



BRIEFING PAPER

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T Levels: Reforms to technical education

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Further education
Apprenticeships (section 1.2)

Summary

The Government is undertaking major reforms to the technical education system in England. The proposed reforms were first set out in the [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), and the legislative framework for them was provided by the *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*. More recently, in November 2017 the Department for Education published a [consultation](#) on implementation, which it responded to in May 2018.

There have been some refinements made to the plans originally set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan. Under the plans as they currently stand, a technical education option will sit alongside the academic option (e.g. A Levels) at age 16. Under the technical option, occupations with shared training requirements will be grouped together into 15 technical education routes.

New level 3 classroom-based technical study programmes (referred to as T Levels) will be created for each occupation or cluster of occupations within a route (4 of the 15 routes will be delivered primarily through apprenticeships). T Level panels, appointed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and made up of employers, professional bodies and education providers, will be responsible for developing the content for T Levels, which will be based on the same employer-set standards as apprenticeships.

T Level programmes are likely to be equivalent in size to a 3 A Level programme and will generally be studied full time over two years by 16-19 year olds. It is expected, on average, that they will consist of 1,800 hours in total – 50% more than the current average 16-19 study programme. Additional funding for this increase will amount to £500 million a year once T Levels are fully rolled out.

T Levels will consist of five components:

- A technical qualification, which will include core content common to the T Level, including maths, English and digital skills, followed by specialisation on occupationally specific skills.
- A work placement with an external employer lasting between 45 and 60 days.
- Maths, English and digital requirements. Students will have to achieve a minimum of level 2 maths and English in order to achieve a T Level.
- Any other occupation-specific requirements/qualifications (e.g. a license to practise).
- Any further employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.

52 providers will deliver T Levels within the construction, digital, and education & childcare routes from September 2020. Full T Level routes are intended to be rolled out between September 2021 and September 2023.

The Government wants to develop a “transition year” for learners who are not ready to start a technical option at age 16, and intends to gather evidence of good practice. It is additionally looking at how T Levels could be made appropriate for adult learners but has stated that there will not be a ‘one size fits all’ approach that will work for all.

Technical routes will extend up to higher skill levels, with the Institute for Apprenticeships maintaining a register of technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5 which are eligible for Government-backed loans. In October 2017, the Government [announced](#) a review of higher level technical education, which it stated is intended to look at “how technical qualifications at this level can better address the needs of learners and employers”, including that learners can progress from T Levels into the workplace.

1. Background: Current technical education system

1.1 16-19 study programmes

Following Alison Wolf's 2011 report, [Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#), the Coalition Government made a number of reforms to 16-19 education. These included removing a large number of vocational qualifications from the 16-19 performance tables, and replacing the system of funding learning providers per qualification with a system of funding per student.¹

As part of the reforms, since the 2013-14 academic year all 16-19 year old students, whether they are studying academic or vocational qualifications, are expected to be given the opportunity to take a study programme that usually includes:

- substantial academic or applied and technical qualifications;
- non-qualification activity, such as work experience; and
- the study of English and maths where they do not hold a GCSE 9-4 (reformed grading) or A*-C (legacy grading) in these subjects.²

Under the 16-19 funding formula introduced in 2013-14, a single basic funding rate per full-time student, currently £4,000 for 16 and 17 year olds, is intended to fund a study programme of around 600 guided learning hours, regardless of where and what the student studies.³ The formula also provides a number of funding uplifts, including for large programmes and disadvantaged learners, and an area costs adjustment. Further information on the funding of 16-19 education is provided in Library Briefing 7019, [16-19 education funding in England since 2010](#).

Technical qualifications

While any qualification that has been approved for teaching to 16-19 year olds (section 96 approval) may be taught as part of a study programme, the Government has published three lists of approved applied and technical qualifications that will be reported in performance tables alongside academic qualifications (e.g. A-Levels).

An outline of the three categories of qualifications is provided in [guidance on 16-19 study programmes](#) published by the Department for Education:

- i) **Tech level qualifications** – rigorous advanced (level 3) technical qualifications, on a par with A levels, and recognised by employers. They equip young people with the specialist knowledge and skills they need for a job in occupations ranging from engineering to computing, hospitality to agriculture.

¹ HC Deb 2 July 2012, [cc34-5WS](#).

² Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes](#), January 2016, p3.

³ Department for Education and Education Funding Agency, [16-19 Funding formula review](#), July 2012, p12.

The Technical Baccalaureate is a performance table measure that includes a tech level, a level 3 maths qualification and an extended project qualification (designed to extend students' writing, communication, research and self-motivation skills).

- ii) **Applied general qualifications** – rigorous advanced (level 3) qualifications that equip students with transferable knowledge and skills. They are for post-16 students wanting to continue their education through applied learning and fulfil entry requirements for a range of HE courses – either by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside and adding value to other qualifications at the same level.
- iii) **Technical certificates** – level 2 qualifications that provide students with a route into a skilled trade or occupation where employers recognise entry at this level (for example, construction trades, social care and hairdressing). Technical certificates also provide access to tech levels or an apprenticeship.⁴

In order to be included in the performance tables, tech levels and technical certificates have to be recognised by a trade or professional body, or by at least five employers. Alternatively, they may be accepted by a national licensed professional registration scheme.⁵ A university must have pledged support for an applied general qualification for it to be included in the performance tables.⁶

For students who are not yet ready for a level 2 qualification, providers should offer “a tailored study programme that supports them to progress either to further education or employment, or to prepare for adult life.”⁷

1.2 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are full-time paid jobs which incorporate on and off the job training. They take between one and four years to complete and are available in 1,500 occupations across more than 170 industries. A successful apprentice may receive a nationally recognised qualification on the completion of their contract.⁸

Apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 16 living in England, although there are different entry requirements depending on the sector and job. Over 900,000 funded apprentices participated on an apprenticeship in the 2016-2017 academic year, and there are, on average, 23,000 apprenticeship vacancies listed online every month.⁹

⁴ Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2018 to 2019 academic year\)](#), March 2018, pp8-9.

⁵ Department for Education, [2018 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the tech level category](#), August 2016, p3.

⁶ Department for Education, [2018 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the applied general category](#), August 2016, p3.

⁷ Department for Education, [16 to 19 study programmes: guidance \(2018 to 2019 academic year\)](#), March 2018, p9.

⁸ Gov.uk, [Key facts about apprenticeships](#), 21 Feb 2017.

⁹ As above.

There are two different types of apprenticeship schemes, frameworks and standards. Apprenticeship frameworks are being progressively phased out and replaced by the newer apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeship qualification levels

Apprenticeships can be studied at different qualification levels:¹⁰

Name	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	3	2 A level passes
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

Traineeships also provide education, training and work experience to young people to help them get an apprenticeship or other job. Further detail is available in the [Library Briefing Paper, Traineeships](#).

The Institute for Apprenticeships

The [Institute for Apprenticeships](#) was established in May 2016 by the [Enterprise Act 2016](#). The executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education, went live in April 2017. The aim of the institute is to ensure high-quality apprenticeship standards and to advise the government on funding for each standard.

Apprenticeship Policy Developments in 2017

Apprenticeship Levy

On 6 April 2017, the apprenticeship levy came into effect, with all UK employers with a pay bill of over £3 million per year paying the levy. The levy is set at 0.5% of the value of the employer's pay bill above the £3 million threshold, and will be paid into an apprenticeship service account by the employer. Funds in this account have to be spent on apprenticeship training and assessment with a training provider.

Other changes to apprenticeship funding

From May 2017, apprenticeship frameworks and standards will be funded in the same way. Each apprenticeship framework or standard will be associated with a funding band, and the government will only pay a share of the costs below the upper limit of the funding band.

