

# T-LEVELS

**The NexT Level**

**qualification?**

An FE Week supplement ahead of the  
T-Level launch in September 2020.

A supplement produced by

**FEWEEK**

In partnership with

**ncfe.**

# CONTENTS



## PAGE 3

Julie Hyde, Executive Director,  
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## PAGE 4

What are T-levels?



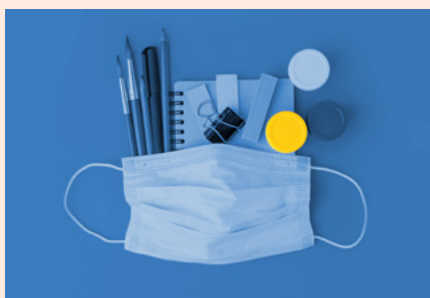
## PAGE 5

A potted history of  
T-levels development



## PAGE 6

T-levels timeline



## PAGE 7

September 2020 rollout to go  
ahead despite pandemic



## PAGE 7

'Tailored' transition course  
to ensure pipeline of T-level  
learners



## PAGES 8-10

Overcoming the industry  
placements challenge



## PAGE 12

Upskilling the  
existing workforce



## PAGE 12

The challenges involved  
in recruiting specialist  
lecturers



## PAGES 13-14

How colleges have been  
stimulating demand for  
T-levels



## PAGES 15-16

Setting the scene for the  
new education and childcare  
T-level



## PAGE 17

How we developed our brand-  
new technical qualifications

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# A guide to T-levels ahead of their launch in September

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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While Covid-19 has brought a halt to many government plans across the country, one rollout that ministers are determined to go ahead with is T-levels.

The much-hyped new post-16 technical qualifications have been dubbed as the “gold standard” of vocational education to match their academic equivalent A-levels.

They are the centrepiece of the government’s plans to improve technical education across the country and have been five years in the making.

Ministers have pushed through their development in the face of delays, the first ever ministerial direction issued by an education secretary, and threat of a legal challenge, and while excitement is building ahead of their launch, there is still apprehension about their success which has only been heightened

through this pandemic.

So, what are T-levels exactly?

This supplement, sponsored by NCFE, includes news, analysis, opinions and interviews with the people at the forefront of their development to provide you with all the information you need to know ahead of their initial rollout in September.

We kick off on page 4 with a handy explainer of all the key components of the qualifications before running through the potted history of T-levels, which since their inception in 2015 have had to manoeuvre some major obstacles to get to where we are today.

On page 7 we run through skills minister Gillian Keegan’s recent announcement that the first of the new qualifications will still go ahead in September, despite concerns over the disruption the coronavirus pandemic has caused.

The same page also provides all the information you need to know about the transition programme that has been developed by the Association of Colleges to ensure a ‘pipeline’ of T-level students.

Then we move onto one of the most challenging components of T-levels delivery – the industry

**T-LEVELS**  
THE NEXT LEVEL QUALIFICATION

placement. How have the first 50 colleges set to deliver the qualifications overcome the challenge of finding enough employers to take on a student for at least 315 hours over the duration of their programme? We spoke to several of them to find out.

Page 12 takes a look at the sector’s efforts to combat any staffing issues they have faced along the road to delivery, while pages 13 and 14 features a series of interviews with several more T-level colleges to find out how they have stimulated demand among young people, parents and employers.

We finish off with Pearson and NCFE talking you through what to expect when delivering the first three T-levels in September – for digital, construction and education and childcare.

NCFE has always championed technical qualifications and alternative routes to education. We’re a firm believer that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach when it comes to learning, which is why we were delighted to be selected as one of the government’s delivery partners for the first wave of T-levels.

Almost two years down the line, and with recognition of the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed the roll out of the first qualifications will go ahead as planned from September 2020.

A lot of hard work has gone in behind the scenes to get to this stage; NCFE has been working closely in partnership with the DfE, the Institute, and a plethora of industry practitioners and subject specialists, who have been instrumental in helping us to develop the content and assessment frameworks for the Technical Qualification for the Education and Childcare T-level.

While T-levels signify a major step forward in the provision of technical education for 16 to 19 year olds, we appreciate that the Covid-19 crisis has brought with it significant additional challenges for providers in their preparations for delivery; in particular, in regards to organising the mandatory work placements that need to be completed as part of the criteria.

Throughout this challenging time, we remain committed to ensuring that providers have access to all of the support that they need to successfully embark on this next and most crucial step of the

## JULIE HYDE

Executive Director, Education & Training Strategy, NCFE



T-level journey, to implement and deliver the qualifications to the first cohort of learners.

Working collaboratively with the sector, we have delivered events and webinars and are developing a series of support materials and resources to share with centres to help them get off to the best possible start.

As we look ahead to the next two to three years, we will see the roll out of the second and third waves of T-level qualifications. Providers approved to deliver T-levels from September 2021 will already have begun working with awarding organisations who will be supporting them in their preparations for delivery. As part of the support offered by NCFE to these providers, we will be delivering a series of training events, centre visits and webinars, as well as providing regular updates on our development progress through newsletters.

In addition to engaging with employers and securing placements, providers will now be looking to ensure staff have the right skills in order to effectively deliver the new Technical Qualifications.

To support with this, the DfE has commissioned the Education and Training Foundation to deliver a T-level Professional Development (TLPD) offer until 2024, as T-levels are rolled out on a larger scale.

While the timetable for developing and delivering T-levels has been an ambitious one, it has been fantastic to be at the forefront of delivering these exciting reforms – ensuring that the value of technical education is recognised and that learners gain well-respected qualifications that truly prepare them for success in the workplace or their next steps in education.

