

Committee of Public Accounts

Introducing T Levels

Thirty-Fifth Report of Session 2024–25

HC 822

Committee of Public Accounts

The Committee of Public Accounts is appointed by the House of Commons to examine “the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure, and of such other accounts laid before Parliament as the committee may think fit” (Standing Order No.148)

Current membership

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown](#) (Conservative; North Cotswolds) (Chair)

[Mr Clive Betts](#) (Labour; Sheffield South East)

[Nesil Caliskan](#) (Labour; Barking)

[Mr Luke Charters](#) (Labour; York Outer)

[Anna Dixon](#) (Labour; Shipley)

[Peter Fortune](#) (Conservative; Bromley and Biggin Hill)

[Rachel Gilmour](#) (Liberal Democrat; Tiverton and Minehead)

[Sarah Green](#) (Liberal Democrat; Chesham and Amersham)

[Sarah Hall](#) (Labour; Warrington South)

[Lloyd Hatton](#) (Labour; South Dorset)

[Chris Kane](#) (Labour; Stirling and Strathallan)

[James Murray](#) (Labour; Ealing North)

[Sarah Olney](#) (Liberal Democrat; Richmond Park)

[Rebecca Paul](#) (Conservative; Reigate)

[Michael Payne](#) (Labour; Gedling)

[Oliver Ryan](#) (Independent; Burnley)

Powers

Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No.148. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 23 June 2025, to be printed. It was published on 27 June 2025 by authority of the House of Commons.
© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2025.

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/pac and in print by Order of the House.

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 8480; the Committee's email address is pubaccom@parliament.uk. You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsPAC](https://twitter.com/CommonsPAC).

Contents

Summary	1
Introduction	2
Conclusions and recommendations	3
1 Raising awareness of T Levels	7
Introduction	7
Raising awareness amongst students	8
Raising awareness amongst employers	11
Establishing T Levels within the wider skills landscape	12
2 Understanding the impact of T Levels	14
Ensuring T Levels address skills gaps	14
Tracking and understanding progress	15
Colleges' ability to offer T Levels	17
Formal minutes	19
Witnesses	21
Published written evidence	22
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	23

Summary

T Levels have a critical role to play in providing young people with the technical skills needed to address vital skills gaps, both now and in the future, across the UK economy. While the Department for Education (The Department) has made progress introducing T Levels, it must now rapidly build on progress and set out how it plans to tackle the significant challenges that remain. The Department is confident that it can significantly scale up enrolments, from 25,508 in September 2024 to 66,100 by September 2029, but the scale of this challenge should not be underestimated.

The success and value for money of T Levels relies on increasing student numbers. However, in 2023 only 50% of year 9 to 11 students had heard of them, and it has been unclear to students, teachers and colleges how T Levels fit alongside other technical qualifications. The Department uses word of mouth as one way to promote T Levels but recognises it can do more to raise awareness. Although many T Levels students have had positive experiences, with seven in ten students feeling well prepared for the workplace, low satisfaction with certain courses alongside completion and pass rates risk tainting views of T Levels. For example, T Level pass rates fell from 97% in summer 2022 to 89% in summer 2024 – the Department is confident pass rates will improve but has not specified the progress it expects to see by when.

All students need an industry placement to finish their T Level. Although it is encouraging 98% of students completing their course in summer 2024 had a placement, more will be needed with growing student numbers. With only a third of employers aware of T Levels, and colleges already finding it hard to secure placements, the Department cannot lose focus and must do more to engage employers.

Although T Levels are more expensive than other level 3 qualifications, at around £5,500 to £7,000 per student per year compared with £4,800, the Department currently assesses T Levels will be 25% more valuable. However, without more students enrolled, the Department risks not achieving the required economies of scale and these benefits. If not, against a backdrop of existing financial challenges, colleges could face greater costs, especially if those awarding qualifications set higher fees, which already increased by up to 149% since the initial contracts.

Introduction

In September 2020, the Department for Education (the Department) introduced T Levels, two-year technical qualifications for 16- to 19-year-olds across a range of skills such as early years education, healthcare and digital. As at March 2025, the Department had introduced 21 T Levels, with 16 of these delivered on time. One more will be introduced in September 2025, and two existing T Levels will be stopped.

Designed to support young people into skilled employment and bridge skills gaps, a T Level equates to three A levels and involves an industry placement and more learning hours than similar technical qualifications. Those involved in developing and delivering T Levels include: the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), which contracts with organisations to develop and award T Levels; employers, who contribute to developing the qualifications and provide industry placements; and colleges, who teach students and organise their placements.¹

The Department is responsible for securing value for money from T Levels. Given their design, they cost more per student than other level 3 qualifications. The future economic benefits of T Levels, critical to assessing their success, are uncertain. The Department's current best judgement is that T Levels will be 25% more valuable, with an estimated economic benefit of around £23,000 per student over their lifetime.