Apprenticeship levy funds will be used to pay for the training and assessment for employers paying the levy (up to the upper limit of the funding band). Employers who do not pay the levy will pay 10% of the cost of training and assessment with the government contributing the remaining 90% (up to the upper limit of the funding band).

Additional payments may be paid to the employer and training provider depending on the characteristics of the apprentice and the type of apprenticeship.

¹⁰ Gov.uk, [Become an apprentice](#).

Register of apprentice training providers

From May 2017, employers paying the apprenticeship levy have been able to choose a provider from a new register – the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. To be eligible to deliver apprenticeship training for apprenticeships, organisations must be listed on the register.

The [Library Briefing Paper, Apprenticeships Policy in England: 2017](#) contains additional information on apprenticeships and the policy changes in 2017.

The [Library Briefing Paper, Apprenticeship statistics for England](#) presents and analyses data on the number of people starting apprenticeships.

2. Initial proposals – the Post-16 Skills Plan

2.1 Report of the independent panel on technical education

In November 2015, the then Minister for Skills, Nick Boles, established an independent panel chaired by Lord Sainsbury to “advise on measures which could improve technical education in England.”¹¹

The [report of the independent panel](#) was published in July 2016. It stated that the UK’s economy was being held back by a “long-term productivity problem” and that years of undertraining had led to “a chronic shortage of people with technician-level skills.” Investment in the development of technical skills was, the report argued, essential to enhancing productivity.¹²

In addition to this economic rationale, the report outlined a social need for change: that individuals should have access to a national system of technical qualifications that is easy to understand, has credibility with employers and remains stable over time. The current system, it argued, failed on all three counts, comprising “a confusing and ever-changing multitude of qualifications”, many of which “hold little value in the eyes of individuals and are not understood or sought by employers.”¹³ The report added that learners, teachers and the public have “long regarded technical education qualifications as inferior to academic qualifications”, and higher level technical qualifications “have too often become divorced from the actual occupations they should be preparing individuals for.”¹⁴

The report made a series of recommendations aimed at “systematically reform[ing] technical education for the long term” and “ensuring individuals can develop the technical knowledge and skills that industry needs through education and training.”¹⁵

2.2 Post-16 Skills Plan

The 2015 Government published a [Post-16 Skills Plan](#) in response to the independent panel’s report, with both reports published on the same day. An [additional document outlining the rationale for the proposed changes](#) and echoing much of the argument set out by the independent panel was also published.

¹¹ [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), July 2016, p8.

¹² As above, p22.

¹³ As above, pp22-3.

¹⁴ As above, p23.

¹⁵ As above, p8.

The Skills Plan “unequivocally accepted all of the independent panel’s recommendations, where...possible within existing budgets” and set out proposed reforms to technical education based on its report.¹⁶

Under the proposals in the Skills Plan, every young person would be presented with two choices of education route at age 16: an academic route and a technical route; learners would also be able to switch between the routes via “appropriate bridging courses.”¹⁷ The Plan argued that the academic option is “already well regarded” and so focused on the technical option, which, it said, “must also be world-class.”¹⁸

The remainder of this section provides an outline of the proposed technical option as set out in the Skills Plan.

The technical option

The Skills Plan stated that the proposed technical option would “prepare individuals for skilled employment which requires technical knowledge and practical skills valued by industry.”¹⁹ It would consist of 15 routes, which would “group occupations together to reflect where there are shared training requirements”:

- Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
- Business and Administrative
- Catering and Hospitality
- Childcare and Education
- Construction
- Creative and Design
- Digital
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Hair and Beauty
- Health and Science
- Legal Finance and Accounting
- Protection Services
- Sales, Marketing and Procurement
- Social Care
- Transport and Logistics

Technical education would continue to be delivered by a combination of college-based education and apprenticeships, with the final four routes in the list above delivered primarily through apprenticeships. Employers

¹⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7.

¹⁷ As above, p20.

¹⁸ As above, p7.

¹⁹ As above.

would “sit at the heart of the system” and would, supported by education experts, design the standards across all technical education – college-based and apprenticeships.²⁰

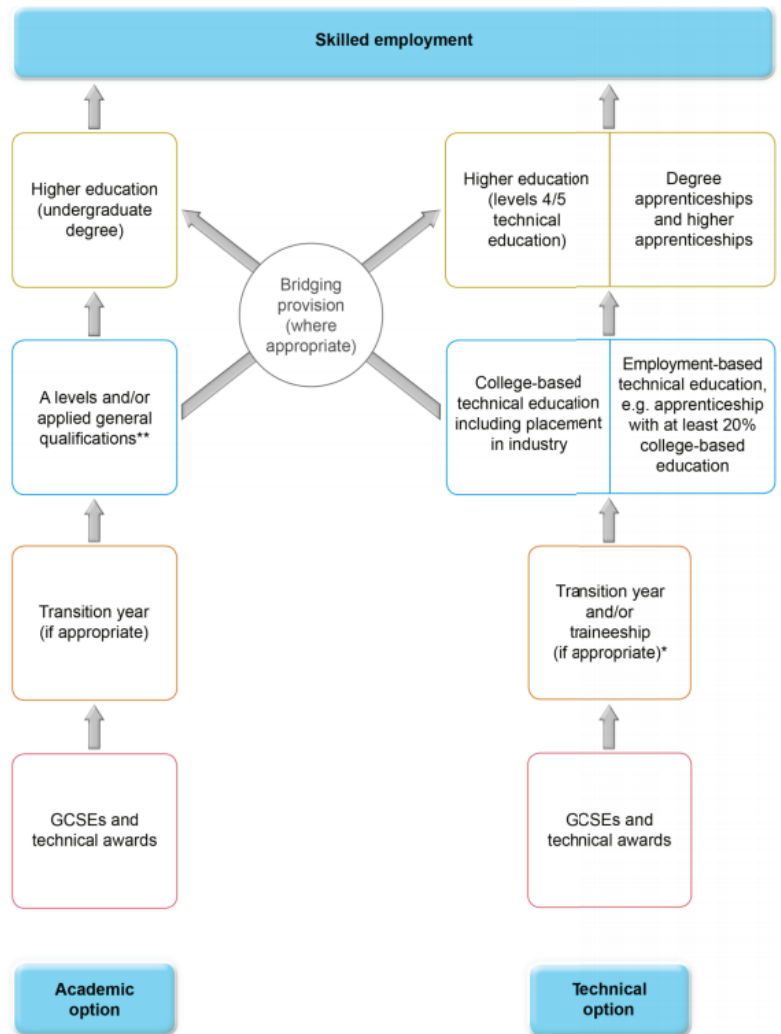
The Skills Plan included a diagram, reproduced opposite, illustrating the main features of the proposed new system.²¹

Technical certificates

Two-year college-based programmes (now referred to as T Levels) would be created at the start of each route, with nationally recognised certificates at levels 2 and 3. Certificates achieved through college-based study would, the Skills Plan said, likely include a technical qualification. Programmes would be suitable for 16-18 year olds, but could also be accessed by learners aged 19 and over. Each programme would be “closely aligned” to the apprenticeship at the start of each route and it would be possible to move from one to the other.²²

Programmes would include a ‘common core’, applying to all individuals studying that route and aligned to apprenticeships (including English and maths requirements, and digital skills), followed by specialisation towards a skilled occupation or set of occupations. Learners on college-based routes would also be entitled to “quality work placements.”²³

The Skills Plan argued that competition between awarding organisations had led to “a race to the bottom” where awarding organisations compete to offer easier and lower value qualifications. Under the proposals, there would be only one approved tech level qualification for each occupation or cluster of occupations within a route. Exclusive licenses would be granted for the development of tech levels following a bidding process.