As we enter what is set to be one of the most uncertain periods in recent times for employers and the wider economy, we believe that T-levels will play a vital role in supporting the sector and society to overcome the challenges ahead, and provide a stable foundation on which the future workforce can be built.

To find out more about NCFE’s T-level offer, visit [ncfe.org.uk/t-levels](https://www.ncfe.org.uk/t-levels).



# WHAT ARE T-LEVELS?

The key things you need to know about the new post-16 technical qualifications

## Who are they for?

Young people aged 16 to 19. They will follow GCSEs and be set at level 3. One T-level will be the equivalent to three A-levels.



## How long will the course last?

# TWO YEARS

Students will be expected to clock up 1,800 hours during that time, including a substantial industry placement.

## What will they involve?

A mixture of classroom learning and on-the-job experience. The DfE says T-levels have been developed in collaboration with employers and providers so that the content “meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work”.

Compulsory elements to the courses will include a technical qualification, which will involve core theory, concepts and skills for an industry area and specialist skills and knowledge for an occupation or career.

Other mandatory components include an industry placement with an employer and a minimum standard in maths and English if students have not already achieved them.

## Industry placements

Every T-level will include an industry placement with an employer, which will last a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days) but can be longer.

Employers can offer industry placements as a block, day release or a mix of these, and can discuss sharing part of the placement with another employer if necessary.

Students cannot achieve the T-level until they have completed the full placement.

## How will T-levels be graded?

Students who complete their T-level will receive an overall grade of pass, merit, distinction or distinction\*. They will gain a “nationally recognised” certificate which will show their overall grade and a breakdown of what they have achieved.

Specifically, the certificate will include an overall grade, a separate grade for the core component, using A\* to E, a separate grade for each occupational specialism, shown as pass, merit or distinction.

It will also include confirmation that the student has met the minimum requirements for maths and English qualifications and completed the industry placement.

## Will they be given UCAS points?

Yes. UCAS points will only be allocated to the overall T-level grade, and students must achieve at least an overall pass. UCAS tariff points will be awarded by each grade as follows:

**Distinction\* = 168 points**

**Distinction = 144 points**

**Merit = 120 points**

**Pass (C or above on the core) = 96**

**Pass (D or E on the core) = 72**



## How will T-levels be funded?

The Department for Education has committed to spending £500 million per year on the programmes.

As T-levels will include more teaching hours than other study programmes, the DfE has introduced four new funding bands – which range from £4,363 per student per year to £6,108 per student per year, depending on the size of the programme.

Industry placements will attract a flat rate funding rate of £550 over the two years, while a single payment of £750 per subject per student will be paid in the first year for learners who need to continue working towards a level 2 in maths and / or English.

Capital funding is also being made available – with a total of £38 million being dished out to the first 50 providers.

An extra £95 million has been committed to help upgrade the facilities of the 64 colleges set to deliver T-levels from 2021.

## When will they start?

The first three T-levels – digital (digital production, design and development); construction (design, surveying and planning); education and childcare – will be available at 50 colleges, schools and other providers across England in September 2020.

A further seven T-levels – building services engineering; digital business services; digital support and services; health; healthcare science; onsite construction; science – will be available in September 2021 with the remaining courses starting in either 2022 or 2023.

# A potted history of T-levels development

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
**BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

**While the much anticipated launch of the first T-levels is now only a few months away, their creation has been five years in the making. Billy Camden delves into their development journey, which has been interrupted by delays, a legal challenge and rare ministerial direction**

The inception of T-levels goes all the way back to November 2015 when the government announced that they had big plans for reforming post-16 skills training, starting with a review by a panel led by Lord Sainsbury.

Six months later, FE Week exclusively revealed that there would be an academic and vocational divide at 16, with 15 new technical education routes which the Department for Education confirmed in a Post-16 Skills Plan in July 2016.

## “The most ambitious post-16 education reforms since the introduction of A-levels”

It was at this point that they were touted as the new technical alternative to A-levels but controversially, the skills plan had said they were to be developed “where that is possible within current budget

constraints” – meaning no new money.

Almost a year later the government admitted this was “the most ambitious post-16 education reforms since the introduction of A-levels 70 years ago” and announced that there would be an additional investment of £500 million for the qualifications by September 2022.

At this stage officials had planned to rollout the first of the qualifications in September 2019, but a string of setbacks involving their consultation and advisory panels led to then skills minister Anne Milton announcing a 12-month delay in July 2017.

The decision was welcomed across the sector, but that wasn’t the end of the trouble.

Many high-profile concerns at the new September 2020 delivery timeline were still rife, including in early 2018 from Sally Collier, Ofqual’s chief regulator, and Sir Gerry Berragan, the then chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships – the organisation that was to assume powers for T-levels in 2019 after finally becoming the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

These concerns would have undoubtedly led in some part to the most controversial step in the T-levels journey – the first ever ministerial direction issued by an education secretary.

The Department for Education’s permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, wrote to then Secretary of State for education Damian Hinds on 17 May 2018, stating that he would “advise deferring the start date to 2021 in order to mitigate the feasibility and consequential value for money risks”.

Determined to continue with the rollout, Hinds published his ministerial direction a week later



Lord Sainsbury

that said he was “able to draw on a wider range of considerations than the guidance to accounting officers, and I am convinced of the case to press ahead”.

But just a few days after this, the DfE conceded in its consultation response that the full rollout should and would be delayed until 2023.

Just as the government started to kick on with the rollout again, they were hit with a threat of a legal challenge from the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

The membership organisation outlined its intention to launch a judicial review of the implementation plans in July 2018, which would challenge on three areas: irrational (timescales), unreasonable (lack of proper engagement on the single provider model) and unfair (has a disproportionate impact on the awarding sector).

