

OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS

1. AELP agrees with the drive to provide a clear route through technical education that is easy to navigate and optimises choice for learners in progressing in a career or occupation. [\(Link\)](#)
2. The decision to add T-levels to the current qualification landscape without a clear strategy of whether or not they are intended to replace other qualifications, has led to confusion as to who they are aimed at and what they are ultimately trying to achieve. [\(Link\)](#)
3. A clear route to any occupation should build in technical learning at Level 2. For these proposals not to have done so is a mistake, and impedes social mobility. [\(Link\)](#)
4. The core competencies of apprenticeship and traineeship providers should be a cornerstone in the building of any new strand of technical learning provision. [\(Link\)](#)
5. Under these proposals there is therefore no automatic equivalence of outcome between completing a T-level at level 3 and an apprenticeship at level 3. [\(Link\)](#)
6. Much more testing of the T-level delivery concepts in non-College environments is required to ensure the policy utilises the full potential benefits of roll-on roll-off provision. [\(Link\)](#)

Specific recommendations

1. Key elements of the T-level standard should be required to be demonstrated in all work placements for that T-level, rather than let the content of the work placement be designed at an individual provider/employer level. [\(Link\)](#)
2. We support the inclusion of a wider range of expertise and experience on the T-level panels than is currently the case. [\(Link\)](#)
3. There must be clear guidelines as to what constitutes “success” in a work placement, and whether/how much of the previous time spent in an “unsuccessful” placement can be counted against the 45-60 day requirement for the new placement. [\(Link\)](#)
4. The idea of a log book is welcome, the contents of which should be standardised to encourage portability of the experience. [\(Link\)](#)
5. A balance may need to be struck between the firm work placement requirement for 45-60 days/ 7 hours a day, and exceptional cases where this may be varied, such as for those with special needs or defined circumstances. [\(Link\)](#)
6. Transport funding costs may need to be a part of a separate budget line and not included in core funding. [\(Link\)](#)
7. Some form of direct financial recompense, or perhaps an employer staff support programme, should be considered to encourage employer engagement in work placements. [\(Link\)](#)

8. The recommendations of the Maynard Panel could directly, or with only minor amendments, serve as a sound basis for work on supporting employers to offer T-level work placements for SEND/LLDD learners. [\(Link\)](#)
9. A “kitemark” will not in itself encourage employer engagement to offer work placements, and will actually appear more like a cost or barrier to doing so. [\(Link\)](#)
10. It is very welcome that Functional Skills and GCSE are both to be recognised by the T-level programme as acceptable and equivalent English and maths qualifications. [\(Link\)](#)
11. We therefore agree that learners should progress to higher levels of English and maths study within the course of their T-level, in the event that sufficient levels of funding can be provided to make the offer financially viable. [\(Link\)](#)
12. The transcript should recognise achievement only for those elements which have been completed in full. [\(Link\)](#)
13. T-levels should be specifically and separately recognised at level 2 in addition to level 3, using the existing Study Programme strand as the “entry ramp” to T-level study, with a “transition offer” for learners with SEND/LLDD and protected characteristics. [\(Link\)](#)
14. Capital funding to build delivery capacity should be offered on a provider-neutral basis. [\(Link\)](#).
15. The policy of single licensing for T-level technical qualifications is a mistake and should be abandoned. [\(Link\)](#)
16. The department must be clear on their plans for applied qualifications because they will have a direct impact on the risks associated with bidding (or not) for T-level development. [\(Link\)](#)
17. We support the introduction of a funding system that allows responsive growth in the early stages and then settles to a more stable funding approach once uptake has stabilised. [\(Link\)](#)
18. Terms of payment between lead and subcontractors should be reflective of overall payment flows but must have the flexibility to allow for particular local circumstances, so a one-size-fits-all of prescription of funding flows to subcontractors would not be welcome. [\(Link\)](#)

Question 1:

Do you agree that the principles outlined above are the right ones on which to base a review of which level 3 qualifications we should continue to fund in the new system, alongside T levels and A levels?

- No, not all the principles

OVERVIEW - POINT 1

AELP agrees with the driving principle behind T-levels and technical reform to provide a simple, understandable and valued route through technical education that is valued as highly as apprenticeships and academic programmes.

OVERVIEW - POINT 2

The decision to add T-levels to the current qualification landscape without a clear strategy of whether or not they are intended to replace other qualifications, has led to confusion as to who they are aimed at and what they are ultimately trying to achieve.

The principle of having a clear technical qualification route to occupational competence is sound. However the decision to limit T-levels to Level 3 means that the first steps on that route (specifically technical learning at Level 2 which is often not covered or not available in the compulsory education period) have been sidelined and downgraded in importance. The policy as it stands does not therefore contribute to social mobility.

Moreover, because it is as yet unclear what T-levels will replace, their addition to the technical qualification landscape, far from simplifying things, makes it considerably more complicated. There is a strong argument that many T-levels will look like no more than Applied General qualifications plus work experience, so they will only gain traction if Applied Generals are withdrawn. But many Applied Generals have significant labour market value, so such withdrawal would have significant risk for no proven benefit, and would in any case have to be piecemeal if a decision was taken that some Applied Generals – but not others - should stay in place.

The fact that the consultation admits that some T-levels will not deliver learners to full occupational competence without an apprenticeship being completed at the same level illustrates the serious doubts that exist as to the potential overall equivalence of T-levels and apprenticeships. Under these proposals, T-levels look like the qualification a learner would take in the event they cannot get an apprenticeship – very much a second-tier option, and therefore more like a generalised “safety net” policy than one designed to build a solid career base.

