

## Update on Reforms to Level 3 Post-16 Qualifications

### What are T Levels?

- T levels are equivalent to 3 A levels and are made up of: a technical qualification which covers core theory, concepts and skills for an industry area, and specialist skills and knowledge for an occupation; an industry placement of 45 days; and a minimum standard in maths and English if students have not already achieved them.
- The core theory and skills are assessed through terminal examinations (70%) and an employer set project (ESP) which is completed in controlled conditions (30%). This element is graded E-A\*. The specialist and occupational skills are assessed via on going synoptic assignments, often within the industry placement setting, and is graded Pass, Merit or Distinction. The overall T Level grade will be given in terms of Pass, Merit or Distinction.
- They have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work, further training or study. They are based on the same standards as apprenticeships and are approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute). Only one awarding body is allowed to run the qualification element for each T level e.g. the technical qualification for the Education & Childcare T level is written and accredited by NCFE.
- T level guidance suggests that students need to be working at GCSE grade 5 and above to access T levels (although they only need to achieve a 4 in maths and English to pass). Schools are able to run a one year T level transition programme of their own design (as long as they follow the DfE framework) to support students in reaching this standard, provided students are able to stay at the school to complete the T level. This might include resits in English and maths, and further level 2 qualifications which would support the knowledge and skills students need to progress onto a T level.

### What is the future for Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) such as Level 3 BTECs and Cambridge Technical?

- The DfE has committed to creating two distinct pathways for post-16 students: A levels as an academic route, usually to university, and T levels as a technical/occupational route, leading to higher technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships or straight into skilled employment (although T levels will attract UCAS points so a student could also choose to go to university).
- Following the January 2021 consultation on the future of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications (AGQs), it has been confirmed that any current Level 3 AGQ such as a BTEC or Cambridge Technical which is in a subject covered by a T level will be phased out by 2025. By the end of the academic year 2021-22, the DfE will review qualifications in the same routes as T Levels in waves 1 and 2 and confirm which qualifications will no longer continue to attract funding due to T Level overlap. They will do the same for Wave 3 & 4 T levels.
- It is the DfE's intention that technical qualifications which overlap with T Levels in waves 1 & 2 will have funding approval removed **from the start of the 2023/24 academic year** (possibly meaning that the current Year 12 cohort are the last cohort who can take BTECs etc in these subjects). This covers the following T levels (subjects likely to be taught in schools in bold):
  - **Digital**
  - **Education & Childcare**
  - **Health & Science**
  - Construction
- Technical qualifications that overlap with the T Levels in waves 3 & 4 will have funding removed **from the start of the 2024/25 academic year** (possibly meaning that the last cohort

of BTEC/CTEC students would begin in 2022). This covers the following T levels (subjects likely to be taught in schools in bold):

- **Business & Administration**
  - **Creative and Design (which includes Media)**
  - **Legal, Finance & Accounting**
  - Agricultural, Environmental & Animal Care
  - Catering & Hospitality
  - Engineering & Manufacturing
  - Hair & Beauty
- The DfE has confirmed that it will continue to fund any technical or specialist qualifications that enable entry into any occupation not served by T levels eg sport and leisure (currently, although we know that the DfE is actively looking at creating a T level in this area), and performing arts.
  - Extended Project qualifications, Advanced Extension Awards, Performing Arts Graded Examinations and Core Maths qualifications will continue to run – these offer additional and complementary skills to support progression to HE.
  - There is the possibility that some smaller AGQ qualifications might remain (often referred to as ‘single BTECs’ in schools), but this is not yet clear.

### **What are the implications for schools?**

- It is common in Herts schools for students to take a ‘mixed programme’ of A levels and AGQs, which will not be possible with so many AGQs not receiving funding. This could mean that schools are unable to retain students for whom a 3 A level programme of study is not appropriate. Schools will need to review their KS5 curriculum offer, and consider what can be offered to those students who might traditionally have completed a mixed programme.
- All schools are now able to offer any of the Wave 1 & 2 T Levels, and any school which is rated good or outstanding can apply to offer T Levels in Waves 3 & 4. From 2024 all schools can deliver all available T Levels, irrespective of their Ofsted rating.
- T levels currently attract more funding than A levels or AGQs from ESFA, but they are bigger courses (approx 900 GLH in comparison to approx 600 for 3 A levels). It is useful to know that some schools are not thinking of their T level as one big course (ie one member of staff teaches all of it), but are instead breaking it into different component parts and staffing it more like 3 A levels (eg psychology, sociology and health and social care for the Education and Childcare T level)
- There is support in the form of training, advice and mentorship from the Education & Training Foundation (ETF). We have met with the Herts area co-ordinators and they are keen to engage with us and with schools to support the roll out of T levels. They suggest a two year planning framework to get schools ready to implement T levels effectively.

*Becky Cox October 2021*