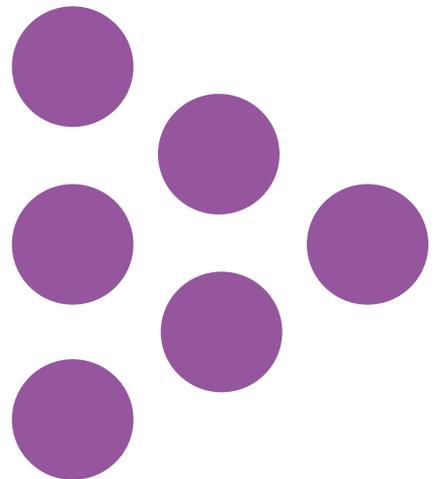

Follow-Up Report

T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery?

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing For Delivery? Follow-Up Report

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Contents

1	Introduction and background	1
1.1	Introduction to this report	1
1.2	T Levels round table	1
1.3	Structure of report	1
2	Context to T Levels	2
2.1	What is the education and training landscape that T Levels will become part of?	2
2.2	Where are the first T Level providers located?	4
2.3	How do T Levels compare to Level 3 qualifications in terms of size?	5
3	Updated findings	7
3.1	Introduction	7
3.2	Awareness of T Levels	7
3.3	Student recruitment and retention	7
3.4	Content and delivery	8
3.4.1	Content and assessment	8
3.4.2	Securing industry placements	9
3.5	Staffing	10
3.6	Progression routes	10
3.7	Social mobility	11
3.8	Uncertainty around Level 3 vocational and technical qualifications	11
4	Suggested actions	12
5	Concluding statement	15
	Appendix 1: List of round table attendees	16
	Appendix 2: Where are the first three T Level providers located?	17

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction to this report

This report provides a follow-up to the T Levels Research Study report, which was published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in June 2019. It is based on discussions that took place at NFER’s T Levels round table event, which was held in London on 8th October 2019.

1.2 T Levels round table

The aim of the round table was to:

- explore whether the T Levels research findings still resonated with providers and key sector representatives
- discuss the progress that had been made since the research was completed, as well as the challenges that had been tackled and those that remained
- suggest the actions that needed to be taken by providers, policy makers and other key stakeholder to make T Levels a success.

The T Levels round table was attended by:

- six provider representatives
- ten senior sector representatives
- a representative from the Department for Education.

A list of attendees can be found in Appendix 1.

1.3 Structure of report

The structure of the report is as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the current vocational and technical landscape as context to the introduction of T Levels
- Section 3 presents the updated findings from the round table discussions
- Section 3 suggests a range of actions for providers and policy makers which emerged from the round table.

Appendix 1: List of round table attendees.

Appendix 2: Maps of where the first three T Level providers are located.

2 Context to T Levels

This section provides a context to the introduction of T Levels which several round table attendees thought would be useful.

Firstly, it explores the education, training and employment destinations of 16 year olds who have completed compulsory schooling. This is the landscape into which T Levels will provide an alternative option for around 2,000 young people from September 2020.

Secondly, it presents a map of where the first T Levels providers are located to show where the first T levels will be delivered across England.

It then provides some background on the guided learning hours and industry placement requirements of current Level 3 qualifications against which we compare the T Level requirements.