This asks significant questions about the cohort that the policy is aimed at. There is no definition given of the cohort in the consultation that could not equally apply to potential apprentices, and yet the T-level is **not** equivalent to an apprenticeship. This is a serious anomaly and will undermine attempts to communicate the worth of the provision to employers and learners alike.

We are also concerned that the proposals over-focus on providing for those learners that already have a clear interest in an occupational sector and have made a decision to use a T-level (or other

study) for further progression in that area. Many learners engage in learning because of an innate interest in the subject that (almost coincidentally) provides a range of occupationally-useful skills. Others engage without a clear idea of where they are headed but with the view that whatever they learn will be generically useful and will give them options having completed a level 3 programme. Whilst the proposed design of the T-level to some extent starts at a generalist level and hones down to a specialism, the overall thrust of the proposals are very much to guide a learner into a specified occupation and perhaps under-emphasise the more generalised and generic learning that can also be imparted.

Question 2:

Do you agree that we should review qualifications at level 2 and below based on the principles that these qualifications should support progression into employment or higher level study and have a value in their own right alongside T levels?

- Yes

OVERVIEW POINT 3

AELP strongly believes that qualifications at Level 2 are a vital ingredient in social mobility, and should be very clearly a significant part of the T-level and apprenticeship offer.

It is right that qualifications should be regularly reviewed for currency and applicability to the labour market, and for their ability to enable progress to higher levels of learning. Level 2 is an important general entry point for those who have been let down at school and have not attained it at the end of their compulsory education period; more specifically, many occupations require entry at level 2 no matter what prior learning has been attained. In precluding level 2 from inclusion in T-levels, there is therefore a risk of losing one of the lower rungs of general social mobility.

With so little overall thought being given in the consultation to a strategy for level 2s it is difficult to see how the social mobility agenda is being addressed within the technical qualification reform agenda as a whole.

Question 3:

Do you agree with the proposed approach to assessing technical qualifications?

- **No** - there should be a standardised correlation between the content of the T-level and each and every work placement.

The role of the technical qualification within a T-level as presented in the consultation, shows no great differentiation from its role within an apprenticeship framework. This immediately raises a question about why technical qualifications should be mandatory within T-levels but not within apprenticeships, if they serve the same role in each.

To judge “how well students can apply a minimum breadth of transferable skills and selected numeracy, literacy and digital skills relevant to the T-level” employers will need to be confident that

all assessments everywhere are performed to a comparable standard. **We believe that key elements of the T-level standard should be required to be demonstrated in all work placements for that T-level, rather than let the content of the work placement be designed at an individual provider/employer level.**

The consultation states that “The outline content will also be considered by delivery and assessment experts to ensure that it is deliverable and capable of being assessed.” Currently there are few stakeholders on the panels beyond employers, so this suggests that the process for approving T-level qualifications will move beyond encompassing just employers and will ultimately bring in a wider range of experience and perspective. **We would support the inclusion of a wider range of expertise and experience on the T-level panels than is currently the case.**

The consultation asserts that “The T level content will inform the method of assessment used” but almost immediately goes on to say that “we propose that the underpinning knowledge of the core component is assessed through an external examination.” It is a flawed approach to prescribe a form of assessment without knowing what the content and learning is to be – content should govern assessment, not vice-versa.

The concept of “threshold competence” should signal “that a learner is well-placed to develop full occupational competence, with further support and development, once in work....Threshold competence is as close to full occupational competence as can be reasonably expected of student studying the qualification in a classroom-based setting.” Considering that an apprenticeship is deemed to signal **full** occupational competence at the relevant level, this means that the relative workplace occupational competences of apprentices and T-level students at the same level will differ. It is difficult therefore to see how there can be equivalence between the two. This raises questions about the progression prospects from a T-level which are discussed more fully in Q22 below.

Question 4:

Do you agree with the approach to grading technical qualification components?

- Qualified yes

Grading should be appropriate to learning so we agree that core components should be graded A*-E whilst skills competence is better suited to pass/merit/distinction.

The notion of “threshold competence” is however flawed in that it only indicates a learner is “as close to occupational competence as can be reasonably expected....in a classroom-based setting.” The learner cannot therefore be automatically considered competent in every case. By applying a Pass/Merit/Distinction grading to the specialist component it is therefore only measuring how well a learner has done in falling short of full occupational competence.

Question 5:

Do you agree with the approach to maintaining comparable standards of performance for technical qualifications?

- Yes

We agree that grades awarded learners by training providers and others must be comparable. Further work will be needed to ensure this happens.

Question 6:

Do you agree that prior attainment of the core could count if students switch to another T level within the same route?

- Yes - but care must be taken to both allow for progression whilst preventing a possible “back-door” reintroduction of programme-led apprenticeships

If a learner has already completed the core, then there should be no inherent need for repeated study of them. However, what constitutes “marginal differences” between T-levels (thereby precluding a straight transfer of prior learning) will need to be clearly defined to ensure consistency.

Of rather more concern are the implications of partially completed T-levels more generally. If a learner has already undertaken the core off-the-job training modules of a T-level - which is nominally equivalent to an apprenticeship and derived from the same set of standards - there is a clear argument that the 20% off-the-job elements of an apprenticeship may have therefore already been completed if the learner were to transfer or progress to an apprenticeship. Under the current proposals a 16-18 year old could therefore be funded by the state to complete the off-the-job element of a T-level, leaving a subsequent apprenticeship employer to “just” provide a year’s worth of applied work experience in order to apply the learning with no need to fund the “off the job” elements.¹ This could amount to the effective return of what were once termed “programme-led apprenticeships” which were justifiably heavily criticised in their time.