A legal challenge would have likely led to a further delay to the T-levels rollout, but it was prevented when the Federation of Awarding Bodies dropped the action a month after it was launched when the DfE offered to “re-set the relationship” with awarding organisations.

A number of key milestones followed including the DfE’s funding consultation and a £17.5 million tender that decided that NCFE would deliver the education and childcare pathway set for teaching from September 2020, and Pearson would deliver the construction and digital pathways.

Providers have since signed up to deliver in each wave of the T-levels rollout – starting with the first 50 in September. There has been fluctuation, with some providers pulling out while others have signed up, which the DfE claims was to be “expected”.

But could the Covid-19 pandemic further delay them? No – according to the skills minister (see page 7).



Damian Hinds (left) and Jonathan Slater

# T-LEVELS TIMELINE



**NOV 2015**

Government launches Lord Sainsbury's review of post-16 technical education

**MAR 2017**

Treasury announces £500m for T-levels in the Budget



**MAY 2018**

First ever ministerial direction issued by an education secretary after permanent secretary raises concern over the new delivery timeline

**JUL 2018**

Federation of Awarding Bodies threatens legal action over delivery timeline but drops the challenge the following month

**FEB 2019**

Contracts to design and develop the first three T-levels awarded to NCFE and Pearson

**JUN 2019**

DfE announces funding decisions for T-levels



**APR 2020**

Skills minister Gillian Keegan confirms T-levels will go ahead in September 2020 despite Covid-19 concerns

**SEP 2021**

A further seven T-levels scheduled to be taught by an additional 64 providers

**SEP 2023**

Full rollout of T-levels to commence

**JUL 2016**

DfE publishes Post-16 Skills Plan with a target to rollout the first T-levels in September 2019

**JUL 2017**

Then skills minister Anne Milton delays initial T-levels rollout to September 2020



**MAY 2018**

Days after the ministerial direction, DfE delays full T-levels rollout to 2023 in their consultation response

**JAN 2019**

Institute for Apprenticeships becomes Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and takes on responsibility for delivering T-levels



**MAY 2019**

DfE reveals flexibilities for T-level industry placement

**OCT 2019**

Contracts to design and develop the next seven T-levels awarded to NCFE and City & Guilds

**SEP 2020**

First three T-levels scheduled to be taught by 50 providers

**SEP 2022**

More T-levels expected to be taught





# September 2020 rollout to go ahead despite pandemic

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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The government is driving forward with plans to launch the first three T-levels from September 2020 despite the disruption being caused by the Covid-19 outbreak.

In late March, FE Week revealed that the awarding bodies designing the qualifications had called on ministers to delay their rollout by a year as they will be in “crisis management and recovery mode up until the autumn term”.

At the time the Department for Education said they were keeping the rollout date “under review”.

But in a sector-wide email sent to training providers and colleges on 3 April, apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan said: “We are aware that the coronavirus will impact those providers due to start delivering the first T-levels from September.



Gillian Keegan

“We are working closely with providers as the situation develops. However, we are continuing to work with all involved to ensure we can continue to roll out the first three T-levels from this September as planned.”

A week later she sent another letter to say that while the first 50 providers have “rightly raised some issues” with delivery, “most wanted to continue to deliver the first T-levels this year”.

“I know how hard you have all worked, both to help develop T-levels, and to get into a position to deliver them, and I do not want your hard work to be wasted,” Keegan said.

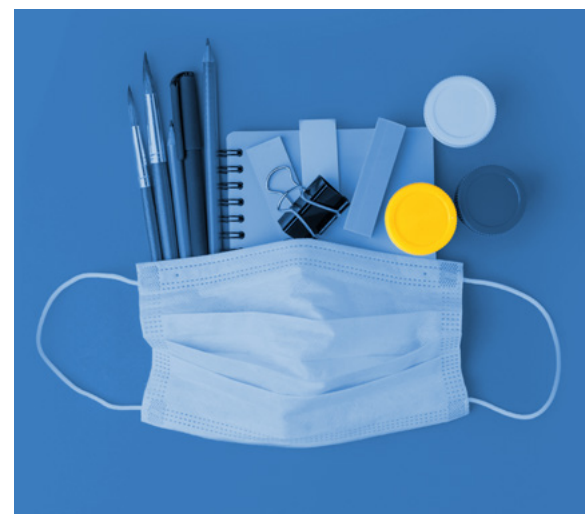
“The government is also determined that students will not lose out on opportunities due to Covid-19 – hundreds have already been accepted onto courses and hundreds more will be accepted between now and September.

“We owe it to these young people to find ways to continue to deliver the courses that they have chosen and that will offer them great progression opportunities.”

The minister added that the “unprecedented impact” of Covid-19 has meant that it is “currently extremely difficult for you to continue to organise and deliver industry placements through the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF), which was already one of the most challenging elements in delivering T-levels”.

Given these “exceptional and unprecedented circumstances”, T-level providers “will not be penalised for missing specific CDF targets this academic year” and “funding will not be clawed back if you can demonstrate how the funding has and will continue to support your work on industry placement delivery”.

Keegan’s most recent T-levels communication with the sector was on 11 May, when she reiterated that the



industry placement element is “understandably a key area of concern, as the impact of Covid-19 on businesses continues to unfold”.

She insisted that the DfE will “continue to offer targeted support to providers in order to make this happen” and said that before the outbreak, the National Apprenticeship Service had worked with “over 16,000 employers as part of their industry placement matching service”.

Later this year, the department will publish industry placement delivery guidance providing “practical information” for providers and employers on “high quality placements”.

Keegan concluded: “Our providers are the pioneers driving this new programme forward, showing what can be done; and I extend my thanks to them for their efforts to continue to deliver in September.”

