the right time for students who need to continue studying maths and English despite some concerns that the funding should be spread over two years for those that need it, rather than as a one-off payment in the first year.
PROVIDERS BROADLY SUPPORTIVE OF T LEVELS

Recent research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) provides a snapshot of how T Level providers are preparing to deliver the first three T Levels from 2020. Providers are broadly supportive of the move to introduce T Levels. They see this as an extension to their existing provision and an opportunity to be at the forefront of changes in technical education. The providers surveyed did not see T Levels as a replacement for Applied General Qualifications.

Other key findings from the research include:

- Providers were being kept well informed about overall T Level design noting the tight timescale to fully develop their curriculum plans, which could impact on quality. Several providers raised concerns about delivering a programme the size of a T Level with its range of requirements.
- Providers were generally confident in their staff expertise and capacity for delivery in 2020 but could not be sure without the detailed qualification specifications. Where staff did not have all of the specialist sector knowledge, most providers planned to develop existing staff rather than recruit new staff for 2020, expecting to have to recruit in the longer term to be able to scale up for T Levels. This was seen as a major challenge in some sectors which could lead to ‘patchy’ delivery in the future. Funding for professional development was a concern for providers.
- While providers were confident about recruiting their target student numbers for 2020, they reported challenges around future student recruitment. All 25 of the providers surveyed reported they were only planning to recruit between 12 and 20 students for each T Level in the first year. More clarity on potential progression routes for T Level students would be welcomed.
- Providers highlighted the need for continuing support and funding for new providers delivering T Levels in the future, particularly those with less experience and capacity than wave one providers.
- Most providers felt reasonably confident in securing the required industry placements for 2020 but reported challenges in certain sectors and over the longer-term with increased learner numbers. Securing Digital placements with the small size of many of these businesses was a particular challenge.

NFER plan to review progress in the autumn.

AOC TO DELIVER T LEVEL TRANSITION FRAMEWORK

The Association of Colleges has been appointed to run the T Level transition framework support programme. The programme will support T Level providers involved in the phased implementation of the T Level transition framework, running up to first delivery in 2020 and 2021. The AoC will:

- Support advisory panels to contribute to thinking on the content of the transition framework
- Provide support for participating providers to develop, package and deliver their local transition programme
- Encourage and facilitate these providers to explore different approaches to implementing certain elements of the transition programme.

Schools/colleges must be a T Level provider in 2020 or 2021 in order to offer the transition programme.

You can read more about the T Level transition framework in The Last Word article at the end of this edition of Spotlight on T Levels.
UPDATE TO T LEVEL INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS RULES

T Level industry placements can now be offered with up to two employers, rather than just one, in further guidance that has emerged as part of new government support for employers.

Industry placements can be taken as a block, series of blocks, day release or a mix of these, depending on what works best for the employer, the training provider and the student. If an employer cannot offer the full 315 hours minimum (now counted in hours not the previous 45 days), part of the placement can be shared with another employer.

Students with special education needs and disabilities can now use on-site facilities such as a college-run restaurant or hair salon, for a maximum of 105 hours of the placement, while students studying at young offender institutions can complete their full placements in these on-site environments. A student’s part-time job hours can now be counted towards the required placement hours, so long as the job is occupationally relevant to their specialism, takes place off the provider’s campus and works towards learning objectives.

Other DfE guidance for employers also published includes:
- The approved framework of industry placement models
- The funding and support available from September 2019
- Further evaluation of the industry placements pilot, with the addition of route reports providing insights into the experiences of delivering placements within specific industries.
- A pilot scheme to understand whether financial support, such as for equipment and protective clothing, would increase employer engagement to offer placements.

MANUFACTURERS SHOW LACK OF T LEVEL AWARENESS

Almost two thirds of manufacturing companies (65%) haven’t heard of T levels, according to Make UK’s latest report.

T Levels - make or break for manufacturers? sets out the organisation’s concerns about the implementation of T Levels for manufacturers asking for the government to do more to raise awareness amongst employers.