* Where a student does both, the traineeship will follow the transition year. Students doing both the transition year and a traineeship may progress directly to employment.

** Some students will move directly from A levels and/or applied general qualifications to degree and higher apprenticeships.

²⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p7.

²¹ As above, p15.

²² As above, p23.

²³ As above, pp23-4.

Box 1: Applied general qualifications

The Skills Plan stated that applied general qualifications were not intended to be part of the technical option. It added that the Government intended “to review the contribution of [applied general] qualifications to preparing students for success in higher education; what part they can play in the reformed system; and the impact any reform would have on the government’s ambitions on widening participation.”²⁴ The November 2017 T level consultation, (see section 5.6) stated that a Government review of what qualifications it funds would include a consideration of the role of Applied General Qualifications.²⁵

Progress to higher skill levels

Technical routes would, the Skills Plan stated, extend up to higher skill levels, with a wider range of qualifications available at levels 4 and 5 as a reflection of the greater specialisation at tertiary level. However, the 2015 Government stated that it expected “to see a reduction in the number of regulated qualifications that exist at levels 4 and 5”.²⁶

Box 2: Degree apprenticeships

The Skills Plan stated that it would remain the responsibility of higher education institutions, under the regulation of the OfS, to determine the degree content of degree apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeships would not regulate the degree qualification but would approve the apprenticeship standard, which sets out the knowledge and skills the apprentice needs to demonstrate, and the associated assessment plan.²⁷

For each of the 15 routes, the Institute for Apprenticeships would maintain a register of technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5 eligible for government-backed student loans. Initially these would be drawn from existing qualifications that best meet national standards set by panels of professionals and aligned with apprenticeship standards in the same route. Only qualifications that meet the prescribed standards and are included on the Institute’s register would be eligible for loans as technical qualifications.²⁸

Learners not ready to access a route

The proposals in the Skills Plan focused primarily on learners able to start at the beginning of a technical route and progress upwards. However, the Plan stated that “up to a year of tailored and flexible support” would be available for young people not able to access a route at 16, which would be “based on their prior attainment and aspirations.” It added that the Government intended to carry out further work and to consult on this “transition year”.²⁹

²⁴ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p20.

²⁵ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p32.

²⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp25-7.

²⁷ As above, p27.

²⁸ As above, pp26-7.

²⁹ As above, p28.

Students with special educational needs

The Skills Plan noted that many students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) “could achieve a high level of technical skill with the right support.” It stated that the Government would ensure that the technical routes are “accessible, inclusive and sufficiently flexible to be adapted to individual needs” and that learners with SEND should receive the support and reasonable adjustments they need to access a route. It added that the transition year would be “crucial” for the “significant proportion” of students with SEND who are unlikely to be able to access routes because of poor prior attainment.³⁰

Institute for Apprenticeships

Under the proposals, the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships would be expanded to cover all technical education, both college-based and apprenticeships. As part of its role, the Institute would convene panels of professionals “to advise on the knowledge, skills and behaviours that individuals need to meet the standards in each [technical] route, and on suitable assessment strategies for college-based learning.”³¹

Technical education providers

The Skills Plan stated that it was for local areas to decide which of the 15 routes to focus on in order to meet the demands of their local economy. It added that the [post-16 area reviews](#) would also identify scope for greater collaboration and efficiency in each area.

The Plan additionally stated that the Institute for Apprenticeships would expect to include qualifications offered by National Colleges on its register of qualifications, and would look to the Colleges to fill any gaps in qualifications in its area of specialisation.³²

Box 3: National Colleges

In the [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), the 2015 Government announced that five National Colleges would be created with the intention of training around 21,000 students by 2020 in “industries that are crucial to [its] productivity agenda.”³³ The Colleges would focus on delivering technical education at levels 4 to 6 in five sectors: digital skills, high-speed rail, onshore oil and gas, and the creative and cultural industries. In May 2016, the 2015 Government announced around £80 million of funding to support the creation of the colleges.

The National College for Digital Skills, and the National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries opened in Autumn 2016. The National College for High Speed Rail was officially launched in October 2017 and the National College for Nuclear was launched in February 2018. It has been reported, however, that plans for the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas have been delayed.³⁴

³⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp30-1.

³¹ As above, pp7 &21.

³² As above, p27.

³³ HM Treasury, [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), Cm9162, November 2015, p46.

³⁴ [Government confirms £80 million for National Colleges to deliver the workforce of tomorrow](#), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 9 May 2016; [Greening opens National College for High Speed Rail](#), *FE Week*, 10 October 2017.

Box 4: Institutes of Technology

The 2015 Spending Review announced that the Government would “support a new network of Institutes of Technology across the country.”³⁵ The Skills Plan stated that the Institutes would likely “build on infrastructure that already exists but will have [their] own independent identity, governance arrangements which directly involve employers, and national branding.”³⁶ The consultation on the industrial strategy (see section 5.6), published in January 2017, stated that the Government would provide £170 million of capital funding for the creation of the Institutes.³⁷

On 30 November 2017, the Government published a [prospectus](#) outlining the Government’s plans for Institutes of Technology. The prospectus stated that Institutes will be tailored to focus on the specific skills needs in their area and will specialise in technical disciplines, particularly STEM, at levels 3, 4 and 5 but also extending to degree level and above. They may be created through new builds or investment in existing estates, but will have a “distinct physical identity that clearly identifies them as new and independent institutions.”³⁸

A [call for proposals](#) to establish Institutes of Technology was launched on 15 December 2017, with applicants able to bid for part of the £170 million capital funding.³⁹ Proposals were required to include a collaboration between at least one further education provider, one higher education provider and two relevant employers. In May 2018, the DfE announced the 16 providers that were selected out of the 35 applications received to move on to the final stage of the competition.⁴⁰ It is expected that the first Institutes will open in 2019.⁴¹

Initial timetable for implementation

The Skills Plan stated that the reforms to technical education would be phased in progressively, with a small number of ‘pathfinder’ routes available for first delivery from September 2019. Additional routes would then become available for teaching in phases between 2020 and 2022. This timetable has now changed (see section 5.2 below).

The Plan added that it was anticipated that the Institute for Apprenticeships would be “fully operational” by April 2017 and until it took over its broader remit, the Government would be responsible for setting the standards for the college-based element of the technical routes.⁴²

³⁵ HM Treasury, [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), Cm9162, November 2015, p46.

³⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p35.

³⁷ HM Government, [Building our Industrial Strategy](#), January 2017, p47.

³⁸ Department for Education, [Institutes of Technology: Prospectus](#), November 2017.

³⁹ [£170m competition launched for new Institutes of Technology](#), Department for Education, 15 December 2017.

⁴⁰ Department for Education, [Institutes of Technology competition](#).

⁴¹ Department for Education, [Institutes of Technology: Prospectus](#), November 2017, p11.

⁴² As above, p42.

3. Reaction and issues

The proposals in the Skills Plan received a broadly positive response from a number of stakeholders, many of which were collated in a blog posted in the Gov.uk website: [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#). For example, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, stated that:

Technical education has for too long been regarded as a poor cousin of academic study. The Government's Post-16 Skills Plan provides a welcome roadmap to redressing this longstanding anomaly.

The Plan rightly sees colleges being at the heart of the reforms with the new qualifications providing them with a cornerstone to build distinctive courses that meet the needs of employers, students and the economy.⁴³

Similarly, Neil Carberry, Director of Employment and Skills at the CBI, welcomed the proposals as a "real step forward" in terms of creating a vocational route of equal attraction and prominence to A-Levels, and for the emphasis they placed on employer involvement.⁴⁴

There was also comment on specific aspects of the proposals, with some issues being raised.