## ‘Tailored’ transition course to ensure pipeline of T-level learners

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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Sitting alongside T-levels will be a transition programme developed by the Association of Colleges.

The course, recommended by Lord Sainsbury in his report on technical education in July 2016, will be for 16-year-olds to take if they are not ready to start a T-level at level 3, but can “realistically achieve it” by age 19.

Catherine Sezen, the AoC’s policy manager who is leading on this work, previously told FE Week this is a “significant group” of young people – just over 20 per cent of the college cohort.

In line with the Sainsbury report, the programme is designed to be “flexible” and “the key objective for the year remains to provide tailored provision that has a sharp focus on basic skills and on progression”.

The review also recommended that “the new transition year is available to students alongside first teaching of the technical education routes”.

Since winning a tender to develop the programme in April 2019, Sezen says the AoC has developed “various support mechanisms: relationship management, advice, guidance and support; regional peer support network; national good practice sharing events”.

“Like all students, those on the transition programme will have support and guidance in making sure this is the most appropriate programme for them from application through interview and initial diagnostic assessment,” she explained.

It will be a 600 hour study programme so the elements will be “similar to those all students experience; technical skills, work experience and preparation, English and maths and pastoral support and personal development”.

The difference, Sezen added, for transition programme is that it will have “greater emphasis on preparing students to start a T-level”.

“What is different is that providers will tailor the programme to prepare students for T-levels. All study programmes have the requirement for work



Catherine Sezen

experience. In the transition programme the emphasis will be on preparing students for the industry placement.”

The transition programme will launch in September, with 36 of the first 50 providers signed up to offer it.

Sezen said participation numbers will vary by each provider.



# Overcoming the industry placements challenge

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**T**he industry placement is largely regarded as the most challenging component of T-levels delivery.

To pass their qualification, students will have to complete a minimum of 315 hours work experience, the equivalent to 45 days. The Department for Education has estimated that up to 100,000 placements will be taken each year when the full rollout commences.

**“Don’t be afraid to innovate in sectors where it is harder to secure placements”**

But many in the sector have warned of a lack of availability, especially for colleges in rural areas and in the digital industry, and the coronavirus pandemic has also put questions over whether the placements will be viable if social distancing rules continue.

The task has been too much for some, including education secretary Gavin Williamson’s old college – Scarborough Sixth Form College, which was scheduled to deliver all three T-levels – in construction, digital and education – in



September, but pulled out of the construction and digital pathways last year as its principal did not feel confident in securing enough placements.

The DfE introduced some flexibilities earlier this year to mitigate concerns, including allowing the placements to be taken with two different employers as well as a trial of employer cash incentives.

Colleges have also been assisted with a capacity and delivery fund to source placements – £55 million was handed out in 2019/20 after the DfE released £60 million in 2018/19.

FE Week spoke to several T-level providers set to deliver the qualifications from September to find out how they have overcome the difficulties of finding enough employers, their plans for structuring students’ placements and the impact of Covid-19.

St Thomas More Catholic School said it utilised its “established links” with employers in the

health and social care sector to meet student demand but were “starting almost from scratch” with the digital pathway.

**“Staff have worked hard to market the qualification”**

Eamonn Callaghan, the school’s digital T-level lead, said it was challenging to find enough employers but staff “worked hard” to market the qualifications and “we were lucky to have some parents who owned or were management within



Weston College  
principal Paul Phillips

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## CONTINUED &gt;

some suitable placement [providers] as well as governors and ‘friends of the school’.

He suggests advertising and sending out requests for placements across the whole institution, as well as across the local area.

St Thomas More also used its T-level capacity and delivery fund to hire an administrative assistant to support staff in finding suitable employers.

Similarly, Weston College has a team of four dedicated staff members who have been working to source and secure placements for its upcoming T-level learners.

## “We must gain access to the next generation of industry talent”

All existing two-year level 3 programmes at the college are expected to have industry placements as an integrated element, and the college also delivers level 4 and above apprenticeships with a number of employers. Principal Paul Phillips said this has “enabled wider sharing of practice across the curriculum” and means employers “recognise the potential of cultivating talent”.

“Don’t be afraid to innovate in sectors where it is harder to secure placements,” he added – citing a pilot the college ran earlier this year.

The college used some of its early T-level funding to create a digital development enterprise where learners worked in placement teams and developed websites and web content for small businesses, charities and voluntary groups. Weston College has now secured employers including Cardstream and Eloquent Technologies for T-level placements.

Phillips’ other suggestions include involving employers in the design and development of programmes and profiling success stories to highlight the impact the placement has had on the employers’ business. “We have found that the more employers understand about the curriculum and its intentions the more likely they are to offer student placement opportunities.”

East Sussex College Group also had established links with employers in all three industry sectors it is set to deliver T-levels in. A spokesperson said: “The main focus of development has been setting expectations



around placements so that employers and students have a shared vision.

“We have held employer awareness sessions to build their knowledge about the qualification and worked via county-level employer groups to seek placements from employer members.”

The spokesperson also recommended working with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and employment and skills boards to identify potential links.

It has successfully secured places for all its digital, construction and childcare students. It is planning for placements to start after Easter in year one with the majority of students’ hours to take place in year two.

Sam Hillman, assistant principal for vocational and technical at Exeter College, agreed that it is important for colleges to talk about the qualification with employers and to fully explain

## “The more employers understand about the curriculum the more likely they are to offer opportunities”

the benefits of T-levels for their business as well as the students. According to Hillman, this includes that companies “gain access to the next generation of industry talent and can help play an active role in the development of the future professionals this country needs”.

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Although York College has not yet secured firm agreements from employers for the provision of T-level placements, it is confident of placing students due to long track records of working with providers.