¹ In July 2024, the Department announced plans for IfATE's functions to pass to a new public body, Skills England; For the purposes of this report 'Colleges' include schools, sixth form colleges and University Technical Colleges.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. More students need to complete T Levels for them to be sustainable and deliver expected outcomes.** In September 2024, 25,508 students enrolled on T Levels, significantly fewer than the Department's original ambition and earlier forecasts. In 2022, the Department revised its ambition from 100,000 by September 2025 to 70,000 enrolments by September 2027. To increase numbers, and achieve its current 66,100 forecast for September 2029, the Department recognises it must do more to improve awareness, with only 50% of students in years 9 to 11 aware of T Levels in 2023. The Department relies on students' sharing their positive experiences. Although seven in ten student thought their T level prepared them well for their workplace, student satisfaction has been mixed (between 39% for those studying health and science-related T Levels and 79% for those on Education and Early Years); low numbers move from the foundation year to T Levels (8% in summer 2022); and students find T Levels have a higher workload and assessment burden than similar technical qualifications. The fact T levels have more of an 'all or nothing' assessment approach than similar technical qualifications makes them riskier. Also, not all higher education institutions accept T Levels – in November 2024 only 166 accepted them for at least one course. Women are under-represented on some T Level courses, such as engineering, while students with special educational needs are less likely to enrol on a T Level than other vocational courses.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should, within six months, develop a structured plan setting out its 'campaign approach' to increasing student awareness and enrolments in T Levels. It should address how the curriculum can be tailored to appeal to a diverse student group (including women) while meeting employers' needs; how the credibility of T Levels can be systematically portrayed through teachers and careers officers promoting T Levels; and how to increase the number of higher education institutions that recognise T Levels. The Department's Treasury Minute response should set out a timeline for implementing the plan.

- 2. There is a risk that colleges cannot secure enough industry placements for more students to complete their T Levels.** Industry placements are a mandatory part of a T Level. While 98% of students finishing their T Level in summer 2024 completed a placement, colleges will need to find significantly more placements should student numbers increase in line with forecasts. However, only one third of employers are aware of T Levels and colleges face challenges sourcing placements in certain locations and for certain courses, such as engineering, digital and health. The Department has previously estimated that a shortage of teachers and industry placements would limit T Levels to 48,000 enrolments but is now confident this risk has been mitigated. For example, from January 2025, it allowed 20% of a placement to be remote (50% for placements in Digital T Levels) and recently reintroduced funding, available from 23 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, for small to medium employers offering placements or those offering health-related placements. The Department has trialled placement co-ordinators for some integrated care boards. It is having conversations with mayoral strategic authorities and recognises that Local Skills Improvement Plans are useful in raising awareness of T Levels.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should set out its plan to improve employer awareness of T Levels, capitalising on local arrangements, including Local Skills Improvement Plans and expanding good practice in finding health placements through integrated care boards.

- 3. The Department has not provided clarity on how T Levels align with other technical qualifications and career pathways.** After pausing the previous government's decision to defund qualifications overlapping with T Levels, in December 2024 the new government announced funding would continue for certain technical qualifications until 2027. The Department believes too many overlapping qualifications creates confusion for students and confirmed further funding decisions will be made following the Curriculum and Assessment Review expected in Autumn 2025. In February 2024, there were 4,337 level 3 qualifications, with 39% being vocational. In 2023, 2% of 16- to 17-year-olds were taking T Levels. The Department has since announced that students will no longer be able to enrol on either the Onsite Construction and Healthcare Science T Levels, risking confidence amongst students, teachers, colleges and employers. Students need clarity on which qualification, or combination of qualifications, best suits their chosen career route. This is particularly true for those interested in hair and beauty and catering where T Levels will no-longer be developed.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should set out publicly, for students, colleges and teachers, how T Levels fit with other funded qualifications, so students understand their route into skilled professions.

4. T Levels are intended to address skills gaps and meet employers' needs, but they cannot quickly be adapted to meet this objective.

T Levels have been developed and approved by employers to, for example, better meet their needs and improve students' employment prospects. It will take time to develop course content – the Department and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) update qualification content each year, but it can take a minimum 18 months for an occupational standard, which provides the basis of a T Level, to be changed. T Levels will need to meet evolving skills gaps. For example, in February 2025, the government announced an increase in defence spending to create new jobs, skills and opportunities across the country, and in April 2025, £600 million to train up to 60,000 more construction workers.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should work with awarding organisations to consider options for developing and reviewing T Level content quickly to maximise the responsiveness of T Level qualifications to changing skills needs in the most efficient way.