Whether prior attainment is taken into account or not, it is questionable how a T-level can come close to providing the equivalent of an apprenticeship’s 80% of on-the-job experience and learning, using only classroom-based activity and 3 months’ work experience. Once again, this raises fundamental questions surrounding the relativity and equivalence that is possible between apprenticeships and T-levels.

The consultation states that “Additional funding will not be provided for students aged 16-18 re-taking components of the technical qualification.” For the purposes of clarity in later developments of the T-level concept, it should be established whether or not this indicates that learners aged 19+ may be eligible to be so funded.

¹ Requiring the apprentice to sit the core modules again would almost certainly be double-funding.

Question 7:

Do you agree with the proposed approach integrating the work placement within the T level programme?

- No, not entirely

The 45-60 day work placement is clearly the most crucial part of the T-level concept and must therefore be designed to provide a worthwhile experience for both the learner and their potential employers if the T-level concept is to gain traction.

The consultation refers to “successfully” completing a work placement but “success” needs a clear definition so that employers may be certain that the judgements made are of a consistent quality and made against the same criteria.

If the work placement is to ensure that “the student has had the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in a workplace environment” then its content must always demonstrate this in every case. As noted earlier, we believe that key elements of the T-level standard should be required to be demonstrated in all work placements for that T-level, rather than let the content of the work placement be solely decided and designed at an individual provider/employer level. Some elements may be generic to all T-levels – others sector-specific – but in all cases there should be a standard framework (core work placement elements) that must be met.

Work placement rules should in all cases be reflective of the specific sector in which the individual is studying. Where there is a predominance of self-employed or micro employers a more varied or staggered programme may be required compared to industries with larger employers – the models being currently piloted by Access to Music refer in this respect.

Where insufficient progress is made to pass the work placement for reasons within the learner’s control then “It will be at the discretion of the provider as to whether the student should be entitled to another work placement in order to obtain their T-level”. We assume that this discretion extends merely to the provider alone, and not to any future opportunities for a learner to complete another work experience placement through another provider. If the intention is to disbar the learner from any further participation in a T-level work placement at all, then this should be explicitly stated.

Where a placement is unsuccessful because of reasons outside the learner’s control, the provider is to assume responsibility for arranging and funding an alternative placement. Whilst this is reasonable, **there must be clear guidelines as to what constitutes “success” in a work placement, and whether/how much of the previous time spent in an “unsuccessful” placement can be counted against the 45-60 day requirement for the new placement.**

Question 8:

Do you agree with the proposed method of appraising the student's performance on their work placement, including the Employer Reference?

- Qualified yes

In general we agree with the proposed method outlined. However as noted in our response to Q7 above, we believe there should be a standardised expectation of particular competencies or behaviours to be achieved through a work placement, which must be demonstrated by the student to the satisfaction of the employer and provider in all cases.

Question 9:

Do you agree with the proposed approach to quality assurance? Please explain how we can ensure work placements are quality assured.

- Yes

It is reasonable to expect that the provider should assure themselves that the work placement environment is safe for the learner to attend. The Fairtrain work experience accreditation standards² describe good practice in work placement and work experience, and may inform the development of any due diligence process in this regard.

Where a work placement learner will require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, it should be made clear who is responsible for funding this – the state, employer, the provider or the individual. If it is anyone other than the state then there will be concerns about whether the course will be viable or accessible.

The idea of a log book is welcome, the contents of which should be standardised to encourage portability of the experience. By setting out what should be achieved by all learners as part of the work placement, then the employer and provider can plan how this will be delivered - this in turn can be reviewed by Ofsted to ensure it is happening, recorded and achievement recognised

Question 10:

What additional support or further modifications should be available to those with greater needs or special circumstances (such as caring responsibilities) during a work placement?

Additional learner support for learners on placement – particularly where one-to-one support is needed could be a particular challenge to put in place. The recommendations of the Maynard Taskforce³ were aimed primarily at increasing the availability of apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties. **These recommendations have a significant overlap into T-level development**

² <http://www.fairtrain.org/work-experience-quality-standard>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations>

and many of them could directly, or with only minor amendments, serve as a sound basis for work on supporting employers to offer T-level work placements for this cohort.

The essential criteria for work placements of 45-60 days for 7 hours a day does not appear to change for anyone. Whilst this is clearly beneficial in terms of the arguments for overall consistency of treatment, it may provide some issues for some individuals in particular situations who may require more tailored solutions. Working against that is the fact that a high degree of individual tailoring of placements could (as noted elsewhere) impact on whether the work placement element is seen as transferable. **A balance may need to be struck between the firm requirement for 45-60 days/ 7 hours a day, and exceptional cases where this may be varied, such as for those with special needs or defined circumstances.**

Questions 11/12:

How can we support students to access work placements relevant to their course in areas where there are no employers to offer work placements nearby?

Do you agree with our suggested approach to providing students with financial support whilst on a work placement?

We agree that “Students should not be prevented from undertaking a work placement due to travel and subsistence costs” and whilst the provider should provide support for these additional costs, the question is where ultimately this funding will come from. Put simply, if providers, learners or employers are asked to fund all travel that is involved without being recompensed, there would be a strong commercial imperative to only offer T-levels that minimise this expense.