Vice principal for academic and applied education, Glyn Jones said there has been some “innovative employer engagement work at subject level”. The college’s head of construction Rob Holmes set up the Construction Employers’ Forum last year to raise employers’ awareness of educational developments in their field.

“It has proved very valuable in shaping the construction T-level curriculum planning, as well as giving us an excellent insight into local and regional industrial needs,” Jones added.

But he hopes further flexibilities will be offered by the DfE, such as removing the two employer limit “given the unpredictable nature of industry in the coming year or two”.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused additional difficulties for colleges looking for employers.

The DfE is monitoring the regional and industry challenges caused by Covid-19 and says

it is planning to target its support to ensure that businesses are able to offer placements where possible.

Vicki Illingworth, principal at Crawley College and T-level lead at Chichester College Group, said: “Securing employers to support industry placement is a challenge, more so now with the impact of Covid-19. Our communication with employers offering industry placement and

## “Securing employers to support industry placement is a challenge, more so now with the impact of Covid-19”

work experience opportunities has significantly reduced as we recognise that this will not be their main priority in the current circumstances.”

It is now exploring moving all placements to year two and providing more options to share with employers to see what they are able to accommodate under the current circumstances.

A spokesperson for Truro and Penwith College, which was previously confident in placement delivery, also said there is “obvious uncertainty now as to whether they can all be in place in readiness given the challenges of Covid-19 for local business and industry”. It was not previously planning to split up the industry placements or schedule them solely in the second year but said they may now have to do this.

“The stipulation to ensure an equivalent of 45-day work placements could prove very difficult to facilitate given the current Covid lockdown. College staff are unable to confirm planned placements in the present climate and indeed with a predominantly micro and SME economy, many companies in Cornwall are struggling to survive,” the spokesperson added.

The college has found conversations on placements are difficult or impossible to arrange and progress as many businesses are having to address other priorities and have a reduced workforce.

The Truro and Penwith College spokesperson said that some relaxation of the full placement requirement for the first cohort would help providers.





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Available for delivery from **September 2020**

Technical Qualification developed by **cache**

[cache.org.uk/t-levels/education-and-childcare](https://cache.org.uk/t-levels/education-and-childcare)



### Digital T Levels

First wave of delivery from **September 2021**

 Digital Business Services  Digital Support Services




Technical Qualification developed by **ncfe**.

[ncfe.org.uk/t-levels/digital](https://ncfe.org.uk/t-levels/digital)



### Health and Science T Levels

First wave of delivery from **September 2021**

 Health  Healthcare Science  Science

Technical Qualification developed by **cache**

[cache.org.uk/t-levels/health-and-science](https://cache.org.uk/t-levels/health-and-science)



## Taking learners to the next level

“Completing these NCFE qualifications has helped build my confidence by giving me the opportunity to gain work experience and develop my skills.”

**Jack Tear**  
NCFE Learner



“MY CACHE qualification has reaffirmed my self-belief, not only in my ability to achieve success, but in my aspiration to work in childcare. I now feel confident about taking on new challenges in my future.”

**Bethan Robinson**  
CACHE Learner



**Find out more about T Levels supported by NCFE and CACHE**

 [ncfe.org.uk/t-levels](https://ncfe.org.uk/t-levels)  
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# Upskilling the existing workforce

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**M**ore than 5,000 college staff engaged with the first phase of a government-funded programme that aims to upskill the workforce ahead of the launch of T-levels.

Developed by the Education and Training Foundation, the T-level Professional Development (TLPD) scheme is targeted at teachers and trainers as well as senior and middle leaders, governors and governance professionals, careers advisers, finance and management information system staff.

The “integrated” offer incorporates five main elements: training needs analyses, understanding T-levels, T-level continuing professional development, professional development for leaders and knowledge hubs.

The ETF received £8 million from the Department for Education to deliver the first phase of the programme between March 2019 and March 2020.

The second phase of the programme will run from April 2020 to 2024 – for which the ETF will receive £15 million in the first year.

In subsequent years, the value of the contract and

number of expected users is dependent on the amount of T-level providers and how many T-levels they will be delivering.

As this phase of the programme started last month during the Covid-19 outbreak, the ETF said the vast majority of the elements will be delivered later this year, in most cases during September or December.

Jenny Jarvis, the ETF’s deputy chief executive, said: “The aim is to ensure that all organisations and their teachers and trainers are T-level ready as soon as they walk through the doors of the classroom or workshop.

“The offer is based on and tailored around the needs of the organisation and the individuals within it. It is not possible therefore, and nor is it the aim, to have a binary ‘one-size fits all’ approach.”

She added the length of the programme is dependent on participants as it is designed to be used flexibly and that the analyses can signpost participants to activities they may benefit from undertaking.

The offer includes both face-to-face (when social distancing measures allow) and online support.

Some elements can be delivered in-house at the request of providers. The knowledge hubs involve collaborative activities across groups of institutions and will be ongoing.



Jarvis said that feedback received from participants so far was “all very positive and overwhelmingly signalled that the activities undertaken had helped individuals prepare for T-level delivery”.

For example, the industry insight component, which is designed to help teachers and trainers ensure they have up-to-date knowledge and experience of industry by allowing them to spend time with employers, was praised for also helping to identify placements for students.

# The challenges involved in recruiting specialist lecturers

**YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU**  
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**A**s well as upskilling their own staff, college leaders have looked to recruit specialists from industry to teach T-levels but found a pay disparity to be a key barrier.

The challenge mirrors the findings of an Edge Foundation report published in April that warned of the difference between technical lecturer salaries and what they can earn in the field.

Analysis of the Education and Training Foundation’s staff data from England for 2017-2018, published in the foundation’s report, showed that lecturers’ average pay is £31,600.