Box 5: Government assessment of the equalities impact of the proposals

The 2015 Government published an [assessment of equalities impacts](#) alongside the Skills Plan. This stated, among other things, that:

- Although the proposals would primarily affect young people aged 16-19, the Government expected that they would also help adults to access technical education.⁴⁵
- Individuals with SEND would be expected to be over-represented on technical routes and the flexibility built into the transition year would "allow students with SEND to be offered the additional support they need."⁴⁶
- The transition year would likely disproportionately affect young mothers and learners who are pregnant. Moving towards two-year programmes could make it more difficult for people to re-enter education and it was expected that transition years will make this easier.⁴⁷

A choice of routes at 16

While there was support expressed for the division between an academic option and a technical option, concerns were raised about young people potentially being faced with a binary choice at 16 between academic or technical pathways.⁴⁸ Gordon Marsden, Shadow FE and Skills Minister, for example, contended that "people will be worried it's going to be another form of the 11-plus" and stated that

⁴³ [Growing support for Government's Post-16 Skills Plan](#), Gov.uk, 13 July 2016.

⁴⁴ As above.

⁴⁵ Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Technical education reform: assessment of equalities impacts](#), July 2016, p5.

⁴⁶ As above, p6.

⁴⁷ As above, p8.

⁴⁸ For example, [Post-16 Skills Plan published by Government](#), Association of Colleges, 8 July 2016.; [Tread carefully in taking forward Sainsbury](#), Association of Employment and Learning Providers, 20 July 2016; [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

more details were needed to reassure people that the technical route will be as prestigious as the academic route.⁴⁹

In his Edge Foundation report, [14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate](#), Lord Baker, welcomed the Skills Plan as an “excellent plan for simplifying post-16 technical routes” but raised concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide between academic and technical education:

However, while simplicity is more than welcome, I have concerns about reinforcing an artificial divide at 16 between the academic and technical routes. England is in a minority of European countries in making young people make such far-reaching choices at 16, and in expecting young people to narrow their curriculum quite so dramatically. I am convinced that many young people would benefit from taking a mixture of technical and academic programmes, in varying proportions according to their talents and ambitions, throughout the period from 14 to 18/19.⁵⁰

Coverage of the 15 routes

Concerns were also raised regarding the coverage of the 15 proposed technical routes. For example, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the AoC, contended that the creative arts and sports were “under-represented” in the 15 pathways and Rob May, Director at YMCA Awards, argued that the “proposed technical routes cover only half of occupations, meaning they’re at risk of ostracizing an enormous part of the labour market.”⁵¹

Awarding bodies and quality of qualifications

As mentioned in section 2.3, the Skills Plan proposed that any technical education qualification at levels 2 and 3 would be offered and awarded by a single awarding body under an exclusive licence.⁵²

There was some support for this proposed simplification of technical qualifications. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), for example, welcomed the “move to streamline the immensely messy landscape of technical education.”⁵³ The Managing Director of City and Guilds was more equivocal in welcoming the idea and questioned whether it was right to take away choice altogether:

At first glance, we would support the idea of streamlining qualifications so that there is one high quality route per occupation. While vocational options remain so fragmented and confusing they will never achieve parity of esteem among young people, or even with their parents, compared with the apparently simple and more recognisable academic routes. However, is it

The Skills Plan proposes one qualification per occupation or cluster of occupations within a route. There may, therefore, be more than one qualification per route.

(See: [Lead DfE civil servant debunks Skills Plan ‘myth’](#), *FE Week*, 4 Nov 16.)

⁴⁹ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), *TES*, 8 July 2016.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Baker, [14-19 Education A new Baccalaureate](#), September 2016, p9.

⁵¹ [Sainsbury review triggers 'biggest change to post-16 education in 70 years'](#), *TES*, 8 July 2016; and [Government's Post-16 skills plan overlooks a number of key issues](#), *FE News*, 8 August 2016.

⁵² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p24. See [PQ 49316](#), 3 November 2016, for more on the Government's rationale for the change.

⁵³ [Small firms support streamlining of technical education](#), Federation of Small Businesses, 8 July 2016.

right to take choice away altogether in terms of awarding organisations who can deliver the pathways? We don't with academic routes. Is there a risk that we fixate too much on rationalisation rather than quality as the driver for change, resulting in some unintended consequences and wrong behaviours?⁵⁴

The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) rejected that a market-based approach had led to large numbers of competing qualifications and raised concerns that "single licences will create monopolies with all of the associated disincentives and perverse results."⁵⁵

Funding of technical education

Some responses to the Skills Plan raised the issue of funding for further education. For example, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) offered support for the aim of boosting technical education but stated that "it is essential that the Government backs up these plans with sufficient resources."⁵⁶ The AoC welcomed the 2015 Government's acknowledgment that additional funding may have to be provided to colleges to support work placements:

However, if we truly want a world class system our colleges will need the additional funding to provide world class resources. The plan's provision for everyone to have work experience alone would cost hundreds of millions of pounds and require much input from employers nationwide to be a success. We therefore welcome the Government's acceptance of the need to review the level of funding for college-based technical education and the Sainsbury Panel's specific suggestion that the intended work placements should receive additional funding.⁵⁷

Timetable for implementation of reforms

Some commentators questioned the proposed timescale for implementing the reforms. The UK Managing Director of City and Guilds, for example, highlighted "the totally unrealistic timing set out in the Skills Plan" as probably their biggest concern with the proposals.⁵⁸

David Hughes, chief executive of the AoC, stated that while the "timescale seems reasonable at one level...there's a lot of other stuff going on in Whitehall, not least Brexit and all of that sucking out [of the civil service], so there are some real worries about whether there's enough infrastructure, enough capacity in the system to do this." He additionally questioned whether the Institute for Apprenticeships was equipped to deal with its new responsibilities.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁵⁵ [Post-16 skills plan and the Report of the independent panel on technical education \(Sainsbury Review\) released](#), Federation of Awarding Bodies, 8 July 2016.

⁵⁶ [Technical education plan must be backed up with funding](#), Association of School and College Leaders, 27 October 2016.

⁵⁷ [Post-16 Skills Plan published by Government](#), Association of Colleges, 8 July 2016. See also, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, pp50-1.

⁵⁸ [Skills Plan: is it a flash in the pan or lasting vocational reform?](#), City & Guilds, 22 July 2016.

⁵⁹ [Not enough 'capacity' to implement Sainsbury review, warns AoC leader](#), *TES*, 15 September 2016.

4. Developments prior to T Level consultation

This section provides an overview of developments related to the reforms to technical education between the publication of the Post-16 Skills Plan and the launch of the T Level consultation in November 2017 (see next section).

4.1 Technical and Further Education Act 2017

The *Technical and Further Education Act 2017* received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017, having been introduced to Parliament on 27 October 2016. Library Briefing paper 7752, [Technical and Further Education Bill](#), provides information on the Bill as introduced to Parliament.

A further two Briefing Papers provide information on issues raised during the Bill's passage through Parliament:

- Library Briefing Library Briefing 7782, [Technical and Further Education Bill: Committee Stage Report](#), 20 December 2016
- Library Briefing 7941, [Technical and Further Education Bill: Lords Stages and Ping Pong](#), 9 June 2017.

The Act's technical education provisions

Among other things, the Act provides the legislative framework for the proposals set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan.

Section 1 of the Act renames the Institute for Apprenticeships as the "Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education" and Schedule 1 amends the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009* to extend the remit of the Institute to cover all technical education. Among other things the Schedule:

- Enables the Secretary of State to specify broad groups of occupations with shared training requirements (which may be referred to as 'routes'). The Institute will be required to map occupations in relation to these routes and must publish information to show how standards for occupations relate to the occupational map.⁶⁰
- Requires the Institute to publish standards for occupations and to describe the expected outcomes required to successfully achieve the standard. Standards will be drafted by groups approved by the Institute.⁶¹
- Allows the Institute to approve technical education qualifications in relation to one or more occupations, and requires the Institute to maintain a list of approved technical education qualifications.⁶²

Section 2 of the Act, which was inserted during Lords Committee Stage, provides that schools in England must ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access

⁶⁰ Schedule 1, paragraph 7.