This will be particularly the case in rural areas or where there is not an extensive local infrastructure to support any particular occupation. Indeed, defining what constitutes a “local” economy could be very different between an inner-city provider and a rural College, for example, meaning that that there is probably not a single simple formula that would cover travel costs for all students in all circumstances. This would suggest that **transport funding costs may need to be a part of a separate budget line and not included in core funding.**

Fundamentally the issues about travel and access to work placements speak directly to issues of overall availability, in that T-levels may become relevant only for local labour markets. At the extreme, if a geographical area is highly dependent on a “dying” industry, then T-levels will provide no opportunity to train for anything else because the local infrastructure would not support the work placements necessary.

The argument has been put forward that, like undergraduate degrees, potential learners may have to travel to where the industry is and therefore where the learning is being offered. However there is a very big difference between expecting this of a young adult aged 18 or more, and a school leaver aged 16, and we do not therefore believe this argument stands up to scrutiny.

T-levels may therefore eventually serve only local economies rather than providing the basis for a general economic mobility of technical skills. Training for technical occupations that are not located nearby may therefore have to rely on Applied General qualifications, but there is a clear inference in the consultation that T-levels are set to replace these, so once again we return to the question – for whom are T-levels intended, and why would they want to do them?

Questions 13/14:

***What are the common barriers / challenges for employers to host work placements and how can we support employers to offer work placements?
How do these challenges vary across industries and location types?***

OVERVIEW - POINT 4

Providers with experience in engaging employers to offer apprenticeship and traineeship provision are in a strong position to also facilitate engagement with work placements for T-level purposes. Every effort should be made to use this experience and expertise as a starting point, including utilising the extensive existing structure of provider networks.

The existing infrastructure of work-based and work-related training, and in particular apprenticeships and traineeships, gives a very firm basis from which to launch the concept of establishing work placements on the scale required to meet the T-level policy objectives. Providers with experience in engaging employers to offer such provision are in a strong position to also facilitate engagement with work placements for T-level purposes. Clearly the experience and expertise in employer engagement demonstrated by apprenticeship and traineeship providers is of direct relevance, and the processes of work placement management used by providers in the welfare-to-work space should also be drawn on. The foundations are already in place for much of what is needed, and every effort should be made to use this experience and expertise as a starting point including utilising the extensive structure of provider networks nationally. AELP has extensive associations and affiliations with these networks and would be very willing to help to facilitate this process – for example, we are already working with the Institute of Employability Professionals⁴ (IEP) on a support programme to build capacity in the creation and management of work placements.

If the fundamental principle to be followed is “no work placement, no T-level”, then some key issues must be resolved:

- **Profile of local industry by sector**

On the basis of “no work placement, no T-level”, T-levels can therefore only be completed where sufficient placement opportunities exist in the local labour market. The design of T-levels is therefore inherently geographically immobile, and will often be unable to offer opportunities to work or study in wider occupations. The work placement limitation means that a T-level offering can only reflect what is already in place at sufficient scale to make a learning offer viable, not what may develop in the future – nor even perhaps, what is developing now.

- **Size of company / relative costs of single placements**

There are significant cost implications between setting up and managing work placement delivery where multiple placements are available on one site, and where multiple sites are required to deliver the same number of placements. Overall funding for work placements needs to bear this in mind.

- **Employer capacity to support and mentor**

Many placements hinge on the confidence of the employer that they have the ability to properly support the learner, and/or that the opportunity cost of doing so will not be

⁴ <http://www.myiep.uk/>

prohibitive. In Poland there is funding made available to employers to address this issue as an inherent part of their vocational training practice provision - up to around €450 for employees who have practical classes with learners, and of around €100 for employees whose major job is to take care of them on a day to day basis. **Some form of direct financial recompense, or perhaps an employer staff support programme, should be considered to encourage employer engagement in work placements.**

- **Legal constraints**

Particularly for those aged 16-18 there are many sectors in which there are legal constraints on what work is able to be undertaken, even on an employed basis – childcare, social care and construction are prominent examples. This should not prevent young people from receiving training to enable them to undertake these tasks once they are of the required age, but if a T-level cannot be offered without a work placement then this may in some cases make the T-level impossible to offer or even develop.

- **Accommodation of part-time work**

Part-time paid employment should count towards the work experience element where its content can fulfil the core work placement elements mentioned in our response to Q7 (above). Wherever possible work placements should be timetabled to reflect the timetable of classroom-based learning, which would allow learners to retain part-time jobs that do not meet the core elements.

- **Travel availability and costs**

A major consideration is how and whether students can reach work placements on a daily basis. This may be a particular issue in rural areas where the distances involved can be greater than average, and the availability of public transport more restricted. Travel-to-work patterns will be key in this, as these can restrict the availability of placements even though the distances involved may not be large.

- **Subsistence**

Subsistence facilities cannot always be guaranteed in proximity with work placements, which may be located in isolated settings, or be peripatetic in nature. This raises issues of cost and support for the learner, in addition to overall issues of welfare.

- **Adjustments for SEND/LLDD learners**

Appropriate adjustments will need to be made for SEND/LLDD learners at employer premises if this cohort are to have equal opportunity to benefit from T-levels. This could be adaptations to the work environment or it may involve some form of enhanced personal support or supervision. The funding streams available to address such issues are generally under-utilised and considerable work will be needed to rectify this situation if T-levels are to offer a genuinely level playing field to all learners. This is discussed in more detail in our response to Q15 (below).

AELP are currently working with City and Guilds on research into challenges to delivery of work placements from the perspectives of both employers and providers, due to report in May 2018.

Question 15:

How can the range of employers, including SMEs, be better supported to offer work placements for students with additional needs?