5. The Department has not yet provided complete clarity over what good progress looks like in T Levels becoming established and when benefits will be realised. The Department has identified four potential benefits associated with T Levels, including progression to further study or skilled employment, and higher earnings than those studying other level 3 qualifications. However, there is a time lag before some of this information will become available and the Department only has targets for two of the four benefits. It is yet to identify how to measure employers' confidence or students' earnings. For these benefits to be realised, the Department needs to ensure students enrol, complete and pass T Levels. It expects pass rates to increase over time, as T Levels mature, but the proportion of students passing has fallen from 97% in summer 2022 to 89% in summer 2024. It does not have a target. The Department also wants to bring student retention rates in line with other large vocational qualifications. In summer 2024, 73% of 16-year-old entrants completed their T Level compared to 78% for other qualifications. The Department's best judgement is that T Levels are 25% more valuable than other level 3 qualifications, with an estimated economic benefit of £23,000 for each T level student over their lifetime although this is very uncertain.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should refine its benefit tracking, update the estimated economic benefit for T level students, and define clear milestones to better understand whether progress, for example on pass rates, aligns with expectations.

- 6. Various factors, such as teacher recruitment and awarding organisation fees, will influence colleges' uptake of T Levels particularly given their wider financial challenges.** The Department recognises the additional burden faced by colleges to recruit T Level teachers, especially given that T Levels themselves are addressing areas of skills shortages. It is working with industry to facilitate a teacher exchange programme and offering certain teachers' financial incentives. However, colleges face wider pressures in recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly in specialist subjects, and other financial challenges. T Levels will be an additional burden for colleges. For the 2025/26 academic year, The Department has confirmed a 5% funding uplift for the additional costs to colleges moving from offering other level 3 programmes to T Levels, but this compares to 10% in the two years before. Colleges must also pay a set fee for each student to organisations that award T Levels. These fees increased by amounts ranging from 26% to 149% on six of its latest contracts and may increase further should student numbers remain low.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should:

- a.** develop a better understanding of the T Level-related funding pressures on colleges, particularly the extent of changes in the costs (or fees) of awarding organisation contracts and recruiting and retaining teachers, and the potential impact of changes in these costs; and
- b.** set out a workforce strategy for supporting colleges to recruit and retain teachers.

1 Raising awareness of T Levels

Introduction

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Department for Education (The Department) and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) on introducing T Levels.²
2. T Levels, introduced by the Department in 2020, are two-year technical qualifications for 16- to 19-year-olds across a range of skills, such as early years education, engineering, health and digital. Designed to support young people into skilled employment and bridge skills gaps, a T Level equates to three A levels and involves an industry placement and more learning hours than similar technical qualifications. As at March 2025, DfE introduced 21 T Levels, with 16 of these delivered on time and one more to be introduced in September 2025. Two of these T Levels, Onsite Construction and Healthcare Science, will be stopped given low student numbers.³
3. The Department is responsible for securing value for money from T Levels.⁴ In 2016, it established a programme to develop and introduce these qualifications. This involves IfATE contracting organisations to develop and award T Levels; employers contribute to developing the qualifications and providing industry placements; and colleges teaching students and organising placements.⁵
4. T Levels cost colleges more per student than other level 3 qualifications. However, the Department's current "best judgement" is that T Levels will be 25% more valuable (an estimated £23,000 per student over their lifetime in 2019–20 prices). The future economic benefits of T Levels, critical to

2 C&AG's Report, [Investigation into introducing T Levels](#), Session 2024–25, HC 768, 28 March 2025; In July 2024, the Department announced plans for IfATE's functions to pass to a new public body, Skills England

3 C&AG's Report, paras 1, 6, 11

4 C&AG's Report, para 2

5 C&AG's Report, para 2; For the purposes of this report 'colleges' include schools, sixth form colleges and University Technical Colleges.

assessing their success, are uncertain. The Department sees its greatest value for money risk as T Levels not offering more benefits than other level 3 qualifications.⁶

5. We received written submissions from a range of organisations including those representing colleges and their leaders and those awarding T Levels. A full list of the written evidence is available on the inquiry page of our website.⁷ Particular points drawn to our attention include:
- students' perspectives on T Levels with comments around the assessment burden; need to specialise for some T Levels; and the 'all or nothing' approach to T Levels, where failing one part of the course leads to an overall fail, deterring students from enrolling. Submissions also highlighted the underrepresentation of women in engineering T Levels;
 - the lack of awareness of T Levels amongst employers, with colleges specifically finding it hard to develop relationships with local employers;
 - lower-than-expected student numbers, and the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of contract management, impacting the financial viability of contacts for those awarding T Levels.