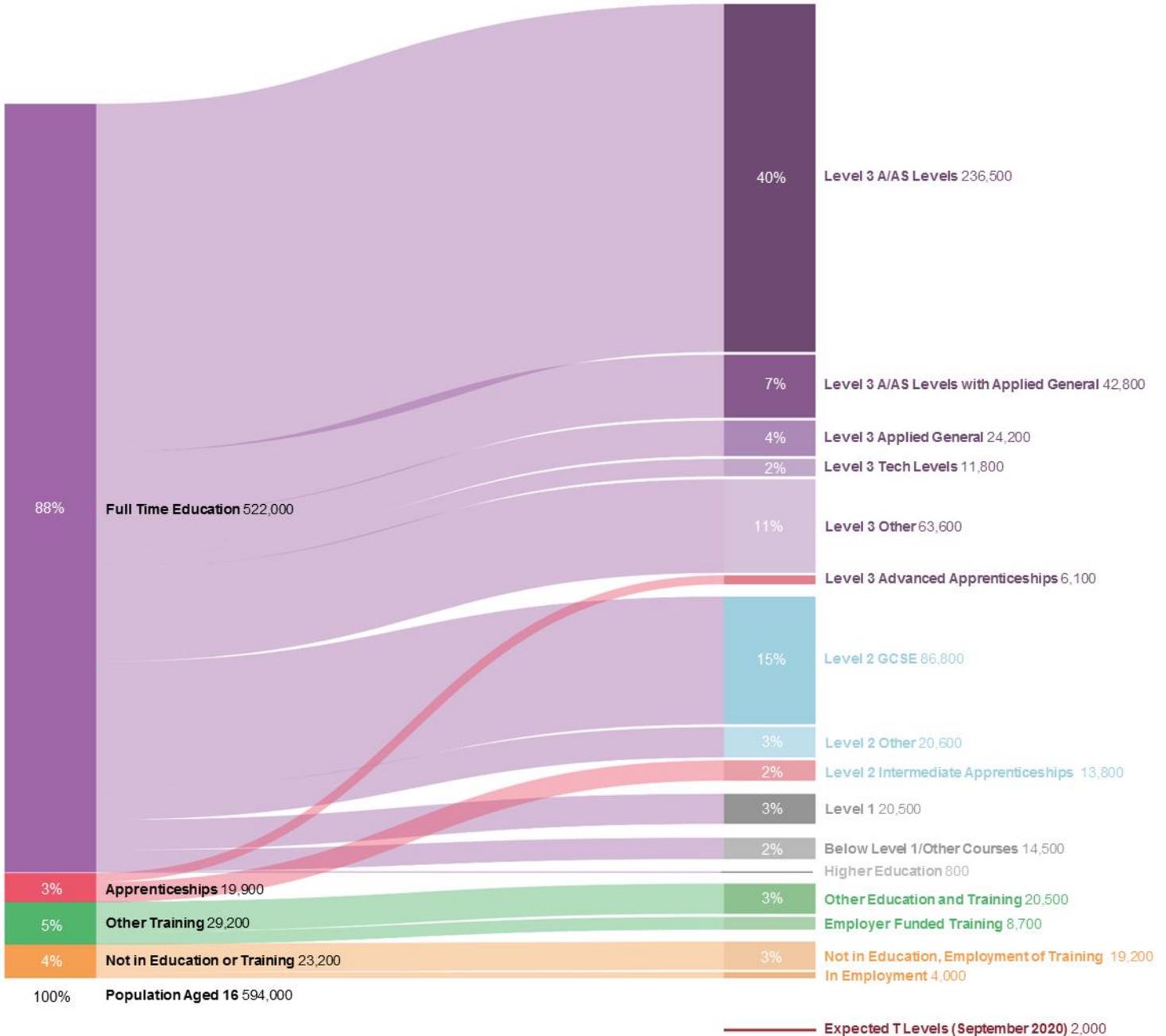
2.1 What is the education and training landscape that T Levels will become part of?

With an estimated 2,000 students taking the first T Levels from September 2020, they will, at that stage, only be a small part of the post-16 landscape. To put this number into perspective, in 2018 there were 594,000 young people in England who were aged 16 at the start of the new academic year.

Figure 1 shows the destinations of these 16-year-old students in autumn 2018 after they have completed compulsory schooling. The left-hand side of the figure shows that the majority of students continue in full-time academic and vocational/technical education, with small proportions progressing into apprenticeships, other training and employment or not undertaking education, employment or training (NEET). The right-hand side of the figure shows a further breakdown of qualification levels that they are pursuing in education and training - for example Level 1, 2 and 3.

T Levels are a Level 3 qualification and the cohort that is expected to undertake them initially will be far smaller than, for example, the number of students taking A/AS levels. The estimated number of 2,000 students taking the first T Levels equates to 0.7 per cent of all students taking A/AS levels ('A/AS levels' and 'A/AS levels with Applied General'), 5.6 per cent of students taking 'Applied Generals' and 'Tech Levels', 0.5 per cent of students taking Level 3 qualifications and 0.3 per cent of the entire cohort.

Figure 1: Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-year-olds in England 2018



Due to rounding and an overlap in recording between apprenticeships and full-time education (300) numbers may not sum to the population.

Data Source: Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England: End 2018 (Provisional)