The government narrative surrounding the potential of LLDD/SEND learners must be positive. Statements such as that made by the Chancellor in December 2017 that “far higher levels of participation by marginal groups and very high levels of engagement in the workforce, for example of disabled people may have had an (adverse) impact on overall productivity measurements”⁵ are not helpful.

As mentioned in our response to Q10 above, the recommendations of the Maynard Taskforce⁶ were aimed primarily at increasing the availability of apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties, and could have a significant overlap into T-level.

This is particularly the case for the multiple recommendations which call for increased awareness of, communication of, and access to, support funding.

Question 16:

Would employers value a recognition in delivering work placements, for example through a form of ‘kitemarking’?

- No

There is already a good practice standard available for employers offering work placements from Fairtrain which already has some traction amongst both employers and providers. Such “kitemarks” are however only effective where work placements are already perceived to have value, so if an employer does not already see the value of work placements overall then they are unlikely to have their minds changed by the mere availability of a kitemark to accredit them, should they offer them.

In a “seller’s market” where the supply of work placements is liable to be vastly outstripped by the demand for them, **we do not believe a kitemark will in itself encourage employer engagement to offer work placements, and will actually appear more like a cost or barrier to doing so.**

⁵ https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/dec/07/philip-hammond-causes-storm-with-remarks-about-disabled-workers?CMP=share_btn_link

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations>

Question 17:

Should students be able to opt to take a higher level maths or English qualification e.g. core maths, A level maths, or work towards higher grades in GCSE even if T level panels do not require it? What are the issues for providers in delivering this?

It is very welcome that Functional Skills and GCSE are both to be recognised by the T-level programme as acceptable and equivalent English and maths qualifications⁷. There is an argument that literacy and numeracy requirements could be embedded within the technical qualification rather than requiring separate qualifications to be demonstrated. Consultation with awarding organisations in our membership has indicated that this may not necessarily be straightforward to develop, but nonetheless the possibility should be properly considered.

We believe that study towards English and maths should be an inherent part of all T-level programmes – the exit requirement should be set at level 2 but study should continue towards whatever level can ultimately be attained within the timetable of the course of study. However, research undertaken by AELP amongst our membership in March 2017 indicates that at the current levels of funding there are noticeable financial losses being incurred by providers in their delivery.

	Average cost of delivery (mean)	Variance from standalone funding (£725)
Level 1 Functional Skills	£769	-£44
Level 2 Functional Skills	£796	-£71
Level 3+ Functional Skills	£966	-£495

It is therefore simply not viable for providers to absorb this cost without funding being made available at a higher standalone rate than is currently the case. Nor is it wise, as is the case with apprenticeship standards, that learners should be required to merely sit an examination at a higher level than the minimum required even if they do not pass it, which merely incurs further cost and inculcates feelings of failure.

We therefore agree that learners should progress to higher levels of English and maths study within the course of their T-level, in the event that sufficient levels of funding can be provided to make the offer financially viable.

⁷ This makes the requirement for resits of GCSEs at Grade D/5 instead of allowing the flexibility to work towards Functional Skills Level 2 even more nonsensical.

Question 18:

Which of the options for funding maths and English within the T level programme do you think would be the most appropriate?

- Option 2

Largely for the reasons outlined in the previous response, we believe that English and maths should attract additional funded hours on top of technical qualification hours, ensuring that the content of T-level technical qualifications are always comparable and unaffected by whether or not English and maths are also studied.

However as noted in the response to the previous question there is a clear argument to be made that literacy and numeracy requirements for the T-level could be embedded *within* the technical qualification rather than requiring separate qualifications to be attained – that passing the T-level qualification in itself would denote attainment of occupational English and maths skills at level 2. This would mean that the T-level is funded according to the needs of the whole syllabus and would avoid the problems that could result from having some students requiring English and maths study, and others not.

Question 19:

Where there are additional occupation-specific requirements that can be delivered or assessed off the job, do you agree that these should be incorporated into T levels?

If there is necessary occupational content at the appropriate level of learning and competence that can only be delivered on an off-the-job basis then this should be specified and incorporated in the T-level standard. Conversely, if there is content that can, or can only, be delivered on an on-the-job basis, then this makes a case for a level of overall prescription in the content of work placements.

The question also arises whether licences to practice would be funded as part of T-levels. If the overall aim of T-levels is “primarily to support entry to employment in technical occupations at Level 3 and above” then this would suggest that licences to practice should be funded; a point, which if accepted as a principle, begs a question as to why they are not also funded under the apprenticeship funding rules.

Question 20:

Do you agree with the information we propose to include in the certificate?

- Yes

Where a higher level of English and maths has been attained than the minimum required, this should also be clearly evidenced on the certificate.

Question 21:

Do you agree that partial attainment should be reflected in the proposed transcript?

- Qualified yes

The concept of the transcript aligns with HE processes. However, it will become a major burden for providers to carry out if there is a requirement to complete a full transcript for every leaver from a programme, whether or not they have passed any element of the T-level. **The transcript should therefore recognise achievement only for those elements which have been completed in full** – in particular the work placement to ensure that the experience always has value – as a transcript of elements that have not been passed will undermine their value where they have.

Question 22:

How can T levels be designed in a way that enables students to progress onto apprenticeships?

OVERVIEW - POINT 5

Under these proposals there is no automatic equivalence of outcome between completing a T-level at level 3 and an apprenticeship at level 3.

In general, AELP supports progression to the next level of learning at each stage of a learner journey, but we are not convinced this will be possible in many sectors and occupations under the current proposals for T-levels.