In comparison, for example, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport estimated that annual earnings in the digital sector were £36,300 in 2018.

And in December, the National Foundation for Educational Research also reported that the first 50 providers were warning that difficulties in attracting staff from the construction and digital sectors would be “particularly severe” because their industries can pay higher salaries.

The research also found that some colleges have attempted to address this by setting up a bank of freelance staff that they can draw on to deliver part of, for example, the digital T-level.

Weston College, Derby College Group and Chichester College Group all concurred that pay is a barrier to recruitment as well as retention.

Weston College principal Paul Phillips noted people from technical disciplines can earn more in industry than teaching. He added another key challenge was a lack of “passion, motivation or aptitude for the role”.

Phillips also highlighted the difficulty of “reaching industry professionals and raising their awareness of the opportunities”. In order to recruit specialists to teach T-levels, he said the Somerset-based college held a number of industry-to-education events and reached out to its alumni from higher education programmes in computing to try and encourage professionals into teaching.

Kate Martin, vice principal of Derby College Group, added that pay is a particular issue in the digital and construction sectors.

She said: “It is always challenging to recruit high quality teachers with recent industry experience but we are confident that this can be achieved”.

Others speculated that this long-term barrier may be eased in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

Principal at Crawley College Vicki Illingworth, who has been leading on T-levels at Chichester College Group, said: “It will be interesting to see the impact on recruitment as we come out of lockdown and there may be more people within the employment market who have the skills that we need and who are looking for a



change in career.”

T-level curriculum leads at her own college group have been working with employers in specific areas to engage them as guest speakers where skills gaps have been identified among existing staff.

Illingworth also drew attention to the creation of a licence to teach T-levels through a Teacher Regional Improvement Project which she said “provides non-teachers with the initial pedagogy to support delivery” and is available to “build confidence and support employers to engage”.

The Crawley College principal believes this will also be useful when they want to recruit associate lecturers with specific skills, who may not be teacher trained, as they are coming directly from industry.



# How colleges have been stimulating demand for T-levels

**YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU**  
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“T-levels Tuesday” and a personalised branded van are some of the innovative ways the first T-level providers have been attracting students to study the new qualifications from September.

Others have hosted open evenings, Q and As and gone into schools to drum up interest.

Raising awareness of T-levels nationally has proved to be a huge challenge for the Department for Education.

Its £3 million “NexT Level” marketing campaign only launched in October 2019 – around the same time that a survey of more than 1,000 parents of children aged 11 to 18 commissioned by the Chartered Management Institute found that two-thirds had never heard of the qualifications.

The DfE previously projected the initial 2020/21 cohort would total 2,500 students, but then revised this down to 2,000. But research by the National Foundation for Educational Research last June found the majority of the first 50 providers were planning to recruit between 12 and 20 students in the first year.

Several colleges spoke to FE Week about their own recruitment strategies and how they raised awareness about T-levels in the local area.

Truro and Penwith College, which will have 15 learners on each of the three pathways, said it utilised a variety of methods to attract sign-ups. This included working with local schools, specific T-level signposting at open events, creating resources about the new qualifications for learners and employers, holding a live Facebook Q and A session and promoting the programmes through paid for digital and out-of-home advertising campaigns.

## “Employers are the key to capturing the attention of parents in particular”

The college found potential students and parents were cautious about choosing T-levels in their first year of delivery. A spokesperson said it was therefore important to give a “clear indication” of the work placements on offer and why this component



goes beyond what is currently available on many existing level 3 qualifications to promote them as a quality choice.

Truro and Penwith College additionally suggested tying the communications and marketing materials to existing branding to show T-levels have been “brought into the fold” in order to attract students.

East Sussex College Group also used a “multi-level” approach such as working closely with partner schools, having a T-level presence at open events and collaborating with local authority careers teams across the county.

This included identifying key year 11 heads in schools and holding “twilight” sessions for teachers and careers teams to come into college to learn about the qualifications.

It is expecting 56 students to start in September: 30 of which will be in education and childcare, 14 in digital and 12 in construction.

Other creative ideas included producing animated videos to use on social channels and branded mugs with the slogan “time for T-levels” which were given to careers advisers at local schools.

A spokesperson for the college recommended encouraging employers to endorse the programme but claimed delays in central decisions caused difficulties in recruitment.

They said it was “important for parents and students to know how these courses will enable

progression to higher education and we didn’t have the UCAS points for T-levels until after the first round of marketing in school”. In addition, not having the final specifications until April 2020 also meant East Sussex College Group had to wait to confirm formal progression agreements with local universities.

This issue was reflective of the National Foundation for Educational Research’s findings in December that providers could not always answer students’ and employers’ more detailed questions about the qualifications without the detailed specifications.

St Thomas More Catholic School highlighted the “prestige” of the programme and its potential next steps to attract students.

It is due to have approximately six to ten students following both the education and childcare pathway and the digital pathway.

Carol Archer, T-level lead for education and childcare, said information about T-levels was given equal time along with other curriculum offers at year 11 options evening and that staff ensured students were aware the qualification would carry UCAS points if they decided to progress to university afterwards.

Eamonn Callaghan, T-level lead for digital at the school, added conversations with parents were “very important,” especially for those who believed vocational courses were a second tier alternative to A-levels, in order to emphasise it was a “robust

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option”.

Moreover, Weston College shaped its marketing activity to promote “careers not courses” and is on track to have 16 learners on the digital pathway. This strategy resulted in more careers events as well as the rolling out of education on how T-levels fit within career pathways and guidance sessions for school careers advisors.

Parent and learner information evenings on T-levels are currently being delivered on Zoom while live Q&A sessions and supporting videos have been

## “Don’t neglect the internal marketing within your organisation”

posted online.