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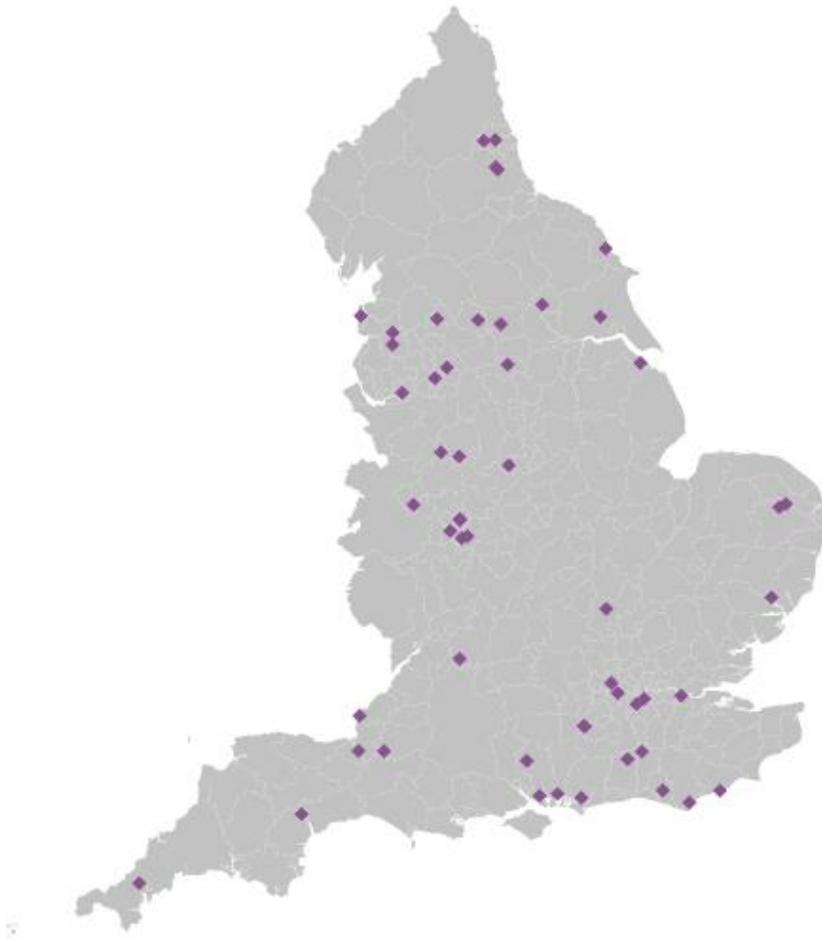
2.2 Where are the first T Level providers located?

In the first year, the delivery of T Levels will be limited in scale and coverage. There will be a small number of providers (50) delivering T Levels over selected geographic areas. The map below indicates where the first T Level providers are located.

It is worth noting that, in most cases, we have mapped the main campus postcode of providers and it could be that T Levels will (also) be delivered on a separate site. However, the map provides a useful overview of the location of T Level provision from September 2020.

Additional maps showing where the providers which will be delivering each of the first three T Levels are located can be found in Appendix 2.

Figure 2: Location of providers of first three T Levels



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2.3 How do T Levels compare to Level 3 qualifications in terms of size?

T Levels are much bigger in size than other Level 3 qualifications. The total time for a T Level is expected, on average, to be around 1,800 hours over the two years, including the industry placement. This is a significant increase on most current Level 3 vocational and technical education courses. Further details are provided below.

T Level courses will include the following compulsory elements:

- a technical qualification of between 900 and 1400 hours, incorporating:
 - core theory, concepts and skills for an industry area
 - specialist skills and knowledge for an occupation or career
- an industry placement with an employer of between 315-420 hours
- the study of English language and maths if students have not already achieved grade 4 or above in GCSE or a Level 2 functional skills qualification (estimated at around 70 hours for one GCSE and 140 hours for two).

T Levels may also include other occupationally-specific content set by T Level panels, leading to professional registration or licence to practice.

The table below compares the guided learning hours (GLH) of the T Level qualification to current Level 3 qualifications which are the same size as three A levels. We can see that the GLH of T Levels are higher than those for A levels, Applied Generals and Tech Levels.

Qualification	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)
3 A levels	1080 (360 per A level)
Applied Generals: e.g. Extended Diplomas/Technical Extended Diplomas	1080
Tech Levels: e.g. Extended Diplomas/Advanced Technical Extended Diplomas/Technical Extended Diploma	720/1080
T Levels	900-1400
- Construction: Design, Survey and Planning	1100
- Digital: Digital Production, Design and Development	1200
- Education and Childcare: Education	Not yet confirmed

In addition to GLH, the significant industry placement element of T Levels is much larger than that required within other Level 3 qualifications, with the exception of Childcare courses. An overview of the requirements for [Level 3 qualifications](#) is shown in the table below. A key point to note is that requirements vary by both awarding organisation, qualification and subject/sector.