The relationship between T-levels and apprenticeships is at the heart of the technical reforms. On the surface it is clear – that they are “two sides of the same learning coin” because they derive from the same route standard, and should therefore lead to broadly similar learning outcomes via two different delivery routes – one work-based, one classroom-based.

However the threshold competence rule only promises to deliver “as close to full occupational competence as can be reasonably expected of a student studying the qualification in a classroom-based setting”. It is therefore difficult to see how occupational specialisms within T-levels can be graded on a Pass/Merit/Distinction basis, if what is being measured is in itself short of full occupational competency. This would mean that a straight Pass is definitely not fully occupationally competent, and the worth of the Merit and Distinction lies merely in relativising how much nearer to full occupational competence the learner is, as opposed to evidencing that they have actually attained it - which is of course the fundamental principle of completing an apprenticeship.

Under these proposals there is therefore no automatic equivalence of outcome between completing a T-level at level 3 and an apprenticeship at level 3. This is acknowledged in the consultation when it says that:

“...for some occupational specialisms there could be a gap between the workplace skills of a T level student when compared to an apprentice who achieves full occupational competence in the workplace over 3 or more years. Therefore, there may be specialisms where it would be appropriate for individuals with a T level to complete the remaining level 3 apprenticeship

content in work (potentially as part of an apprenticeship) prior to starting an apprenticeship at level 4 or above.” (p.29)

If there is no automatic correlation between competence at T-levels and apprenticeships at level 3, then that means employers will be required to understand what might be missing from the T-level that is present in the apprenticeship, *across a range of sectors*, to make a proper comparison of potential employees’ capabilities. We question whether this in any way “simplifies the system”.

Presented as above, the proposals are merely developing a different way of expressing the existing situation whereby full-time learners do not have the work experience skills that their apprentice counterparts have, thus undermining the whole rationale of the reforms. They innately suggest progression to apprenticeships is not just desirable, but is actually *required* if full occupational competence is to be achieved.

Question 23:

How can T levels be built to provide a solid grounding for, and access to higher levels of technical education?

A key factor in enabling this to happen will be recognition by universities of the value of T-levels – a process which will probably be enhanced by their engagement and development of degree apprenticeships. The progression opportunities must be made clear (including allocating suitable UCAS points) so that there is no uncertainty, once a T-level has been achieved, what the progression options are.

Similarly employers will have to be convinced that T-levels can provide a suitable bedrock for progression, particularly when set against existing applied general routes that hold considerable influence and professional currency (such as in accountancy)⁸.

Question 24:

What good practice already exists in enabling learners with technical (rather than academic) backgrounds gain access to, and succeed on, degree courses?

This question appears to presuppose that a degree is purely academic, and that technical learners somehow need to be made “more academic” before they can access degree courses. There is of course already a wide level of level 4-6 programmes and therefore already a lot of progression from vocational to higher levels. The increasing development of Degree Apprenticeships will be an increasingly influential part of progression routes and this question does not appear to recognise this fact.

T-levels will however need to build their currency in terms of how the learning they impart is perceived, and it will be important (as noted in our response to Q23 above) that universities recognise this worth, and that suitable UCAS points are allocated for their achievement.

⁸ We are aware of issues within the European Space Agency whereby apprenticeship standards are not yet recognised as sufficiently robust to allow for certain occupational activities to be undertaken or staff ratios to be applied, so it is almost certainly the case that the value of T-levels will be similarly downgraded in that occupational sector until this situation is resolved. Undoubtedly similar issues exist in other sectors.

Question 25:

What support should we consider as part of a transition offer to ensure that students can progress to level 3 study and particularly T levels?

The current thinking surrounding the “transition year” or “transition offer” appears to be trying to create a limited remedial offer that already exists, rather than a new progressive offer on which to take forward a sustainable career.

The consultation document says that that it is

“clear that (the transition year) should focus on maths, English and developing technical skills, knowledge and behaviours linked to T levels, as well as transferable skills. It would be targeted at students who have not yet achieved grade 4 in English and maths but who could progress to a T level with the right support, and where this aligns with their career aspirations.”

This outline is inadequate on a number of levels. Not only is it describing Study Programmes that already exist, but it infers that a lack of maths and English are the main barriers to accessing a technical education. In turn, this may mean that learners who have achieved a grade 4 in English or maths but for other reasons are not ready to progress to a T-level (such as perhaps an interrupted education, caring responsibilities, or other factors), have no “transition offer” available for them to work towards T-level entry.

As the English and maths requirements on 16-18 learners are a “given” in the funding system in any case whether T-levels exist or not, so there is no need to develop a T-level transition programme that specifically addresses them. The “technical skills, knowledge and behaviours linked to T levels, as well as transferable skills” could also be accommodated within the structure of existing Study Programmes, given a steer as to what these skills, knowledge and behaviours need to be in order to commence a T-level, as opposed to any other qualification or destination.⁹ Others will already be encapsulated in level 2 provision, which lends weight to the argument that T-levels should operate at level 2. **AELP therefore strongly urge that T-levels should be specifically and separately recognised at level 2 in addition to level 3, using the existing Study Programme strand as an “entry ramp” to T-level study where required.**

A specific “transition year” to T-levels could however be aimed at LLDD/SEND learners, who were identified by the Sainsbury as a possible discrete cohort for the “transition year”. The consultation document takes no special consideration of access to T-levels for LLDD/SEND learners at all. **We recommend that any “transition year” concept should actively incorporate access for this group.**

Overall, it is concerning that the thinking for the “transition year” is in such a nebulous state considering that teaching for it is slated to commence at the same time as the first teaching for T-levels themselves in 2020.

