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# Accounting officer assessment: T Levels

Updated 20 December 2022

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Accounting officers have a responsibility to scrutinise significant policy proposals, projects or programmes and ensure the actions of the public organisation they lead meet the 4 accounting officer standards (regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility) as set out in [managing public money](#).

From April 2017, the government has committed to making a summary of the key points from these assessments available to Parliament when an accounting officer has assessed a project or programme within the government's major projects portfolio (GMPP).

## Background

The T Levels programme aims to give young people the opportunity to access a high-quality technical education as a route to skilled employment, higher education or higher-level technical training. The programme also aims to provide businesses with the skills needed to support improved productivity and economic growth. The new T Levels will be available full time in colleges, sixth-form colleges, academies and schools. They are level 3 programmes lasting 2 years and are roughly the same size as a 3 A level programme.

During preparations for the launch of the first 3 T Levels, the then accounting officer asked for a ministerial direction on 17 May 2018. This was requested on the grounds of feasibility, particularly flagging risks to our ability to deliver on time and ensure a consistently high standard for the first wave of T Levels in September 2020.

On 24 May 2018, the Secretary of State issued a ministerial direction to proceed with 3 T Levels, delivered by a small number of providers for first teaching in 2020.

Even though the delivery of this first wave was subject to considerable risk, the department did successfully roll out the first wave of T Levels in September 2020, on time and to a high standard. Subsequent waves of delivery were not subject to ministerial direction.

The first cohort of students started their courses in September 2020. Students completed their courses in August 2022, with 92% passing their full T Level. These students have progressed into a variety of destinations, including higher level apprenticeships, employment and higher education.

In September 2022, around 170 providers began delivery of 16 T Levels to students across the country. By 2025, 24 T Levels will be available for delivery.

These courses were developed in collaboration with employers and education providers so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through further or higher education.

To ensure effective management of the programme, it remains on the GMPP and is subject to regular review. These reviews have provided positive feedback to the department about the quality of the programme management.

As required by all major projects, the department has developed a risk strategy and integrated approvals and assurance plan. T Level delivery risks are identified and managed using management of risk methodology. These risks are routinely reported through the T Level programme governance structures, and top-tier risks are escalated quarterly to the Department for Education performance and risk committee.

The following summarises an accounting officer assessment, subsequent to the ministerial direction in 2018, reflecting the progress made on the programme since then.

## Assessment against accounting officer standards

### Regularity

The [Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#) provides the legislative basis and parliamentary authority for the department to incur expenditure on the T levels programme.

### Propriety

The risk of impropriety through the governance and implementation of the programme is judged to be minimal and the programme complies with departmental and governmental governance and assurance requirements and expectations. The overarching programme business case was approved by the department's investment committee and HM Treasury.

An experienced senior responsible officer effectively governs the T Levels programme. There is continued oversight and scrutiny on effective delivery from ministers, senior officials across government and external experts, including the [Infrastructure and Projects Authority](#) and Government Internal Audit Agency.

## Value for money

There is an overall need for an education and training system that delivers more skills with greater labour market value to more people than ever before, supporting economic success and social mobility.

T levels have several requirements that support improvements in the technical education offer and these are outlined below;

- Increased teaching hours – from 600 per year for current technical qualifications to 900 per year to teach the additional content of the more stretching T Level qualifications, bringing us more in line with the best international systems.
- Industry placements – on average 350 hours (with a minimum of 315), to help young people acquire the necessary skills that specific occupations, and the workplace more generally, require of them. Evidence from other schemes (such as Youth Contract) shows that work-based learning helps to increase the employability of young people and results in higher productivity.
- Better-quality workforce – by upskilling staff and recruiting new staff with higher skills to meet the teaching requirements of the rigorous and more employer-focussed standards.

## Feasibility

There are feasibility risks for the programme, which the department continues to manage.

There is a critical dependency between the roll-out of the T Levels programme, and the level 3 qualifications review. As part of this, technical qualifications that overlap with T Levels will have funding approval withdrawn for 16- to 19-year-olds.

The final list of qualifications that overlap waves 1 and 2 of T Levels was published on 14 October 2022. These will no longer be funded for new 16 to 19 starters after 1 August 2024. Qualifications in the same routes as T Levels in waves 3 and 4 will also be reviewed, and overlapping qualifications will have funding approval removed from 1 August 2025. Where new T Levels are introduced in future, qualifications that overlap with them will also have funding approval removed.

In addition, there remain risks to the programme associated with delivering new qualifications, including the need to make sure the challenge of the qualifications is correctly calibrated in the early years. We consider that these can be managed by maintaining effective relationships with all

stakeholders involved in delivery, and by facilitating regular reflection and review exercises.

The programme is now assessed as deliverable. Sufficient budget has been secured, and the programme team is resourced, has adhered to all internal review and approval processes, and has established strong project and portfolio management methodologies and processes to monitor and manage the project.

## Conclusion

As accounting officer for the Department for Education, I have considered this assessment against the 4 accounting officer standards, and I am satisfied that the T Levels programme relies on clear legal powers, meets the standards of managing public money, accords with the generally understood principles of public life, represents good value for money for the Exchequer, and is feasible to deliver.

If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this project, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

**Susan Acland-Hood**

Permanent Secretary

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