Principal Paul Phillips said: “We have found that employers are the key to capturing the attention of parents in particular.” The college has used employer videos, talks and demonstrations online and at events and have also secured endorsement from employers to be used in marketing.

The college also runs a social media campaign called “T-level Tuesday,” which it uses to build brand awareness and share information such as UCAS points, industry placements and messages from employers. The premise is to reach potential

learners and their influencers, which staff hope will entice them to make an enquiry about the course.

“Don’t neglect the internal marketing within your organisation is one key tip,” Phillips added. ‘Tool box’ talks involving employers and learners have been held to raise awareness among staff.

Oldham College, which is set to deliver T-levels in wave two of their rollout in 2021/22, is attempting to get ahead of the curve.

Using grant funding they received as a provider in one of the DfE’s “opportunity areas”, the college bought a T-levels branded van, built with TVs inside to explain what the new qualifications are.

It cost them between £25,000 and £30,000 to “get it fully kitted out” and will be driven around the town over the next few years to raise awareness.

In regards to the DfE’s own T-level marketing campaign, there has been a mixed reaction within the sector.

“NexT Level” was launched in October 2019. It was featured across social media, on-demand television, posters and used geographical targeting to reach the 2020 provider locations.

When the national drive was announced, education secretary Gavin Williamson said: “We want to make sure young people and their parents know all about the brilliant opportunities these



Gavin Williamson

new qualifications will offer. Our new campaign will help make sure they have all the info they need.”

The design of the NexT Level logo cost the government £250,000 and the marketing firm Havas Worldwide London Ltd was handed an extra £3 million for the implementation of the campaign in 2019/20 to help recruit the first wave of students for the new technical qualifications.

A spokesperson for Truro and Penwith College said the DfE had supported its own messaging “extremely well” by running promotional campaigns within the area.

However, other providers believed it had been less successful.

## “Employer understanding of what T-levels really are is limited”

St Thomas More Catholic School’s Archer said: “Even though national marketing campaigns have taken place, employer knowledge about T-levels and understanding what they really are is limited.”

Glyn Jones, vice-principal in academic and applied education, added that the national campaign to promote the qualification “does not seem to have had much impact”.

And Kate Martin, vice principal of Derby College Group, recommended that “more needs to be done on a national level to raise awareness – akin to the wider apprenticeship awareness campaigns”.



Oldham College's T-levels van



JANET KING

Sector manager for education and childcare at CACHE (part of the NCFE Group)



Setting the scene for the new education and childcare T-level

Having been closely involved with the design of one of the new T-levels, Janet King explains its process in full

In September this year we will see the new education and childcare T-level rolled out to the first cohort of learners. The two-year long, college-based vocational programme of study at Level 3 is equivalent to three A-levels and is one of the first three T-levels to launch.

Having been selected by Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) and the Department for Education (DfE) following a rigorous tender process to develop the technical qualification within the T-level, we're incredibly excited about this final, crucial step towards implementation and delivery.

Preparing learners to work in childcare and early years

The education and childcare T-level will provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to progress into skilled employment, higher level training or further study in the education and childcare sector. There will be three specialisms within the new qualification: education and childcare, assisting teaching, and supporting and mentoring students in further and higher education. All consist of both classroom-based and practical learning experience.

Designed in conjunction with industry practitioners, as well as the Institute and the DfE, to ensure that the qualification specification meets the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria for those wishing to work in a Level 3 job role in an early years setting, the new T-level will be listed as full and relevant on their list of suitable qualifications. This is of critical importance for the sector and means students will be counted in ratio within early-years settings on successful completion.

What does the qualification involve?

The core content of the T-level is arranged under 12 elements, which cover both education and childcare topics. Synoptic external assessment (testing of knowledge gained over several modules) is planned for the core part of the programme, and includes



Assessment structure	
Core content	Occupational specialism
Exam (Paper A and Paper B)	Themed assignment: planning to meet the individual needs of children
Employer-set project (controlled supervision, scenario-based)	Practical assessment of competences required for the EYE criteria
	Themed assignment: observation cycles

an examination and employer-set project (this is in reality a project set and marked by CACHE in conjunction with employers).  
Students are able to take one of the three "occupational" specialisms, for example, early-years education and childcare, which has five performance outcomes. The assessment will be an opportunity for students to converge theory and practice through assignments, to demonstrate both their practical skills and theoretical understanding.  
Students who do not have GCSE maths or English at grade 4 or above or an equivalent functional skills

qualification in both subjects at Level 2 will also be able to work towards these qualifications during their programme of study.  
**How will the T-level be assessed?**  
The table above shows how the assessment is structured. This method has been developed to maximise knowledge, understanding and skills through both the core and occupational specialism.





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Exam papers A and B will be completed towards the end of the core component and will test the students' knowledge and understanding across the 12 elements.

The employer-set project will consider an application of knowledge and understanding across the core content to allow students the opportunity to engage with work-based situations that have been developed by NCFE and CACHE with employer input. Centres will be able to enter students for their external assessment at their discretion in line with published external assessment windows.

## “The education and childcare T-level will provide the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to progress into skilled employment”

Towards the end of the occupational specialism, students will be required to complete three assignments:

1. Themed assignment: planning to meet the individual needs of children
2. Practical assessment of competences required for the EYE criteria
3. Themed assignment: observation cycles

#### How will the industry placement work?

A core component of all of the T-level programmes is an industry placement with an employer which will help learners to develop the practical and technical skills required for employment in the sector.

This placement will last a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days), but those students following the early years education and care occupational specialism will need to complete a greater number of hours, similar to those under existing EYE qualifications (750), in relevant work experience in order to sufficiently meet the EYE criteria.