⁶¹ Schedule 1, paragraph 8.

⁶² Schedule 1, paragraphs 15 and 21.

pupils during the relevant phase of their education, for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships. Lord Baker, who moved the amendment, stated that this would give all young people the chance to hear directly from providers of apprenticeships and technical qualifications” and would be of particular benefit to University Technical Colleges (UTCs) which recruit learners at 14 years of age.⁶³

Section 41, inserted at Lords Report Stage and amended during Ping Pong, requires Ofsted to comment on the careers advice provided to students when inspecting FE providers.

Sections 2 and 41 of the Act will come into force on 2 January 2018 and the Government intends to publish statutory guidance on the same day.⁶⁴ The Government expects the Institute for Apprenticeships to take on responsibility for technical education from April 2018.⁶⁵

Many of the issues raised during the passage of the Bill were similar to those raised following the publication of the Skills Plan. Other issues related to the proposed technical education reforms that were discussed included:

- The quality of careers advice.
- Access and participation in technical education.
- The quality of apprenticeships.
- The representation of learners and apprentices on the board of the Institute for Apprenticeships.
- The representation of students, trade unions and other stakeholders on the groups formed to set standards for occupations.

4.2 Increase in programme hours

The [March 2017 Budget](#) stated that the number of programme hours for 16-19 year olds in technical routes would be increased to “over 900 hours a year on average.” It stated that this would result in over £500 million of additional funding per year once routes are fully implemented.⁶⁶

The Budget additionally announced that from 2019-20, further education maintenance loans will be available, like those available for higher education students, for students on technical education courses at level 4 to 6 at National Colleges and Institutes of Technology.⁶⁷ This

⁶³ HL Deb 22 February 2017, [cGC54](#).

⁶⁴ [Technical and Further Education Act 2017 \(Commencement No. 2 and Transitional Provision\) Regulations 2017/1055](#); [PO HL3953](#), 20 December 2017.

⁶⁵ Department for Education, [Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships](#), April 2017, p5.

⁶⁶ HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), HC 1025, March 2017, p41.

⁶⁷ As above.

followed an earlier [consultation](#) on further education maintenance loans, which was launched in March 2016.⁶⁸

4.3 Institute for Apprenticeships launched

The Institute for Apprenticeships, chaired by Antony Jenkins, went live on 3 April 2017.⁶⁹ Following an earlier consultation, strategic guidance on how the Institute should carry out its functions for the 2017-18 financial year was published by the Government on the same day. It is expected that such guidance will be issued annually.⁷⁰

On 21 April 2017, the Institute announced that it had appointed chairs for the 15 route panels, which will be responsible for “setting the standards, of knowledge, skills and behaviours needed by employers for every occupation in England.” The panels will also be responsible for reviewing and recommending apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. A panel of apprentices, made up of current or recent apprentices, was also appointed to advise the board and to “ensure the apprentice voice is heard within the decision making structure of the institute.”⁷¹ This followed a commitment given by the then Minister, Robert Halfon, during the Technical and Further Education Bill’s Committee Stage in response to concerns about the lack of apprentice representation on the board of the Institute.⁷²

4.4 Change to implementation timetable

In July 2017, the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Anne Milton, wrote to FE stakeholders to inform them that the first technical routes would be introduced at a number of pilot providers in September 2020, a year later than under the proposals set out in the Skills Plan. The letter stated that it was still expected that all 15 routes will be available for teaching by 2022.⁷³ NB: This timetable has subsequently changed (see section 6.12 below).

4.5 Review of higher level technical education

On 31 October 2017, the Government announced that it intended to conduct a review into higher level technical education.

⁶⁸ Department for Education, [Further education maintenance loans \(technical and professional\)](#), last updated September 2016.

⁶⁹ [Institute for Apprenticeships to ensure quality skills training](#), Department for Education, 3 April 2017.

⁷⁰ Department for Education, [Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships](#), April 2017, p3.

⁷¹ [Institute for Apprenticeships announced new appointments](#), Institute for Apprenticeships, 21 April 2017.

⁷² PBC 29 November 2016 (afternoon), [cc145-6](#).

⁷³ [Implementing changes to Technical Education](#), letter from the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills to FE stakeholders, 20 July 2017.

The review will cover the whole of level four and five education, with a particular focus on technical qualifications.⁷⁴ It is intended to look at “how technical qualifications at this level can better address the needs of learners and employers”, including that learners can progress from T levels into the workplace. It will also consider how qualifications at this level work for those in the workforce looking to upskill or retrain.⁷⁵

Box 6: Costs of providing further education at levels 4 and 5

In December 2017, the DfE published a [research report](#) looking at the costs of providing further education at levels 4 and 5 in STEM subjects. The report concluded that higher apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5 face wide variations in their operating margins, the main driver of which is staff salaries. It added that the findings did not support the assumption that providers may choose not to offer STEM qualifications due to the investment required in equipment.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Level four qualifications are: Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE); Higher National Certificate (HNC); Level 4 Award; Level 4 Certificate; Level 4 NVQ. Level five qualifications are: Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE); Foundation Degree; Higher National Diploma (HND); Level 5 Award; Level 5 Certificate; Level 5 Diploma; and Level 5 NVQ.

⁷⁵ [Level 4 & 5 technical education to be reviewed](#), Department for Education, 31 October 2017.

⁷⁶ Department for Education, [The costs of providing levels 4 and 5 in further education](#), December 2017, pp9-10.

5. T level consultation and action plan

In October 2017, the Government published a '[T level action plan](#)', which provided further information on the Government's policy on T Levels and gave an update on progress made in implementing the technical education reforms.

This was followed by the publication on 30 November 2017 of a [consultation](#) on the implementation of T Level programmes. The consultation closed on 8 February 2018 and the Government responded on 27 May 2018.

This section provides an overview of the content of the consultation and the T level action plan, followed by a short summary of the Government's consultation response.

5.1 Principles of T Levels

"T Level" was used in the action plan and the consultation to refer to the proposed new level 3 classroom-based technical study programmes (i.e. not just the level 3 qualification that forms part of the proposed T Level certificate). They will sit alongside apprenticeships as one half of the technical education offer.

The consultation and action plan outlined a number of principles that guide the development of T Levels:

- T Levels will be designed primarily to support entry to skilled employment at level 3 and above. Students will also be able to progress to technical education and training at levels 4, 5 and 6, including technical degrees.
- Apprenticeships and T Levels will be based on the same set of employer designed standards (which have been developed by apprenticeship trailblazer groups) but there will be differences in the content. Apprentices will train for a single occupation while T Level students will undertake a broader programme, gaining skills and knowledge relevant to a range of occupations in a route.
- Students achieving a T Level will have the numeracy, literacy, digital skills and wider transferable skills needed to succeed in occupations relevant to their chosen route.
- T Level programmes are likely to be equivalent in size to a 3 'A' Level programme. They are likely to be studied over two years and will generally be taught full time.
- Individuals will be tested at the end of the programme and those who pass all parts of the programme will be awarded a T Level certificate.
- T Levels will generally be taken by 16-19 year olds, but the Government will take account of the needs of adult learners when designing the programme.

5.2 Content of T level programmes

The consultation stated that T Level programmes will, on average, consist of 1800 hours over two years. They will follow the same broad framework and will consist of five components:

- A technical qualification
- A work placement with an employer
- Maths, English and digital requirements
- Any other occupation-specific requirements/qualifications (e.g. a license to practise).
- Any further employability, enrichment and pastoral provision.