Qualification	Employer involvement
3 A levels	A level study programmes are expected to include work-related learning, including a work experience element wherever possible. There is no set number of hours students should spend on placement. A week's work experience (around 35-40 hours) is fairly common.
Applied Generals	Employer involvement is not a requirement although qualifications may incorporate it depending on the qualification and sector/subject.
Tech Level	'Meaningful employer involvement' is mandatory but this can be via various means and there are usually no set hours for an industry placement. Where a placement is required, the hours vary by sector. For example, 730-750 hours are required for Extended Diplomas in Childcare ¹ but for other courses, where placement hours are set, they are generally lower than the T Level requirement (for example, for BTECs, the Land and Animal sector requires students to spend 300 hours on placement; Health and Social Care requires 100 hours of placement time).
T Levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction: Design, Survey and Planning - Digital: Digital Production, Design and Development - Education and Childcare: Education 	Minimum 315 hours industrial placement (expected to be 730 hours for Education and Childcare).

All T Level courses require students to spend 45 – 60 days (315 – 420 hours) on an industry placement. Within the Education and Childcare sector, this element is around 50% of the current requirement which make it easier to implement. However, within BTEC and City and Guilds Extended Diploma qualifications within the Construction and Digital sectors there are no specified hours/days that students are required to spend on work placement, although this does not mean that providers do not offer it, for example through optional units or their programme of study more broadly.

¹ For the BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development (Early Years Educator) 750 hours on placement are required within at least two settings, including a minimum of 100 hours with three different age ranges. For the NCFE CACHE Technical Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care (Early Years Educator), the recommended hours for a work placement are 730 spread over three age ranges. The same number of hours apply to City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner (Early Years Educator).

3 Updated findings

3.1 Introduction

It has only been around nine months since we first consulted with providers and senior sector representatives so not a great deal has changed and **most of the findings of our earlier report still resonate with consultees**. Providers reiterated that they welcomed being involved in T Levels from the beginning, were generally optimistic about the future of T Levels and were embracing the opportunity to be involved in the development phase. However, a number of challenges remain which they are proactively tackling and seeking solutions to. Further details on progress and continuing challenges are presented below.

3.2 Awareness of T Levels

Delegates welcomed the [NexT Level campaign](#) - which will raise national awareness of T Levels – as well as the funding providers are receiving for their own local awareness-raising. They felt that this level of national priority on raising the awareness of the new qualifications amongst students, parents/carers and employers was important given that T Levels are a totally new model of post-16 education. Compared to the 14-19 Diplomas, they felt that T Levels were clearer, more targeted and higher quality.

However, despite praising the national and local marketing support, **delegates felt that there remained significant work to do to raise the awareness and understanding of T Levels amongst young people, parents/carers and employers**. Providers reported some of the local activities that they were undertaking or were planning. These included raising awareness of vocational education and training more broadly as an alternative to A levels, alongside promoting T Levels more specifically. Providers talked of: meeting with business umbrella groups to promote T Levels more broadly to local employers, alongside targeted employer visits; developing promotional literature; providing information on T Levels on their website; activities to raise the awareness of college staff; and working with local schools. However, providers noted that, without the detailed specifications, at this stage they could not always answer students' and employers' more detailed questions.

3.3 Student recruitment and retention

Mirroring the findings from the earlier research consultations, providers were generally positive about meeting their student recruitment targets. This was mainly because they had set conservative targets which they felt were achievable. The DfE's national marketing campaign had also eased some recruitment fears. In addition there was some positivity about the Transition Programme in terms of providing a pipeline to T Levels. A number of providers provided details of their school engagement strategies and their work in raising the awareness of local careers advisers, school staff and students. However, concerns still remained regarding school protectionism and some providers commented that because of this they would struggle to promote T Levels in schools with sixth forms.

Delegates also reiterated a number of concerns regarding access to T Levels. One related to the size of qualification i.e. the number of guided learning hours. They felt that the size of the qualification would make it difficult to access for young people who relied on the money from part-time jobs and/or had caring responsibilities. Issues regarding transport to and from college and to placements also remained a key concern for colleges based in rural areas. In addition, although the rigour and value of T Levels for progression was not disputed, some delegates reported that the instruction and exam-based assessment would not be attractive to students who were seeking workshop-style delivery and continuous assessment.

3.4 Content and delivery

3.4.1 Content and assessment

There has been some curriculum and timetabling progress since our earlier consultations with providers. This includes the devising of different curriculum models to allow for flexibility in how and when students complete their industry placement, including options for students to access content online. However, **the late availability of the full T Level specifications in March 2020 and the tight timescale for fully developing the qualifications is still a cause for concern.** This leaves just six months for the qualifications to be ready for teaching in September 2020, which includes the summer break. It was commented that less work was needed in preparing for the Education and Childcare T Level as it was closely aligned to the CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education whereas the other two pathways included more content that was completely new for providers.