The manufacturing industry supports the principles behind T Levels believing they can form part of the solution to help fill the skills gap the industry faces, but has the following recommendations for encouraging T Level success:

Industry placements:
- Simulated work environments should be permitted
- More financial support is needed for employers
- Employers require flexibility about when they can host a placement
- More guidance and support is required for employers
- More than one employer should be allowed.

Parity of esteem:
- Post-16 pathways should be clearly mapped
- Higher Education Institutions must accept T Level students
- Additional careers support is required to bridge the gap between manufacturers and education.

Structure:
- T Levels should focus on the breadth of knowledge rather than the depth
- Employers should be consulted on grading structures
- T Levels should include work-readiness and digital skills modules.
NEXT STEPS FOR T LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In this month’s Spotlight on T Levels, we take a look at the latest additions to professional development activities for T Level teachers, trainers and leaders who will be delivering T Levels in 2020 and beyond. We start with the Education and Training Foundation’s Regional Knowledge Hubs.

Regional Knowledge Hubs have been created to support T Level professional development for providers.

As part of the ETF’s T Level Professional Development offer, the Hubs are helping to ensure that post-16 providers in the first two tranches are T Level ready, as well as supporting those wanting to deliver T Levels later.

The professional development offer aims to ensure that teachers and trainers have the teaching skills, subject knowledge and confidence needed to deliver high-quality T Level programmes from the outset.

The Knowledge Hubs develop teacher development networks and collaborative activities focused on T Level routes, pathways and subject-specific themes. Employers and professional bodies are also engaged to ensure that learning and practice reflects industry needs. The three Hubs are being delivered by the Skills and Education Group, Association of Colleges and Creative Education.

Research projects known as Teacher Regional Improvement Projects (TRIPs) are also supporting teachers to prepare their teaching practice for T Levels. Grants of £45,000 are being awarded to 50 collaborative TRIPs across England.

The Knowledge Hubs form part of the ETF’s high-quality professional development offer to support T Level teachers, trainers and leaders. The suite includes:

**Ongoing professional development needs analysis:** Building a clear understanding of professional development needs - an ongoing process that will inform the development of the offer and learn from the excellent practice that already exists. **Self-assessment tools** are also available.

**Understanding T Levels:** Ensuring that all staff understand T Levels and what the new qualifications mean for their roles.

**Teacher development programme:** Focusing on pedagogy (core teaching skills and methods); practice (subject knowledge and subject-specific teaching); professional knowledge (industrial and employability understanding for teachers); and developing teachers’ capacity to embed English, maths and digital skills in technical teaching environments.

**Organisational readiness:** Focusing on leading and managing educational change, targeted at middle managers, governors and governance professionals with a particular focus on teaching leadership and curriculum planning/timetabling.

You can contact TLPD@etfoundation.co.uk for further information about the T Level Professional Development offer, or sign up for the regular ETF T Levels bulletin.
The Department for Education is currently consulting on plans for a wide-ranging review of qualifications for 16-19 year olds. The plan is that there will be far fewer qualifications at Level 3 and below approved for funding post-16 than at present.

The review covers qualifications at Level 3 and below that are approved for funding in England for students aged 16 and over. The review includes Applied General Qualifications (such as OCR’s Level 3 Cambridge Technicals and many BTECs). T Levels, GCSEs, A/AS Levels and Functional Skills are excluded from the review.

As T Levels gradually become available to learners, the post-16 options available to young people will increase. Therefore, as the DfE review continues and beyond, it will be vital that clear advice and guidance is made available to young people so they can make informed choices.

One of the decisions that learners may be faced with is whether to take a T Level or an Applied General Qualification (AGQ). What are the key differences between these qualifications? Why the distinction?

Technical route or academic route
T Levels are included in the technical route, which also includes apprenticeships. This route is designed to prepare people for employment and higher level training.

AGQs are largely classified as part of the academic route, typically studied at key stage 5, designed to enable access and progression to higher education. They differ from A Levels because they include both examinations and practical, applied assessments that nurture a broad range of skills and are based on real life work related topics.