The Government has worked with the Gatsby foundation to develop the occupational map, which breaks down each of the technical routes into a number of occupations, with closely-related occupations grouped together into pathways. The consultation stated that the Institute would run a separate consultation on the content of the occupational maps shortly. The Institute's [consultation](#) on its draft occupational maps was published in December 2017.

Box 7: T Level Panels

T level panels appointed by the Institute for Apprenticeships will develop the content common across each technical route, as well as the specialist content required for each occupation on the occupational map. On 30 November 2017, the Government announced the membership of the panels for six T Level routes.⁷⁷ In March 2018, the Skills Minister announced that businesses could apply to be on the panels for the final six T Level routes. The closing date for applications was 8 May 2018.⁷⁸

Technical qualifications

The consultation proposed that technical qualifications will include core content followed by specialisation. The core content will “develop the underpinning knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to the T level”, including selected numeracy, literacy and digital skills. The specialism will focus on occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours.⁷⁹ It is expected that the breadth of a technical qualification is likely to be at pathway level.

The consultation stated that the underpinning knowledge of the core component will be assessed through external examination, with core employability skills assessed through employer-set projects. For occupational specialisms, students will demonstrate that they have competence through practical assignments.

Rather than having an overall grade for a technical qualification, the consultation proposed that students will receive separate grades for the core component (graded A*-E) and for the specialism (graded Pass,

⁷⁷ [T level panels membership](#), Department for Education, 30 November 2017.

⁷⁸ [Skills Minister calls on employers to join new T Level panels](#), Department for Education, 27 March 2018.

⁷⁹ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp12-15.

Merit or Distinction), with each recognised separately on the T Level certificate. In order to achieve a T Level, students will have to attain an E or above in the core content component and a pass or above in each relevant specialism.

It is expected that the time for the technical qualification component of T Level programmes will range between 900 and 1400 hours.⁸⁰

Work placements

The consultation proposed the criteria that a T Level work placement will have to meet, including that it should take place with an external employer and should last between 45 and 60 days.

Some in the FE sector, including the Association of Colleges, have raised concerns that colleges will struggle to fit in work placements lasting a minimum of 45 days.⁸¹ Concerns have also been raised that making a work placement a mandatory part of T Levels may limit the access to certain subjects for learners in rural areas (where there are no local employers relevant to a subject).⁸² However, *FE Week* has reported the Secretary of State as confirming that the mandatory work placements will be a part of T Levels.⁸³

Box 8: Funding for work placements

The Government has announced that £74 million of funding will be available for the period from April 2018 to August 2019 to support providers in starting to build their capacity and capability to provide substantive work placements, and to deliver placements in the 2018-19 academic year.⁸⁴ The consultation adds that this funding will “increase every year up to and beyond the introduction of T levels.”⁸⁵

In line with the consultation proposals, guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in September 2017 sets out that work placements delivered using the announced funding – the Capacity and Delivery Fund – are required to adhere to a set of eight [principles](#), including that they must last between 45 and 60 days. The guidance states that the principles were developed in consultation with employers and providers and build on principles being tested in [work placement pilots](#) launched in September 2017. It adds that the principles will continue to be refined and may change before T Levels are rolled out.⁸⁶

Maths, English and digital

The consultation proposed that the Government will not set maths and English entry requirements to enrol on a T Level, but students will have to achieve a minimum level of attainment in order to achieve one. This will be set at level 2 and so students may meet the requirement through

⁸⁰ As above, pp16-17.

⁸¹ [T-levels funded work placement plans criticised](#), *FE Week*, 7 October 2017.

⁸² [Don't 'punish' young people with mandatory T-level work placements. AoC pleads](#), *FE Week*, 10 November 2017.

⁸³ [T-levels: DfE won't consult on 3-month work placements](#), *FE Week*, 1 December 2017.

⁸⁴ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p14; [Justine Greening: Speech at the Business and Education Summit](#), Department for Education, 6 July 2017; and Department for Education, [Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan](#), October 2017, p14.

⁸⁵ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p19.

⁸⁶ Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Work Placement Capacity and Delivery Fund: principles for high quality work placements](#), September 2017.

achievement of a GCSE standard pass in English and maths or a level 2 Functional Skills qualification.

The consultation set out two options for how to fund students who may need to continue studying English and maths to meet the level 2 requirement:

- provide the maths and English study from each student's T level programme hours; or
- provide the study as additional funded hours on top of their T levels.

The consultation additionally outlined the Government's expectation that occupation-specific digital skills relevant to an industry will be "an integral part of each T Level programme."⁸⁷

Certificates

The consultation stated that the Government did not believe it was appropriate to include an overall grade for the T Level as a whole on the T Level certificate (NB: see consultation response below). Instead, it proposed that grades for all the separate components should be listed separately. To pass the T Level and be awarded a certificate, the student would need to pass all components of the programme. Students who do not meet the requirements for certification, or leave a programme part-way through, would receive a transcript recognising the parts of the programme that had been achieved.

Annex A of the consultation (pages 46-47) includes an example of what a T Level certificate and a T level transcript could look like.

5.3 Timetable for implementation

In the 'T Level action plan', the Government confirmed that "a small number of providers" would deliver some pathways within the digital, construction, and education and childcare routes from September 2020. The consultation stated that T Level panels had started developing T Levels in these subjects with the process managed by the Department for Education before being transferred to the Institute for Apprenticeships.

It was proposed that the 11 non-apprenticeship routes would then be launched in full in two waves:

- The digital; construction; education and childcare; legal, finance and accounting; engineering and manufacturing; and health and science routes would be launched in September 2021. The consultation stated that T Level panels are developing T Levels for these routes.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p24.

⁸⁸ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p13.

- The hair and beauty; agriculture, environment, and animal care; business and administrative; catering and hospitality; and creative and design routes would be launched from September 2022.⁸⁹

While the consultation stated that all T Level routes and pathways should be launched by 2022, it added that the Government expects that colleges and training providers will expand their 'T level offer' over time as overlapping qualifications are phased out. The action plan stated that the Government's ambition is that "the majority of providers will be offering T Levels by 2024."⁹⁰ NB: this timetable has now changed (see section 5.12 below)

5.4 Transition years

The consultation sought views on how the transition year can be developed for 16 year olds who are not ready to start either the academic option or the technical option. It stated that the transition year will be aimed at students who have not yet achieved grade 4 in English and maths but who could progress to a T Level with the right support. It would be focused on "maths, English and developing technical skills, knowledge and behaviours linked to T Levels, as well as transferable skills." The consultation stated that the Government intends to use findings from [research](#) in effective practice in teaching and supporting lower attaining students to develop proposals for the transition year. These will then be piloted once the first T Levels are introduced in 2020.⁹¹

5.5 Adult learners

The consultation stated that the Government wants to consider how it can adapt T Levels so that they are appropriate for adult learners. It added that the Government was looking at options to ensure that adults can retrain throughout their lives, and this could include "looking at removing some of the barriers adult learners may face through flexible delivery of T Levels".⁹²

5.6 Other qualifications

The consultation set out the Government's intention that T Levels will replace most current technical qualifications for 16-19 year olds, and that in the future the majority of funding for 16-19 year olds will be directed to T Level and A Level programmes. To this end, the consultation proposed a review of qualifications funded by the Government, which will include a consideration of the role of Applied General Qualifications.

⁸⁹ Department for Education, [Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan](#), October 2017, pp10-11.

⁹⁰ As above.

⁹¹ Department for Education, [Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan](#), October 2017, p31; Department for Education, [Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan](#), October 2017, p15.

⁹² Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p32.