Raising awareness amongst students

6. In September 2024, the fifth year of T Levels being available, 25,508 students started the qualification, reflecting 42% of the Department's earliest November 2022 estimate, 85% of its August 2023 estimate and 1% higher than its October 2023 estimate. There are inherent uncertainties associated with estimating student numbers, with wider changes, such as the Advanced British Standard, impacting these estimates. Drawing on its estimates, in 2022 the Department revised down its ambition for T Level enrolments from 100,000 students in September 2025 to 70,000 in September 2027.⁸
7. The Department's latest forecast of 66,100 T Level starters in September 2029 is significantly more than the 25,508 students starting in September 2024. We asked the Department about its confidence in meeting this forecast – it told us it was positive progress could be made and that it was improving its model to more accurately forecast

6 C&AG's Report, paras 13, 20

7 Committee of Public Accounts, [Introducing T Levels - Written evidence](#)

8 C&AG's Report, paras 2.2-2.4

student numbers. However, it still recognised that more needed to be done to raise awareness.⁹ In 2023, 50% of students in years 9 to 11 were aware of T Levels.¹⁰

8. The Department told us it relies on the positive experiences and word of mouth from T Level students as one way to raise awareness.¹¹ However, students have reported varied satisfaction. For instance, those who started a T Level in 2021 reported higher satisfaction with their industry placements (78%) than the management of T Levels (37%), while those on the Education and Early Years T Level were more satisfied at the end of their course (79%) than those taking health and science-related T Levels (39%).¹² However, it also highlighted that seven in ten students thought their T levels prepared them well for their workplace, 10% to 15% higher than comparable level 3 qualifications.¹³ The Department also described using a wider skills promotion campaign and a network of ‘ambassadors’ to raise awareness across students and employers. It described the network, including over 900 members covering both students and employers, as providing feedback on how well T Levels were working and promoting the qualification to others.¹⁴
9. We heard of various reasons for students not being aware of T Levels or keen to enrol. Written evidence we received described students being unclear about what T Levels offered and uncertainty over their position particularly following government’s announcement to reverse introducing a new qualification, the Advanced British Standard, which would have incorporated T Levels.¹⁵ It also described excessive workload and assessment burden as challenging for students.¹⁶ In response to the assessment volume impacting students completing their T Level, the Department told us that IfATE has been using colleges’ feedback to change assessments, specifically across digital T Levels.¹⁷ When we pressed the Department on its plans to further streamline assessments and T Level content, it committed to taking onboard this feedback and continually looking for opportunities while retaining the quality of the qualification.¹⁸

9 Qq 7, 12, 33; C&AG’s Report, para 7

10 C&AG’s Report, para 14

11 Qq 25- 26

12 C&AG’s Report, para 10

13 Q 28

14 Qq 20; 33; C&AG’s Report, para 15

15 Edge Foundation ([ITL0003](#)); National Foundation for Educational Research ([ITL0006](#)); Make UK ([ITL0012](#)); EngineeringUK ([ITL0014](#))

16 Thomas Pocklington Trust ([ITL0001](#)); Association of Schools and College Leaders ([ITL0002](#)); Association of Colleges ([ITL0005](#)); [ITL0006](#); Education and Training Foundation ([ITL0008](#)); Pearson plc ([ITL0011](#)); City and Guilds ([ITL0013](#))

17 Qq 8, 21; C&AG’s Report, para 2.7

18 Q 35

10. The Department introduced the T Level Foundation Year for those needing support before starting a T Level. However, few of those on these courses progressed to T Levels – in 2021/22 only 8% of those completing the Foundation year then did a T Level.¹⁹ The Department acknowledged this was lower than expected and said it was monitoring how it could tailor the foundation year so more would do T Levels.²⁰ More widely, the Department has sought to address barriers by now recognising higher education as an aim for those completing T Levels. However, in November 2024, the Department published a list of only 166 higher education providers accepting T Levels for at least one course.²¹ We questioned the Department on its current ‘all or nothing’ approach to T Levels, where failing one part of a course leads to a fail overall, and the impact of this on university entry. It reassured us it allocates UCAS points for completing the core and occupational specialism components of the T Level. It also described giving students the flexibility to complete their industry placement up to two years after their course to still receive their qualification.²²
11. We challenged the Department on the underrepresentation of women in engineering and manufacturing T Levels, which mirrored the current workforce, and what it could learn from others internationally. This included the Supporting Adolescent Girls’ Education programme in Zimbabwe, which supports out-of-school adolescent girls into education and vocational training through revising the school curriculum.²³ Written evidence we received also highlighted the gender disparity; lower proportion of disadvantaged students in engineering and technology T Levels; and the restrictions on remote working creating a barrier for students with special educational needs (SEND) accessing T Levels.²⁴ Students with SEND are less likely to enrol on a T Level than other vocational courses – in 2022/23 students who had been assessed as having SEND by age 15 made up 11% of T Level students, compared with 15% of level 3 vocational qualifications students.²⁵ The Department told us it will continue to monitor disparities by socioeconomic status, race, gender and SEND breakdowns and consider what more it can do to address these within T Levels and other vocational technical qualifications.²⁶