Delegates mentioned the minimum 600 guided learning hours and the size of assessment as an issue in terms of delivery (and access – see above). The larger number of guided learning hours was reported to be causing timetabling issues. In addition, **delegates reiterated the challenge of ensuring T Level students achieve Level 2 functional skills or GCSE grade 4 or above in English and maths at the end of the two-year programme.** This was due to limited time in the context of the other requirements of T Levels, particularly the Technical Qualification and the minimum 315 hours industry placement. They also commented on the fact that T Level students would have less time for extra-curricular activities which could impact on well-being and the attractiveness of the qualification.

There was some discussion around oversight of the industry placement element and who should be take ownership for monitoring quality. It was reported that some providers had a separate employer engagement team which was responsible for securing placements and that quality assurance could fall under their remit. However, they might not have the necessary knowledge to ensure that students were acquiring the required technical knowledge and skills on placement.

Providers were not yet clear how they would develop and assess transferable skills – such as communication skills, teamwork and resilience – within their curriculum. However, they felt that these skills were crucial for students to successfully obtain and complete industry placements and that these skills are of key importance to employers.

3.4.2 Securing industry placements

Providers reported enthusiasm from employers and higher levels of awareness of T Levels than they had anticipated and, as a result, they felt positive about being able to secure their target number of placements for the 2020/21 academic year. In particular, it was thought that placements would be easier to secure in Education and Childcare as the sector was used to a significant placement element in existing Level 3 courses. Positive comments were also made about the responsiveness and helpfulness of the CITB in terms of raising employers’ awareness and supporting industry placements in construction and about digital employers in terms of trying to find solutions to challenges in providing placements. It was also commented that independent training providers had significant experience of working with employers and could provide support to colleges in this regard.

However, delegates qualified their positive comments by adding that different employers were able to offer different levels of engagement and support to students. In addition, each sector has a different make-up and characteristics. This suggested the need for **flexibility in terms of how individual employers and how employers in different sectors engage with T Levels**. They welcomed the DfE’s [update on delivery models and support](#) and the increased flexibility this had provided. However, to allow employers to engage more flexibly, they called for **project-based learning and work-related learning to be counted within the minimum 315 hours industrial placement requirement**. This would enable the engagement of employers who lacked capacity to support a placement and did not have a physical base. This particularly applied to digital businesses.

A number of other current challenges were mentioned in the discussions which included:

- challenges in **students in rural areas travelling to placements** (though it was reported that some employers in rural areas were offering to transport students to and from their placement)
- **competition for placements** – particularly with degree apprenticeships and graduate placements which it was felt some employers may favour over T Levels
- a lack of understanding that digital placements do not just have to be secured within digital businesses - all companies have a digital focus and placements could, for example, be found in the public sector e.g. hospitals and local authorities which have a significant digital function
- having to re-establish links with a business once a key contact leaves.

In the longer-term, **securing industry placements at scale once T Levels are fully rolled out** was noted as a concern. The DfE expect providers who have accessed the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) in the 2018/19 academic year to deliver more than 20,000 T Level type placements to current vocational students. One delegate suggested that the number of T Level style industry placements would need to double from 20,000 to 40,000 when T Levels are rolled out.

3.5 Staffing

Delegates generally felt optimistic about having the staff and skills they needed to deliver T Levels from 2020. Some reported that they were taking advantage of the opportunity to undertake [T Level Industry Insights placements](#), as part of the professional development package being managed by the Education and Training Foundation. Others reported having a bank of freelance staff they could draw on to deliver different aspects of the digital T Level.

However, there were still a number of concerns around staffing. This included the medium and longer-term challenges of keeping the industrial knowledge and skills of staff up-to-date and recruitment and retention issues. Recruitment and retention challenges are likely to be particularly severe in sectors such as digital, construction and engineering, where higher salaries can be commanded in industry.

Other issues discussed included:

- ensuring staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver content that is new e.g. materials science for the construction T Level
- gaining buy-in from staff to deliver T Levels, where they are concerned about the new content and the possible withdrawal of Applied General Qualifications (AGQs)
- releasing staff for training, with staff cover not often being available.

Delegates suggested that it would be useful for providers to share practice regarding solutions to staffing issues.

3.6 Progression routes

There remains a degree of uncertainty around progression routes from T Levels.

Delegates welcomed the [UCAS Tariff Points that have been allocated to T Levels](#). However, universities are free to decide whether they will accept T Levels and there were questions as to whether Russell Group institutions will accept T Levels and what type of courses T Level students will be able to progress on to. Linked to this, decisions made by Russell Group universities may influence other universities and could tarnish T Levels in the minds of parents/carers. In terms of the first three T Levels, this was felt to be a particular issue for digital as the view is that a high proportion of digital students will want to progress on to university. In contrast, delegates reported that most Education and Childcare T Level students will go into employment.