⁹ This may not require a year to do, and may not actually involve any form of transitioning – therefore the overall term of “transition year” is a misnomer and requires amendment. For simplicity however we continue to refer to the concept in these terms in this response.

Question 26:

How should we adapt T levels for adults so that they meet the needs of adult learners?

There is no reason for any differential in the content of T-levels for adult learners. There may be a case for differences in delivery mechanisms, but even these should be based on need (such as household income, caring responsibilities or a number of other factors) and not on a relatively arbitrary age limit. Such differences may be more prevalent in older age groups but nothing is actually exclusive to them.

Question 27:

What do you think the biggest challenges will be for providers in delivering new T levels and what additional support do you think providers will need? Specifically, ensuring:

- ***the right facilities are available***
- ***the right equipment is available***
- ***appropriately trained staff are recruited, and in the numbers required***
 - ***existing staff get high quality training and development***

For T-levels to have worth and currency with employers it will be vital that providers are able to offer up-to-date equipment and facilities for training purposes, requiring access to capital funding. In too many cases in recent years the state has made available capital funding pots to FE Colleges only and have ringfenced these away from applications from independent training providers. **Capital funding to build delivery capacity should be offered on a provider-neutral basis.** Ideally employers would also be willing to allow access to their up-to-date equipment for off-the-job training purposes.

It is absolutely vital that an appropriate lead-in time is given to the sector to prepare for delivery. This includes time to develop teaching materials and resources and crucially to train staff in their effective delivery. It is still by no means clear that the timetable will give sufficient time for this to happen. This is discussed in more detail in our response to question 28 (below).

Question 28:

What information do you think will need to be provided to be able to market T levels effectively to students and parents, and how far in advance of first teaching will it be needed?

The timelines being proposed are at best “challenging”, and at worst likely to short-change the quality of the experience for early adopters of T-level learning.

Whilst there is no inherent reason why T-levels cannot be offered on a roll-on roll-off basis, it is most likely that the bulk of delivery will (at least initially) be within full-time learning establishments that offer an academic-year model of delivery.

For first teaching to be available in 2020 as currently scheduled, the table below shows the timeline for the current cohort of Year 9s in January 2018 who will be the first to be able to consider T-levels as an option.

	Jan 2018	Summer 2018	Sept 2018	Winter 2018/19	Sept 2019	Spring 2020	Sept 2020
COHORT	Year 9s - should be making (if not have already made) option choices for GCSEs. Should ideally be based on knowledge of what they want or need to do in Yr 12 at 2020, including details of availability of transition year (TY) and content.		Year 10 – Start of teaching for Year 10 GCSE options.		Year 11 – start of final year teaching before GCSE in May 2020		T-level delivery to Year 12s starts. TY must also be available to start teaching (as per Sainsbury Report).
STAGE OF T-LEVEL DEVELOPMENT	Consulting on design	ITT for single licences for T-levels issued		Contract for single licences awarded – successful awarding organisations begin development of T-levels.		Publication of first T-levels and resource / teaching materials, including details of any specialist teaching required for TY provision.	

Based on this timeline it is apparent that marketing for T-level availability – the fact that they exist, what they will teach, their potential for career enhancement - in the three T-level areas selected for first teaching in 2020 must begin *immediately* or the current Year 9 cohort will not be choosing GCSE options based on full information of the potential offer in 2020. Indeed, this information is unlikely to be available until around six months before teaching is scheduled to actually commence. Whilst we understand the early provider adopters of T-levels in 2020 will be involved in the design stages of the qualifications, this timetable still seems very compressed when looking at the needs of the early cohorts of learners.

Ideally there needs to be at least a year before first teaching when the qualification is complete with sample assessments, books, etc, so that teachers can prepare and potential learners can choose in an informed way – however, this did not happen properly with GCSEs and A-levels; apprenticeships standards were released without end-point assessment arrangements having been finalised; and it now appears that something very similar will be happening with T-levels as well. This will compromise the quality of learning experience for those who will follow these new qualifications.

Question 29:

How much engagement do providers currently have with industry professionals in shaping the curriculum, teaching, and training other members of staff?

Good providers always work closely with employers to build a bespoke curriculum to both meet the employer's needs and also fit with the criteria allowed by the specific funding stream.

As part of the AELP-led "Future Apprenticeships"¹⁰ programme we have put on many workshops for providers. By the time of its planned conclusion in March 2018 it will have reached over 1600

¹⁰ <http://futureapprenticeships.org.uk/>

individuals (practitioners and managers/leaders) and nearly 1000 providers. The resources provided help to deconstruct the new apprenticeship standards to give a full understanding of what is required, as it is vital to have this detailed knowledge when talking to employers in order to both do what the employer wants and also to ensure that the apprentice will pass the end point assessment. This approach will improve outcomes and overall quality, and a similar approach needs to be taken in working with providers and employers on the implementation of the T-level programme.

Question 30:

What challenges will providers face if they want to bring in more industry expertise?

In general terms, attracting those with the most up to date industrial experience to become involved in teaching of any description will always be a challenge; not least because of differentials in terms of pay and conditions, but also because the sector is by necessity always one step ahead of the learning environment in terms of its development of new technologies and techniques. This is why apprenticeships are so powerful – because they tie the workplace and the learning inextricably together. Classroom-based T-levels will undoubtedly struggle to match their ability to align learning with the most up-to-date workplace developments.