Differently defined sectors
Those opting for the technical route can choose from sectors ranging from Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care to Creative and Design and are required to select a specialism which is aligned to a specific career pathway.

AGQs are not bound by sectors in the same way and are often broader. 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.

Two year programmes
T Levels are full-time two-year programmes which include substantial new Technical Qualifications alongside maths and English and a significant industry placement. Some AGQs are large enough to take up a whole two year programme of study, but they also come in smaller sizes which can be taken in a blended approach alongside A Levels.

Development and implementation
T Levels will be developed by panels of employers under the direction of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. The Institute will franchise the awarding of qualifications to a single body for each of the pathways.

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

Support for choice
Responses to the first stage of the DfE review show clear support for the continuation of post-16 qualifications in addition to T Levels and A Levels. Ofqual’s response warned against limiting options for the diverse range of learners taking post-16 qualifications. And in its response, UCAS highlighted the important and distinct role that AGQs play in supporting students from all backgrounds to progress to Higher Education, making a large contribution to widening participation.

At OCR, we welcome the opportunity to engage with the review to highlight that young people should continue to have access to a wide range of high quality qualifications. Even where qualifications are identified as overlapping with T Levels they cannot be de-funded until the equivalent T Level is widely available. De-funding will need to be implemented gradually and with care to avoid gaps in provision. All of us involved in post-16 education, must be careful not to restrict opportunities for young people to progress, whichever route they choose.

T LEVELS INFO
Visit the OCR website for further information on T Levels.
Our guest commentator, Catherine Sezen of the Association of Colleges, considers what the T Level Transition Programme might look like and the importance of flexibility for providers.

At AoC we are delighted to be working with The Challenge alongside DfE and a number of the 2020 T Level providers to flesh out what a successful T Level Transition Programme could look like and support early delivery from September 2020.

The project has the potential to impact on a significant group of young people; just over 20% of the college cohort according to AoC data are on Level 2 study programmes. The T Level Transition Programme may not be the answer for all current Level 2 young people; some will want to go straight into an apprenticeship or work at 17 or 18. However, 48% of current Level 3 students start this level at 17, suggesting that they studied a Level 2 programme in the previous year. In terms of ensuring a pipeline for T Levels and enabling even more young people to access Level 3 study the Transition Programme is crucial.

In 2016 the Sainsbury panel Review of Technical Education recommended that young people who are not ready to access a technical education route at aged 16 should be offered a ‘transition year’ to ensure that as many students as possible can complete a T Level by 19. The majority of Level 2 students have the potential to achieve at Level 3 and many will progress on to further study post college, but they need an extra year to find their feet, develop employability skills including English and maths and the self-confidence that will enable them to be successful.

The T level consultation response published in May 2018 confirmed that DfE would develop an effective ‘transition offer’ by working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, providers and sector bodies during 2018 to learn from existing good practice and consider how best to target the offer. This work has led to the building blocks of a guiding framework which builds on this good practice and the practitioner views gathered through stakeholder visits and interviews.

T Levels are at the centre of plans for technical education reform. They will be high-quality, stretching Level 3 study programmes based on employer-led standards. But not all young people will be ready to start a T Level at age 16. So, what does a programme to deliver ‘readiness’ look like? We are working with an advisory panel made up of 2020 providers to explore current and innovative practice to ensure students are T Level ‘ready’.

The vision for the national guiding framework is that it offers the flexibility for providers to tailor their own study programmes to ensure their students have the best opportunity to develop the academic and technical skills, knowledge and behaviours required to progress to a T Level, and to successfully complete it. The framework will include thorough initial assessment, English and maths, technical skills, work-related learning, personal and social development opportunities and information, advice and guidance.

We are excited to have the opportunity to work with colleges and other providers in the planning and development stage. Currently the focus is on supporting students to progress to the first three T Levels in Education and Childcare; Design, Surveying and Planning; Digital Production, Design and Development. This phase of the project will help inform and shape not only Transition Programmes for 2020 providers, but it will also establish good practice that can be adopted by 2021 and later providers as well as subsequent T Levels.

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