Employers can offer industry placements as a block, day-release or a mix of these, and can discuss sharing part of the placement with another employer if necessary, and as appropriate in order to meet the requirements.

#### Who will be delivering the education and childcare T-level?

This T-level will be delivered to the first cohort of students from September 2020 by 36 college and sixth-form providers. We are currently working closely with these providers in the lead up to their delivery, and supporting them in navigating the additional challenges they face during this preparation period as a result of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Following this initial wave, T-levels will be made available as part of a phased rollout, with the second wave of eligible providers beginning delivery of T-levels from September 2021. It is expected that

T-levels will be fully rolled out to all providers by September 2023.

## “We are working with employers across the sector to ensure the validity of the assessments and content of T-level technical qualifications”

#### How can childcare employers get involved in T-level design?

We are currently working with employers across the childcare sector to ensure the validity of the assessments and content of T-level technical qualifications. If you are interested in finding out how your organisation could offer industry placements to T-level students visit: [gov.uk/government/publications/employer-engagement-and-support-for-t-level-industry-placements](https://gov.uk/government/publications/employer-engagement-and-support-for-t-level-industry-placements).

We appreciate that with such ambitious plans for technical education it is important to provide information that offers a clear insight to the sector. We are committed to driving forward advancements in childcare and education which support providers in meeting the demand for a highly skilled and qualified workforce.

For more information, visit: <https://www.cache.org.uk/education-and-childcare-t-level>.



## CINDY RAMPERSAUD

Senior vice president  
for BTEC and  
apprenticeships,  
Pearson



## How we developed our brand-new technical qualifications

**Set to launch this autumn, the construction and digital TQs devised by Pearson had plenty of industry input, says Cindy Rampersaud**

It has been an exciting two years working with our team to develop the two technical qualifications (TQs) that Pearson will be launching in September in Construction: Design, Surveying and Planning, and Digital Production Design and Development.

Our new, two-year qualifications will sit alongside our academic Edexcel A-levels, our BTEC suite and apprenticeships, offering a diverse range of pathways to support progression into further study, higher education, career-focused and employment pathways. The new T-levels offer students an option that combines classroom theory, practical learning and a 315-hour plus industry placement.

Pearson's role is to provide the technical qualification, including the assessment, supporting the main classroom-based element of the T-level. Alongside this, students will also need to achieve a minimum standard of English and maths (currently assumed to be at either GCSE grade 4 or above, or level 2 functional skills) plus complete the industry placement to achieve the full T-level awarded by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

**“We have developed cutting-edge qualifications so students can hit the ground running when they enter employment”**

### Course content – an industry-focused approach

The construction TQ is intended for students who want to progress to a job in the construction sector, with a focus on design and surveying, while the digital production TQ is for those who want to progress to a job in the digital sector, with a focus on software design and development. With this in mind, we challenged ourselves to be as industry-

focused as possible.

We took the DfE's content outlines and worked with experts from across the industries. For the construction course this included consulting partners such as Arup, Balfour Beatty, Lovell Homes Partnership and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, to make sure we are delivering the skills and knowledge they want to see in future recruits. For the digital course this included the BBC, BT, Siemens and Nationwide.

As a result, I believe we have developed cutting-edge qualifications that will enable students who take them to hit the ground running when they enter employment. In the construction qualification, for example, we have placed a heavy focus on maths, English and digital skills. In the digital qualification, when looking at the coding section of the course, we have included not only how to create new code from scratch but also sections on fixing and modifying existing code and integrating existing programmes, as so much of the day-to-day work of a software engineer is focused on this.

### Assessment – looking at occupational competence

Students will learn the core knowledge that underpins each industry while also developing occupationally specific skills that will allow them to enter skilled employment. The course is divided into two mandatory sections:

- The core component, which covers the underpinning knowledge, concepts and skills that support threshold competence in the construction and digital industries.
- The occupational specialism component, which covers the occupational specialist knowledge and skills required to demonstrate threshold competence for each specialism.

We have worked closely with our expert panels to ensure the courses focus on assessing this “threshold competence”. Students will be assessed in a number of ways, to help them demonstrate and master a range of skills. Our new TQs both have two externally set and marked examinations and an employer-set project.

The occupational specialism section will be assessed by an externally set and marked skills-



related project. In the digital qualification, for example, the occupational specialism project gives the student a scenario and asks them to create a large project from scratch to meet the client's need. They are assessed on a wide range of elements, from gathering user requirements to handing over a finished product, as well as soft skills (such as client communications).

In the construction qualification, the employer-set project for one of the subject options centres on answering a formal tender for a contract. The student is given a tender to answer, taking into consideration all the different areas of the business that would be involved, from start to finish. They are also challenged to consider sustainability considerations.

I'm really looking forward to seeing the rollout of these qualifications in September. We will be capturing feedback as we work to continually update them and keep them relevant.

The new T-levels (sitting alongside A-levels, career-focused pathways such as BTEC and apprenticeships) will offer choice to support a diverse cohort of learners to access education and progression, benefiting individuals, communities, employers and the wider UK economy.

A photograph of three young women with long hair, smiling and working together on a project. They are in a classroom or workshop setting with a green wall and a large orange rotary phone in the background.

# High quality end-to-end provision in Education and Childcare

As the chosen provider of the Technical Qualification for the Education and Childcare T Level, our unique portfolio enables you to provide a consistent, high-quality and seamless progression journey for your learners.



Education and Childcare T Level - Chosen provider



Gold standard provision from Entry to Level 5



The UK's leading sector specialist

Find out more about delivering the  
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[www.cache.org.uk/t-levels](http://www.cache.org.uk/t-levels)