The size and scale of the industry placement is an important selling point for T Levels. However, **doubts still remain as to whether completing a T Level will enable learners to progress on to a Level 4 apprenticeship** due to lack of occupational competencies. It was felt that this will be particularly the case in more technical and practically-orientated apprenticeships, such as construction and engineering.

3.7 Social mobility

Delegates echoed comments that were made in the earlier consultations relating to social mobility. They reported that not every Level 3 student will be capable of undertaking T Levels or will be interested in taking them.

In terms of access, the English and maths requirement was seen as a barrier. However, it was hoped that the Transition Programme would help by supporting young people to achieve GCSE English and maths grade 4 or above prior to them embarking on T Levels. In addition the number of guided learning hours and extended industry placement will be a barrier for young people with part-time jobs and caring responsibilities, as noted above. In terms of interest, delegates noted the specialist focus of T Levels and their exam-based assessment which will not suit all learners.

Providers commented that the Level 3 vocational and technical offer should continue to provide young people with a range of options and learning styles, as well as broader vocational study.

3.8 Uncertainty around Level 3 vocational and technical qualifications

T Levels are heralded as 'gold standard' qualifications but AGQs are an established route with a licence to practice. The review of Level 3 qualifications and below has not reported yet. However, **there remain some concerns around what is going to happen to BTEC/Cambridge Assessment Level 3 vocational students if some or all of these qualifications are discontinued and what might be the unintended consequences.** It was felt that the AGQ space is different to the T Levels space in terms of breadth and specialisation and that different types of qualifications can thrive alongside each other if they are of the required quality.

4 Suggested actions

The round table identified a range of actions for providers and policy makers, which are detailed in the table below.

	Providers	Policy makers
<p>Awareness raising of schools, young people and their parents/carers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers will continue to raise awareness of T Levels with their feeder schools. In the longer-term, providers would like to raise the awareness of young people much earlier e.g. from the start of Key Stage 3 so that they can make informed study decisions to facilitate a smooth progression onto a T Level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegates were positive about the NexT Level campaign and called for policymakers to continue to play a key role in the national promotion of T Levels to ensure that this new model of post-16 education is understood and becomes established. This includes continuing to promote T Levels to potential learners and parents/carers, including raising understanding of what T Levels involve and lead to and how they compare to other Level 3 qualifications. Over time, information on T Levels should be provided to students at a much younger age, and particularly before GCSE choices are made. Success stories should also be gathered and used in the promotion of T Levels.
<p>Workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers will continue their efforts to ensure they have staff with the required skills and experience to deliver T Levels from September 2020. This includes engaging existing staff with professional development and industry placements to update knowledge and skills, as well recruiting additional staff. Some are facing challenges with the former due to staff workload and the cost of cover. Regarding the latter, providers will only be able to fully assess skills gaps once they have seen the detailed qualification specifications. The education and industry salary differential will also continue to be a barrier to recruitment for some sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An overarching action for policy makers will be to ensure that providers have the required capacity and resources to deliver T Level programmes effectively. For example, the £400 million additional funding for the further education and sixth form colleges sector for 2020-21, which was announced in August 2019, will go some way to supporting the sector, alongside the range of additional funding and support that is specifically targeted at T Levels.

<p>Curriculum: content and delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers will continue to plan and develop their curriculum models and content, whilst waiting for the detailed specifications to be available in March 2020. This will include models that allow flexible delivery when students are going out on placement at different times, including the creation of online content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Levels are sizable programmes of study and policymakers should consider reviewing the large number of guided learning hours. The size of the programme will make it difficult for students to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, which could adversely affect wellbeing. In addition, the number of learning hours will make T Levels difficult to access for some young people, particularly those who are already disadvantaged. More detailed guidance should also be provided on how students' transferable skills should be developed and assessed, which are of key importance for success in the industrial placement and future employment.
<p>Industrial placement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers have more work to do in raising employers' awareness of T Levels and explaining their value in helping employers to meet their workforce development and skills needs. Due to employers feeling inundated with requests for placements from a range of education and training providers, providers may want to explore how contacts with employers may be coordinated across providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexibility in what constitutes an industry placement is still required to take account of the structures and characteristics of different sectors and the range of ways that employers are able to engage. This could include counting work-related learning and projects led by employers in the 315 hours requirement. More guidance on how the quality of industry placements should be monitored and who would be best placed to perform this role would be welcomed. The awareness of local authorities should also be raised. They could be a large source of placements. DfE plans to deliver T Level awareness-raising activities with local authorities and the National Health Service in the near future. Other actions include providing more guidance on what can constitute a digital placement (e.g. digital functions can be found in most organisations) and considering allocating additional funding for providers in rural areas to subsidise students' transport costs.