19 C&AG’s Report, para 14

20 Q 54

21 C&AG’s Report, paras 1.9 and 3.25

22 Qq 35-36

23 Qq 58-60

24 [ITL0001](#), [ITL0014](#)

25 C&AG’s Report, para 2.6

26 Qq 56-60

Raising awareness amongst employers

12. Employers play a critical role across T Levels, through helping to develop qualification content that meets their requirements and providing students with industry placements.²⁷ However not all employers are aware of T Levels – the Department told us that currently only a third of employers know about the qualification.²⁸ Written evidence from EngineeringUK highlighted that while most of the engineering and manufacturing employers it surveyed in 2022 had heard of T Levels, a large proportion of small and medium employers did not and only 28% understood what they involved.²⁹ However, the Department described that once employers had started providing industry placements, they often increased the places offered.³⁰
13. Industry placements are a mandatory part of T Levels. Of those finishing their T Level in summer 2024, 98% had completed a placement. However, in August 2023, the Department estimated that shortages in placements could limit T Level places to 48,000.³¹ Nevertheless, the Department told us that its work to date gave it confidence that the forecasted 66,100 students starting T Levels in September 2029 will have a placement although it could do more to raise awareness.³² It told us that Skills England will lead work with employers and wider government and that it is speaking with mayoral strategic authorities about their role in bringing together placements in their area given their relations with employers. The Department did not give details on how it plans to use Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) to raise awareness of T Levels beyond them encouraging conversations.³³ We received written evidence which suggested the need for a cross-government strategy, alongside LSIPs and employer representative bodies, to encourage more businesses to engage with colleges to offer placements.³⁴
14. Colleges play a key role coordinating and securing industry placements for T Level students. They will need to find more placements as student numbers increase, ensuring employers can offer placements but also that they have the capacity to source and oversee placements.³⁵ The Department said it offers colleges £550 per student to help them arrange a placement.³⁶

27 C&AG's Report, paras 2, 3.2

28 Q 26

29 [ITL0014](#)

30 Q 20

31 C&AG's Report, paras 15, 1.4, 2.5

32 Qq 6-7, 26-27; C&AG's Report, para 7

33 Qq 49-50

34 [ITL0003](#), [ITL0005](#), [ITL0008](#)

35 C&AG's Report, para 3.21

36 Q 11

In 2024, the Department found colleges were facing particular challenges finding placements across their health, engineering, construction and digital T Levels.³⁷ The written evidence we received from the Education and Training Foundation raised further concerns across the legal, finance, and creative industries.³⁸ Evidence from the Association of Colleges noted challenges across different areas, with poor transport links in rural communities making students' travel to placements difficult or expensive.³⁹

15. The Department also described its work to address employers' concerns and challenges in offering placements.⁴⁰ For example, we received written evidence from Make UK and EngineeringUK describing the health and safety concerns associated with hosting students.⁴¹ The Department described reintroducing funding to support employers, available from 23 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, for small to medium employers offering placements or those offering health-related placements (for example to procure the necessary personal, protective equipment).⁴² It has also created more flexibilities for employers. For example, by allowing them to host T Level students remotely up to 20% of the time (50% for digital T Levels) from January 2025 and allowing some elements of placements to be done in simulated environments.⁴³ We also questioned the Department about some employers having concerns that T Level students joining them didn't have enough skills or experience. The Department recognised it needs to do more to clarify miscommunication around T Level students' capabilities but is relying on local partnerships between colleges and employers to alleviate these concerns.⁴⁴ It also described trialling placement coordinators in some NHS integrated care boards to generate more placements.⁴⁵

Establishing T Levels within the wider skills landscape

16. In 2019, the Department stated that T Levels would become the main technical qualification option for 16- to 19-year-olds.⁴⁶ In response to questions around how T Levels fit into its plans to address critical skills gaps across the economy, the Department told us they are part of a landscape

37 Q 3; C&AG's Report, para 3.21

38 [ITL0008](#)

39 [ITL0005](#)

40 Qq 44-48

41 [ITL0012](#), [ITL0014](#)