The consultation stated that for a small number of students, achievement at level 2 (as opposed to an A Level, apprenticeship, T Level or a transition year followed by level 3 study) may be an appropriate aim by the age of 19. After the review of level 3 qualifications, the consultation stated, the Government will review which level 2 qualifications it should continue to be funded alongside T Levels and the transition year.⁹³

The consultation additionally said that as part of the review of level 4 and 5 technical education (see section 5.5 above), the Government will consider how bridging provision will allow individuals to progress to both academic and higher level provision.⁹⁴

5.7 Funding

The consultation noted the additional funding provided at the 2017 Spring Budget (see above). It added that in recognition of the additional costs of delivery, the Government intends to provide funding for T Levels in-year initially as opposed to on a lagged basis. The consultation also sought views on whether funding for T Levels should be distributed using an adapted 16-19 funding formula, or whether a different approach should be considered.

Box 9: Review of funding of technical education in other countries

In July 2017, the Department for Education published a review of funding and expenditure in post-16 education in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway. The introduction to the report stated that, with the reforms to technical education progressing, it was “timely for the Government to consider what funding structures are needed to ensure technical education meets the needs of employers and this includes learning from international experience.”⁹⁵

Among other things, the review found that:

- Around 90% of students who study upper-secondary⁹⁶ vocational programmes in Germany, Denmark and Norway have a training agreement with an employer. In France and the Netherlands, about two-thirds follow vocational, school-based programmes.
- In Norway upper secondary vocational education at both colleges and workplaces is mainly supported by state funding. In Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and France, the state finances training at vocational schools, whilst employers mainly finance on-the-job training.
- Countries are investing considerable resources in post-16 vocational education programmes and spend more per student following vocational tracks than for those following academic routes. Germany, for example, spends £3,038 more.
- Core vocational educational programmes last between 2 and 3 years in France and Germany, 1 and 4 years in the Netherlands, 3 and 4 years in Norway and 3 and 5 years in Denmark. In all the countries students generally receive around 1000 supervised teaching hours per year.⁹⁷

⁹³ As above, pp8-11.

⁹⁴ As above, p30.

⁹⁵ Department for Education, [Funding and expenditure in pos-16 education: An international review](#), July 2017, p8.

⁹⁶ The report explains that “upper-secondary” vocational education encompasses young people aged 15 years and over in France, 15/16 years and over in Germany and 16 years and over in Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. The majority of the programmes are at levels equivalent to Level 2 (GCSE A*-C) and level 3 (UK A level) on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

⁹⁷ Department for Education, [Funding and expenditure in pos-16 education: An international review](#), July 2017, pp10-11.

5.8 Accountability

The consultation set out the measures that the Government think should form the basis of the accountability system for providers of T Levels:

- A completion measure.
- An attainment measure for the qualification component of T Levels, just for those students who complete the full T Level.
- Destination measures, which will show how well T Levels enable progression to skilled employment or higher technical education.
- Maths and English – to measure the progress that students are making in attaining basic skills.

The consultation additionally proposed that it will be necessary for Ofsted to evaluate the delivery of T Level routes as a separate provision type and give a grade for T Level provision.⁹⁸

5.9 Provider capacity

The consultation stated that the Government will work with providers to help identify gaps between current capacity and what is needed to successfully deliver T Levels. It added that responses to the consultation would help the Government plan this work.⁹⁹

The Autumn Budget 2017, delivered in November 2017, announced that the Government would invest “up to £20 million to help teachers prepare for the introduction of T Levels.”¹⁰⁰

Box 10: Support for FE colleges

In a [speech](#) at the Business and Education Summit in July 2017, the Education Secretary announced a package of support for FE providers, which included:

- £15 million for a Strategic College Improvement Fund, which will be focused on supporting weaker colleges. A pilot scheme for applications to the fund opened in October 2017, with [guidance](#) published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
- The establishment of a programme for National Leaders for Further Education (NLFEs) to enable the spread of knowledge and support to weaker parts of the system. [Guidance](#) for applicants to become NLFEs was published in October 2017.¹⁰¹

5.10 Other issues

The consultation touched on a number of other areas related to the implementation of T Levels, including:

- Progression from T Levels to apprenticeships and higher technical education (pages 29-30 of the consultation).

⁹⁸ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, pp41-2.

⁹⁹ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation](#), November 2017, p33.

¹⁰⁰ HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2017](#), HC 587, November 2017, p48.

¹⁰¹ [Justine Greening: Speech at the Business and Education Summit](#), Department for Education, 6 July 2017.

- How the Government can influence the T Levels that are offered locally to ensure that skills needs are met and that there is a universal offer on T Levels for all young people (page 34 of the consultation).
- The procurement and contracting of awarding organisations, and the regulation of the market. The consultation stated that the Government is “committed to introducing an exclusive license approach for all T Levels” and that the tendering process is expected to start in summer 2018 for T Levels intended for teaching from 2020 (pages 35-38 of the consultation).
- Quality assurance and regulation (pages 39-40 of the consultation).

5.11 Government response

The Government published its response to the consultation on the implementation of T Level programmes on 27 May 2018. Alongside the consultation response, the Government also announced the 52 providers who will deliver the first three T Levels (in construction, digital, and education & childcare) from September 2020.¹⁰²

The response reported that there was “strong support for T Levels across different groups of respondents, and optimism about the potential of T Levels to transform the technical education system.” The main findings from the consultation included:

- Respondents wanted clarity about the purpose of T Levels and their positioning within the education system, including their target audience in relation to A Levels and apprenticeships.
- There was support for simplification of existing qualifications, but only where this is employer-led and does not leave gaps in provision.
- T Levels needs to be rigorous and accessible for students with special educational needs or a disability.
- Industry placements will be challenging to deliver on a national scale and there was concern from students that there will not be enough good employers offering placements in their area.

The Government stated that it would adjust its approach to the design and implementation of T Levels to take account of the views received. A brief summary of some of the changes, along with other areas of note from the response are set out briefly below.

Technical qualifications

In a change from the intention set out in the consultation, the response stated that an overall Pass grade for T Levels will be awarded so that it is clear to an employer that a student has completed all components of the system. It is still intended that the different components of the Technical Qualification will also be graded separately as outlined in the consultation.

¹⁰² [New T Levels mark a revolution in technical education](#), Department for Education, 27 May 2018.

Work placements

Additional support will be provided to enable industry placements to be delivered. This will include:

- funding to build the capacity of providers through the Capacity and Delivery Fund (see box 7);
- advice and support for employers through the National Apprenticeship Service; and
- additional bursary funding in 2018-19 to help students travel to industry placements.

Students on placements will not be entitled to a salary and there is no expectation that they will be paid. However, employers will be able to pay students should they wish to do so.

The placements will now be referred to as 'T Level industry placements'.

Maths and English

Maths and English for students who have not yet achieved level 2 will be funded in addition to the hours required for the other parts of the course, rather than out of the T Levels standard programme hours.

Relationship with other qualifications

The Government believes that in principle a student should be able to take an A Level alongside a T Level, and will be particularly supportive of students who want to take Core maths or A Level maths alongside a T Level.

T Levels will not be available in all areas where qualifications currently exist. The Government review of level 3 qualifications, as outlined in the consultation, "will be comprehensive and will ensure that there is continued provision where there is a genuine need for a qualification." Further details about the review will be set out "shortly".

The Government is also working with UCAS to explore the option of allocating UCAS Tariff points to T Levels.

Transition years

The response stated that the Government wants to "develop an effective transition offer to make sure that as many students as possible can complete T Levels." It states that the Government will work with relevant bodies during 2018 "to gather evidence on existing good practice of similar 'transition' programmes."