<p>Progression routes</p>		<p>There needs to be more clarity on progression from T Levels to university and to apprenticeships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policy makers need to further promote T Levels to universities and gather more detailed information on which universities and courses will accept T Level students. • more clarity is also required regarding the progression of T Levels students to Level 4 apprenticeships.
<p>Awareness raising of internal staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers have more work to do internally in terms of raising the awareness of T levels amongst their wider staff and explaining where the new programmes fit within the technical education offer. Alongside this, some will need to gain staff buy-in to T Level programme delivery, and deal with concerns around the potential withdrawal of AGQs. Involving staff in decision-making and the development phase may be an effective way of gaining buy-in. 	
<p>Exploring and sharing best practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy makers and providers should work together to collate and share best practice regarding providers' preparation for, and early delivery of, T Levels in relation to: workforce development and recruitment, delivery of the TQ, engagement with employers, delivery of industry placements (including curriculum models which allow for flexibility regarding when and how students undertake their placement), promotion and awareness raising. • Policy makers could also explore if there is any learning from the promotion and delivery of degree apprenticeships which can be drawn on. 	
<p>Level 3 vocational qualifications</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very important that policy makers do not overlook the education and training needs of learners aged 16 to 18 who do not wish to take T Levels or will not be able to. This will require retaining a range of Level 3 options with different learning styles and assessment and offering options with more breadth of study than T Levels.

5 Concluding statement

There remains a high level of positivity amongst providers and key sector representatives for the introduction of T Levels. Most of the findings of our T Levels report are still valid and we note that more work is still to be done by policymakers, sector leaders and providers in preparing for the implementation of T Levels. Providers continue to drive forward enthusiastically with their preparation for the introduction of the first three T Levels in September 2020 and they are being well supported by the Department for Education, the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Education and Training Foundation. Sector leaders are also playing their part in supporting preparation activities. Of key importance will be ensuring that young people who will benefit from T Levels are aware of them and understand what they will gain from taking them, and that curriculum plans, staffing and resources are in place to enable high-quality delivery of T Levels that leads to positive progression into employment, further training or higher education. Promoting the value of T Levels to employers and harnessing their involvement in providing high-standard placements will also be pivotal to the success of these new technical education programmes. This promotion needs to be sustained across the full roll out and beyond and not just focus on the initial phase of qualifications. We will continue to track the progress of T Levels over the coming months and years and provide an independent commentary on their progress and outcomes.

6 Appendix 1: List of round table attendees

Name	Organisation
Kerry Boffey	Adult Learning Improvement Network & Fellowship of Inspection Nominees
Mark Compton	Access Creative College (Access to Music Ltd.)
Anita Crosland	City & Guilds
Norman Crowther	National Education Union
Dana Dabbous	Edge Foundation
Sam Dilliway-Davies	Education and Training Foundation
Kerry Anne Foster	Cardinal Newman College
Kevin Gilmartin	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Cath Gladding	Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
Suzanne Hall	Pearson
Samantha Hillman	Exeter College
Lee Hunt	Newbury College
Julie Hyde	CACHE
Susan Lovelock	Department for Education (DfE)
Matt Reynolds	Cirencester College
Julian Roberts	Truro and Penwith College
Paul Steer	JCQ

Appendix 2: Where are the first three T Level providers located?