42 Qq 11, 43; HMG, [April 2025 - confirmation of additional support for T Levels](#), 28 April 2025

43 Qq 40-42

44 Qq 46-48

45 Q 44

46 C&AG's Report, para 5

of different qualifications needed to meet different skills gaps.⁴⁷ In February 2024, there were 4,337 level 3 qualifications, with 39% being vocational.⁴⁸ In 2023, 2% of 16- to 17-year-olds were taking T Levels.⁴⁹

17. In December 2024, the Department announced that there would be no further enrolments on the Onsite Construction T Level after September 2024. In March 2025, it announced it would also stop the Healthcare Science T Level, and that it had stopped developing T Levels in catering and beauty therapy.⁵⁰ We questioned the Department around the uncertainty in the future of T Levels, which may impact students' and colleges' confidence in them as an option.⁵¹ The Department told us that it considers having too many overlapping qualifications creates confusion for students.⁵² However, we received written evidence highlighting the need for other level 3 qualifications alongside T Levels to, for example, allow student choice and flexibility for students to combine qualifications. In particular, T Levels do not meet the needs of all learners due to its demanding content and assessment requirements.⁵³ The Department recognised T Levels may not be suitable for everyone, and those completing a T Level would more likely go into a higher-level apprenticeship.⁵⁴
18. In December 2024, following its previous decision to pause defunding qualifications overlapping with T Levels, the Department announced funding would continue for certain qualifications until 2027. It also committed to continually reviewing those qualifications with low or no enrolments and confirmed that the Curriculum and Assessment Review, expected in Autumn 2025, would help inform future plans.⁵⁵

47 Qq 2, 10, 45

48 Ofqual, [All Regulated Qualifications Landscape](#), 21 February 2024

49 DfE, [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#), 18 March 2025

50 C&AG's Report, para 6

51 Qq 38, 61-62

52 Q 62

53 [ITL002](#), [ITL005](#), [ITL006](#), [ITL008](#), [ITL011](#), [ITL013](#)

54 Q 62

55 HMG, [The outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform at Level 3 in England](#), 14 April 2025

2 Understanding the impact of T Levels

Ensuring T Levels address skills gaps

19. The Department for Education's (The Department's) aims for T Levels include improving technical education and work outcomes for young people, alongside having qualifications that better meet employers' skills needs. T Levels are based on occupational standards that are developed and approved by employers. They include a core curriculum, alongside a specialism which students choose covering specific knowledge, skills and behaviours. As at March 2025, there were 74 occupational specialisms across 21 T Levels.⁵⁶ Written evidence received as part of this inquiry highlighted concerns around overspecialised and overlapping T Level content, which did not meet employer's needs, particularly within engineering T Levels.⁵⁷
20. The Department said that as T Levels reflect a major change to the technical qualification landscape, it will take time to develop course content.⁵⁸ We challenged the Department on how quickly T Level content could be adapted to ensure students were taught the skills needed within the economy both now and in the future.⁵⁹ For example, in early 2025 the government announced defence spending increasing to 2.5% of GDP from April 2027, supporting highly skilled jobs, and a £600 million investment in training 60,000 more skilled construction workers.⁶⁰ In December 2024, the Department announced it was stopping the Onsite Construction T Level.⁶¹ In response to emerging skills needs, the Department described looking across all skills routes and opportunities. It was also investing in Skills Bootcamps, 12-week training programmes,

56 C&AG's Report, paras 1.4, 1.6, 2.9

57 [ITL0002](#)

58 C&AG's Report, para 2.7

59 Qq 9-10

60 HMG, [Prime Minister sets out biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the Cold War](#); 25 February 2025; HM Treasury, [Government unleashes next generation of construction workers to build 1.5m homes](#), 23 March 2025

61 DfE, [The outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform at Level 3 in England](#), 12 December 2024

to quickly prepare people for work.⁶² The Department and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) also set out how, each year, they review and update the content of T Levels and will continue to do so. However, it could take a minimum of 18 months to make substantive changes to occupational standards.⁶³ Pearson and City and Guilds, organisations that develop and award T Levels, also highlighted the excessive content within T Levels, and inability to respond quickly to market changes as difficulties for the Department in scaling up T Levels.⁶⁴

Tracking and understanding progress

- 21.** The Department has identified four potential benefits associated with T Levels – progression to further study or skilled employment; students’ readiness for their chosen career; higher earnings than those studying other level 3 qualifications; and employers’ confidence in T Level graduates.⁶⁵ The Department described that, as it would take time for T Levels to become established, this would impact progress and realisation of benefits.⁶⁶ Anticipated benefits were particularly uncertain as T Levels had not been available for long, so student numbers were hard to estimate and data on their subsequent earnings was not yet available.⁶⁷ The Department noted that through being introduced in 2020, T Levels were brand new compared to A levels that have been around for 74 years. It described how a conscious decision for other qualifications to be currently offered alongside T Levels would make it more challenging to establish the programme.⁶⁸
- 22.** The Department only has targets in place for two of its four identified benefits – progression to further study or skilled employment and students’ readiness for their chosen career. It does not have targets to understand progress in employers’ confidence in T Level graduates or students’ earnings. As at June 2024, it was not yet monitoring employers’ feedback due to difficulties identifying a robust evidence source. It was also using student surveys as alternative evidence for student outcomes.⁶⁹ The Department stated that 44% of T Level students progressed onto a university degree and 49% went on to paid work, including an