Adult learners

There is no 'one size fits all' approach that could meet the needs of the majority of adult learners. The Government recognises that 19-23 year old learners could benefit from the same T Level programme as 16-19 year old learners. For learners aged over 24 the Government will take into account wider reviews of technical education, including the reviews of qualifications at levels 3, 4 and 5, and will "consider any specific adaptations that will improve accessibility."

Funding

There was support for retaining the existing National funding formula and so the response stated that the Government will “build on this to distribute funding for T Levels.” The response added that the Government recognised that the additional taught hours and the industry placements will mean that T Levels cost more to deliver than current programmes. It noted the additional funding announced at the March 2017 Budget and said that the Government expected to fund T Levels at different rates to reflect the cost of delivery and for variations in the number of additional taught hours.¹⁰³

Box 11: Previous reform of vocational education - 14-19 Diplomas

14-19 Diplomas were introduced in 2008 following recommendations in the 2004 report: [14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform](#) (The Tomlinson Report). Diplomas were designed partly by employers and they aimed to increase post-16 participation in education by providing learners with a qualification which combined work-orientated skills and academic study.

14 diploma lines were introduced covering all major industries and sectors and these lines were available at three different levels - foundation, higher and advanced. The introduction of Diplomas was implemented in phases, the first five Diplomas in 2008 were: Engineering; IT; Society, Health and Development; Construction and the Built Environment; and Creative and Media. Further Diplomas were rolled out in 2009 and 2010.

Diplomas were a composite qualification, the three main components of the qualification were principal learning, generic learning and additional learning. Principal learning was a single qualification, based on the chosen specialism, generic learning covered functional skills in English, Mathematics, ICT and work experience and additional learning enabled students to include other qualifications in their diploma such as GCSEs or A levels. OCR awarded its final 14-19 Diplomas in July 2014.

In its consultation response, the Government outlined why it believes that T Levels are better placed to succeed than 14-19 Diplomas. The reasons offered included:

- Diplomas were not widely taken up in part because they lacked a clear purpose and tried to chart a ‘middle course’ between vocational and academic qualifications. T Levels are different as they are “part of a new, distinct technical offer.”
- Only some of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report were implemented, which led to “Diplomas adding a layer of complexity” to the existing system rather than simplifying it. The Government is implementing all the recommendations of the 2016 Sainsbury Report, “making T Levels part of a new, streamlined technical option.”
- Diplomas were broadly relevant to whole sectors and did not reflect the specific skills that employers wanted. T Levels set out to equip young people with the skills needed to enter skilled employment.¹⁰⁴

5.12 Implementation timetable

Ministerial direction on T Level roll-out schedule

On 17 May 2018, the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, Jonathan Slater, [wrote](#) to the Secretary of State to raise concerns about the planned timetable for the roll-out of T Levels. “As things stand today, the letter stated, it will clearly be very challenging to ensure that the first three T Levels are ready to be taught from 2020 and beyond to a consistently high standard.” Mr Slater continued that his responsibilities as an Accounting Officer led him to advise “deferring the start date to 2021 in order to mitigate the feasibility and

¹⁰³ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, pp7-21.

¹⁰⁴ As above, p11.

consequential value for money risks.” But it is “perfectly legitimate” for the Secretary of State to bring other considerations in addition to those of an Accounting Officer to bear, he added, and on this basis the Secretary of State “can quite legitimately decide” to stick to 2020 as the initial rollout date. If this is the case, Mr Slater said, he would need a formal written direction from the Minister.

In response, the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, [wrote](#) that “T Levels are central to reforming technical and vocational education and training, to improve workforce skills and drive productivity growth”. It was important, he said, to “keep up momentum” behind the reforms and none of the advice had indicated that teaching from 2020 cannot be achieved. The Minister added that “the delivery of T Levels in 2020 is focused in a measured way on a small number of T Levels in a small number of providers. I want us now to put all out collective weight behind delivering these T Levels to begin in 2020.”

Change to implementation timetable

The Government’s consultation response noted the concerns of some respondents, including the CBI, about the pace of roll-out, and stated that the Government had “therefore decided to extend the full roll-out of T Levels beyond 2022. It added that the Government wanted to take “an agile approach” which in some cases could mean slowing plans to get a T Level into delivery, and in other cases accelerating delivery. The final sequencing of the roll-out of T Levels would, the response said, be outlined once the outline content is finalised by T Level panels.¹⁰⁵

Following publication of the consultation response, *FE Week* reported DfE as confirming that, while the T Level pilot will still begin from September 2020 in line with the Ministerial direction, the full roll-out of T Levels would now be extended by 12 months to September 2023.¹⁰⁶

5.13 Next steps

The consultation response set out the steps the Government will take during Summer and Autumn 2018 related to the implementation of T Levels, including:

Summer 2018

- The Government will identify an organisation to work with to design and deliver support to providers to prepare their workforce. It is envisaged that this support will be available from early summer 2019 for those providers delivering T Levels from September 2020.
- The Government will refine the design of the procurement and the role and responsibilities of awarding organisations who will design and administer the provision of the first three T Levels from 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p20.

¹⁰⁶ [T-level full roll-out delayed until 2023. DfE confirms](#), *FE Week*, 27 May 2018.

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- Guidance to help employers and providers to design and implement T Level industry placements will be published.
- Details of the plan for the review of qualifications will be set out.
- The National Apprenticeship Service will start providing support for employers delivering T Level industry placements.

Autumn 2018

- The invitation to tender for awarding organisations to bid to the exclusive licences for the Technical Qualifications in the first three T Level pathways will be launched.
- Providers who will deliver T Levels from September 2020 will complete implementation plans.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Department for Education, [Implementation of T Level programmes: Government consultation response](#), May 2018, p13.

6. Other reports

This section very briefly outlines the role of the reforms to technical education in the Government's Industrial Strategy and Social Mobility Action Plan.

6.1 Industrial Strategy

On 30 November 2017, the Government published its [industrial strategy](#). Echoing the Post-16 Skills Plan, the strategy highlighted people and the skills they have as "a key driver of productivity". It argued that in the past insufficient attention has been given to technical education and the current system is complex, confusing and does not always meet the needs of employers or the wider economy. As a result, migrant labour has been required to meet domestic skills shortages. The strategy stated that the Government will "put technical education on the same footing as out academic system, with apprenticeships and qualifications such as T levels."¹⁰⁸

The strategy then outlined the plans for the reform of technical education, and stated that the Government wanted the system "to be as prestigious as higher education...and for it to rival the best systems in the world."¹⁰⁹ As outlined in the consultation, the strategy stated that school and college performance measures will be updated "to ensure that students can make an informed choice between technical or academic education in time for the introduction of the first T Levels, recognising them as equally valued routes."¹¹⁰

The consultation on the industrial strategy, published in January 2017, stated that the Government would explore how to create a similar platform to UCAS for technical education students so as to "make it easier for students to compare options in technical education and higher education."¹¹¹ This was not explicitly referred to in the strategy published in November 2017.

6.2 Social mobility plan

On 14 December 2017, the Department for Education published its social mobility action plan: [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#). The plan outlined the Government's planned reforms to technical education, including the introduction of T levels, the review of level 4 and education, and plans for the transition year.

Emphasising the role of employers in setting the standards for technical qualifications, the plan argued that this would ensure that "young people following the technical option will have a direct line of sight to skilled employment." The plan additionally stated that "creating high

¹⁰⁸ HM Government, [Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future](#), November 2017, p94.

¹⁰⁹ As above.

¹¹⁰ As above, p102.

¹¹¹ HM Government, [Building our Industrial Strategy](#), January 2017, p43.

quality technical education disproportionately benefits people from disadvantaged backgrounds.”¹¹²

¹¹² Department for Education, [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility](#), Cm9541, December 2017, pp24-7.

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