Figure 3: Location of T Level Digital providers



Figure 4: Location of T Level Construction providers

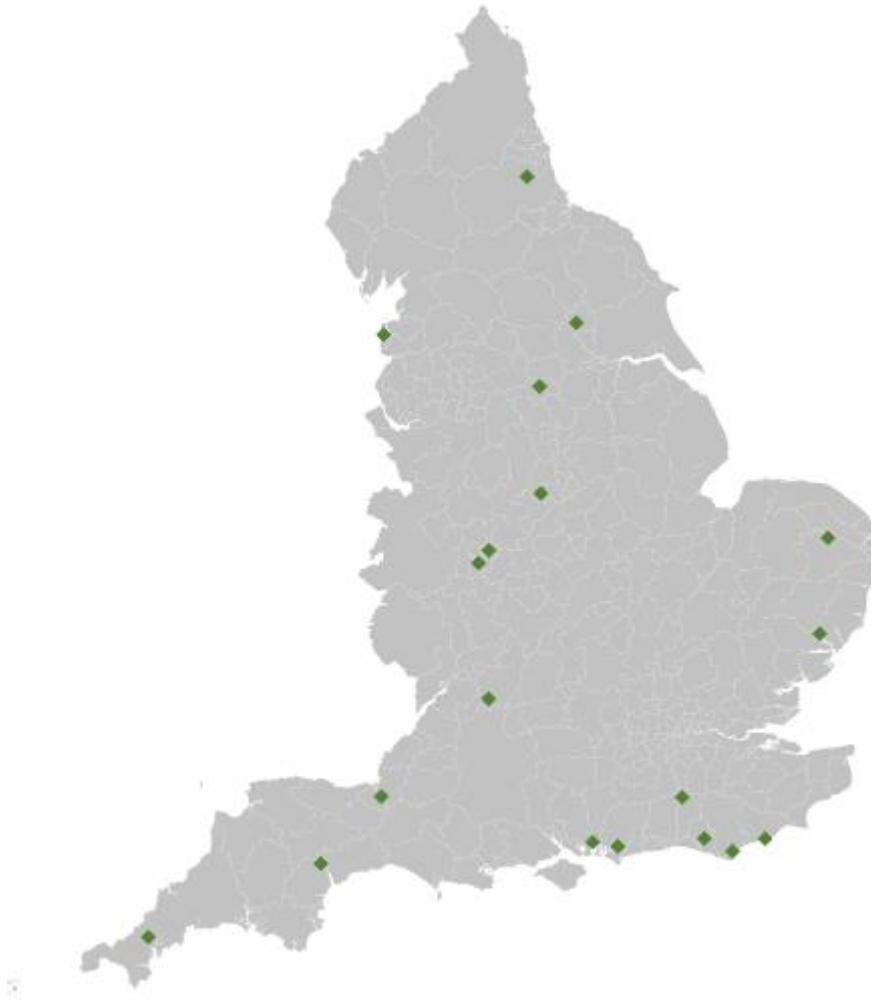
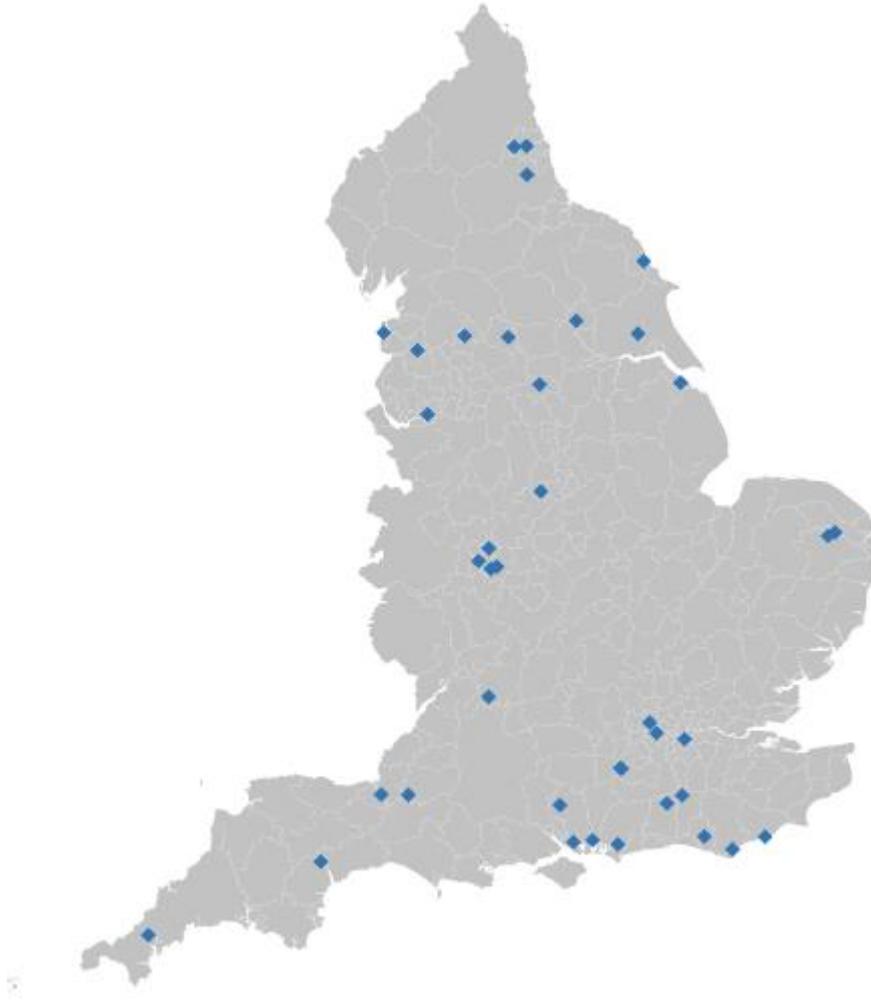


Figure 5: Location of T Level Education and Childcare providers



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