62 Q 10

63 Q 9

64 [ITL0011](#), [ITL0013](#)

65 C&AG’s Report, Para 2.17, Figure 9

66 Q 61

67 C&AG’s Report, paras 13, 2.18-2.19

68 Q 61

69 C&AG’s Report, para 2.18, Figure 9

apprenticeship, with seven out of ten students studying a higher or degree-level apprenticeship. It also described how seven in ten T Level students go into areas related to their chosen specialism.⁷⁰

23. The Department's current "best judgement" is that T Levels will be 25% more valuable than other level 3 qualifications (around £23,000 per student over their lifetime, in 2019–20 prices).⁷¹ It will get a better understanding of this uplift as the programme matures. For example, it uses assumptions on students' future earnings which are inherently uncertain.⁷² The Department acknowledged that its judgements were best estimates at this stage as so few students had completed T Levels making it hard to generate evidence on longer lifetime earnings. It described students moving into work and higher-level study as good signs of the quality and value of T Levels.⁷³
24. For benefits to be realised, the Department needs to increase the number of students enrolling but also then completing and passing T Levels.⁷⁴ Given that the Department withdrew some T Levels due to lack of demand, we questioned the Department on its confidence in achieving its latest forecast for increasing student numbers. The Department confirmed it is confident that it will meet its forecast of 66,100 students starting in September 2029.⁷⁵ On completion rates, the Department told us this jumped from 68% for those starting in September 2021 at 16 years to 73% for those starting in 2022 at 16 years. This compares to 78% for large vocational technical qualifications, which are the most similar qualification. The Department told us that, even with progress so far, it would like to close this gap.⁷⁶
25. In terms of pass rates, the Department told us that it does not set a target but that it would expect to see pass rates slowly rise as the qualification becomes more established and better understood. It also noted that pass rates are influenced by new T Levels being introduced each year and growing numbers of colleges offering T Levels.⁷⁷ The proportion of students passing their T Level fell from 97% in summer 2022 to 89% in summer 2024 with the overall pass rate across the 10 T Levels also assessed in summer 2023 remaining similar. In summer 2022, only three T Levels had been available at a small number of providers selected by the Department for their quality and capability.⁷⁸

70 Qq 12, 17, 19

71 C&AG's Report, para 13

72 C&AG's Report, para 2.20

73 Qq 17-18

74 C&AG's Report, para 2.1

75 Qq 5-7; C&AG's Report, para 7

76 Q 55

77 Q 52

78 Qq 51-52; C&AG's Report, para 2.8

Colleges' ability to offer T Levels

- 26.** Colleges play a critical role in providing T Levels – as well as sourcing industrial placements, they must have enough teaching staff with the right expertise, industry-standard facilities and specialist equipment to teach T Level students.⁷⁹ Alongside introducing T Levels, colleges are also facing difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers and wider financial challenges. In 2021 the previous Public Accounts Committee reported that financial pressures, such as rising staff pension costs, were affecting provision for students, including through colleges narrowing curriculums and reducing enrichment activities.⁸⁰
- 27.** The Department told us it recognises the additional burden of T Levels on colleges. It had sought to address this, and help colleges transition to T Levels from other level 3 programmes, by providing a 10% funding uplift in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This reduced to a 5% funding uplift for 2025/26.⁸¹ The Department explained that colleges received a higher uplift in the earlier stages of the roll-out when T Levels were newer.⁸² It also told us it had introduced a retention incentive scheme for teachers training in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and priority subjects, awarding £6,000 annually after tax; offered bursaries to support teachers of STEM subjects; and is trialling a teacher exchange programme with industries. Despite these initiatives, it recognised there was more to do to attract teachers into the further education sector more widely.⁸³ Written evidence from the Education and Training Foundation, Association of School and College Leaders and Edge Foundation pointed to the ongoing recruitment and retention issues within the further education sector, specifically in the construction, engineering and digital industries.⁸⁴ We pressed the Department on the demands of T Levels compared to other level 3 qualifications. It told us that, with an average of 660 to 840 hours per year, T Levels required more study time than an average level 3 course (640 hours) but less than international comparators, including Canada (935 hours), Denmark (1,000 hours) and Italy (890–1,155 hours).⁸⁵
- 28.** For each student enrolled on a T Level, colleges need to pay a set fee to those organisations developing and awarding qualifications. For the latest set of contracts with awarding organisations procured by IfATE, fees per student had increased for six contracts, by amounts ranging

79 C&AG's report, para 3.17

80 Committee of Public Accounts, [Managing colleges' financial sustainability](#), Thirty-Eighth Report of Session 2019–21, HC 692, 27 January 2021

81 Q 23; HMG, [April 2025 - confirmation of additional support for T Levels](#), 28 April 2025

82 Q 11; C&AG's Report, Para 11, 2.14

83 Q 24

84 [ITL0002](#), [ITL0003](#), [ITL0008](#)

85 Q 34

from 26% to 149%. For the remaining two contracts, costs per student decreased by 18% and 37% respectively.⁸⁶ We pressed the Department on why the second-phase contracts were so much more expensive.⁸⁷ It described how the first contracts made a loss due to initially being priced too low by awarding organisations. Lower-than-expected student numbers then created additional financial pressures.⁸⁸ It confirmed that IfATE used an adaptive pricing approach, where student entry fees could be increased or decreased depending on student numbers, to ensure awarding organisations did not carry all the volume risks on the latest contracts. As a result, colleges may need to pay higher student fees to awarding organisations.⁸⁹ The Department described how the higher fees were comparable with the fees for three A levels, presented value for money for colleges and were a small proportion of colleges' overall costs. This contrasts with what we have heard from some colleges however, who felt fees were too high.⁹⁰

86 C&AG's Report, para 16

87 Q 64

88 Q 68; C&AG's Report, para 16

89 Qq 68, 71; C&AG's Report, para 3.11

90 Qq 64, 69-71

Formal minutes

Monday 23 June 2025

Members present

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts

Mr Luke Charters

Anna Dixon

Peter Fortune

Rachel Gilmour

Sarah Green

Sarah Hall

Sarah Olney

Oliver Ryan

Introducing T Levels

Draft Report (*Introducing T Levels*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 28 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirty-Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available
(Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Thursday 26 June at 9.30 a.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 24 April 2025

Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education;
Julia Kinniburgh, Director General, Skills, Department for Education;
Carmel Grant, Interim Chief Executive, Institute for Apprenticeships
and Technical Education

[Q1-74](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ITL numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	ASCL	ITL0002
2	Association of Colleges	ITL0005
3	City & Guilds	ITL0013
4	Edge Foundation	ITL0003
5	Education and Training Foundation	ITL0008
6	EngineeringUK	ITL0014
7	Food and Drink Federation	ITL0009
8	Gatsby Charitable Foundation	ITL0010
9	Make UK	ITL0012
10	National Foundation for Educational Research	ITL0006
11	Pearson plc	ITL0011
12	Thomas Pocklington Trust	ITL0001

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
34th	Department for Business and Trade Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24	HC 818
33rd	Supporting the UK's priority industry sectors	HC 1070
32nd	The Future of the Equipment Plan	HC 716
31st	Local Government Financial Sustainability	HC 647
30th	Antimicrobial resistance: addressing the risks	HC 646
29th	Condition of Government property	HC 641
28th	Decommissioning Sellafield	HC 363
27th	Government's relationship with digital technology suppliers	HC 640
26th	Tackling Violence against Women and Girls	HC 644
25th	DHSC Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24	HC 639
24th	Government cyber resilience	HC 643
23rd	The cost of the tax system	HC 645
22nd	Government's support for biomass	HC 715
21st	Fixing NHS Dentistry	HC 648
20th	DCMS management of COVID-19 loans	HC 364
19th	Energy Bills Support	HC 511
18th	Use of AI in Government	HC 356
17th	The Remediation of Dangerous Cladding	HC 362
16th	Whole of Government Accounts 2022-23	HC 367
15th	Prison estate capacity	HC 366
14th	Public charge points for electric vehicles	HC 512

Number	Title	Reference
13th	Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children	HC 365
12th	Crown Court backlogs	HC 348
11th	Excess votes 2023-24	HC 719
10th	HS2: Update following the Northern leg cancellation	HC 357
9th	Tax evasion in the retail sector	HC 355
8th	Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage	HC 351
7th	Asylum accommodation: Home Office acquisition of former HMP Northeye	HC 361
6th	DWP Customer Service and Accounts 2023-24	HC 354
5th	NHS financial sustainability	HC 350
4th	Tackling homelessness	HC 352
3rd	HMRC Customer Service and Accounts	HC 347
2nd	Condition and maintenance of Local Roads in England	HC 349
1st	Support for children and young people with special educational needs	HC 353