With the support of the Education and Training Foundation, AELP are also leading work on ‘TeachToo’. This is an approach to delivery where employers provide their own staff to deliver training where the subject matter is very technical or requires high levels of specialist knowledge. Teach Too is now in its 4th phase with some strong case studies showing the impact that it has had¹¹. By working with employers on ‘real’ jobs, students learn a variety of disciplines, not only developing skills in their own areas of interest but also in associated trades.

The main challenges that in adopting the “TeachToo” approach centre on a reluctance by employers to release busy staff to deliver training, or to receive support themselves in how to best deliver training. In some cases we have found that employers will charge for their staff to support learners. This is most often the case in apprenticeship delivery, where employers are encouraged to negotiate the price with the provider.

Question 31:

Should we seek to further influence which T levels are offered by providers, according to local and national skills needs? How should we do this?

The T-level offering, even at national level, will be ultimately constrained by local economic industry and infrastructure. If the employers are not there in sufficient numbers to host placements in any particular area; or if companies cannot offer sufficient placements at the right time in the course to make the placements worthwhile; or if learners cannot actually get to where the placements are located; then the T-level offering will be compromised.

Skills Advisory Panels may help to ensure that T-level provision aligns with local need but unless it also brings that them together to ensure national coverage for all skills needs, no overall cohesive

¹¹ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/teach-too-resources-0>

national picture will properly emerge. Officials have informally said to AELP that in the same way that not all universities offer every course, so potential learners have to travel to them if they want to learn something particular, and a similar principle could apply to T-levels. However, quite aside from the fact that degrees are aimed at those aged 18+ and T-levels are (currently) aimed at 16-18s so the safeguarding issues are a little different, this would be a fundamental change to the availability of 16-18 full-time learning and infers a major overhaul of how travel to and from (and if necessary subsistence towards) 16-18 study is handled. In the current fiscal climate it is unlikely that local authorities would be able to meet the potential costs involved, which really only leaves some form of centralised funding as an option. This could be in the form of learner loans, but there would of course be very significant political issues in developing such a policy further.

Question 32:

How do providers currently take account of local and national skills needs when planning their provision and how do they work with the existing structures that have responsibility for local skills planning?

We believe the consultation over-estimates how much the supply of and demand for provision is governed by policy and underestimates how much it responds to market forces - not least the market forces of the learners themselves, hence why there is an entrenched problem in (for example) attracting females into engineering professions. Having an offer available does not ensure it will be taken up.

In general, rather than looking at the national picture, providers will need to primarily ensure that there is both a supply of local work placements and potential learners to fill them. They will use a variety of labour market information (LMI) sources to do this, but most often they will be responding directly to employer demand, either through proactive marketing or through response to employer enquiries.

The role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in providing LMI is still patchy. Some are proactive, informed and useful; others much less so. Many independent providers in particular still report “visibility” problems with both local authorities and Jobcentre Plus, who often tend to default to College provision rather than accessing the alternatives that exist within their area – this has been a long-standing problem and can mean both that learners lack the proper information to make suitable choices, and the wider learning infrastructure lacks the information it needs to be able to service local demand. There are however some examples of excellent practice around the country where of strong relationships with a range of local provision, facilitating strong referral links and two-way information flows. Much could be learnt from these.

Question 33:

What additional support will providers need to ensure that T levels meet local skills priorities?

Work placement availability is THE single most important factor that will determine whether T-levels can go ahead either locally, or (for that matter) at all. It cannot be assumed that if there are skill shortages in an area, then there will be companies in the area willing to provide work placements to help address the issue. Without the availability of work placements, nothing else matters, so whilst all support will be welcome, **government must be prepared to put time and money into helping**

and enabling providers to identify suitable placements with employers and facilitate learners getting to them.

Question 34:

What material could reasonably be included under the copyright of a technical qualification? Are there any other steps that we could take, within the parameters of the legislation, that would allow this to operate effectively and in everyone's interests?

Awarding organisations in our membership have expressed concerns to us that if intellectual property rights are owned by the IfA in all cases, then this fundamentally changes their role to that of a service provider. In turn, this raises risk questions in that the AO could take all the risk of developing something yet never own it. This may impact on their willingness to participate in future tendering rounds when they have been unsuccessful in previous ones, and on international business strategies where there would be opportunities for commercial uses in export markets.

The general feeling amongst AOs in our membership is that the single-licensing policy is flawed as a concept, but notwithstanding that, state-owned IP in all materials is unnecessary and does not align with the system elsewhere. It has been noted that in Wales the exclusive licence tender means that the specification and design is owned by the state but the qualifications and other materials stay with the AOs, facilitating easier re-tendering rounds when required because the AOs retain an incentive to invest. Step-in clauses are available whereby the government can acquire all the IP to allow swift transition if there is a market failure (or similar) during the course of a licence.

A wide-ranging acquisition of IP by the government would require more detail on the compensation that AOs might expect before many will commit to giving detailed answers to this question. It is clear however that service to support the qualifications (such as individual data) could not be transferred under IP, in part due to data protection legislation.

Questions 35/36/37:

How can the above mechanisms (i.e. licence length, lotting and transferability) be used to help AOs recover their investment, maintain appropriate profit margins but also keep the market competitive for future re-procurements?

When contracts are re-procured what would be needed over and above the licensed copyright to submit a competitive bid? How will AOs keep their skills levels up to maintain their capability to bid in future re-procurements?

Are there other variables that could influence the return on investment for AOs? How might these factors influence interest from the AO sector for initial and further competitions?

The policy of single licensing for T-level technical qualifications is a mistake and should be abandoned. Previous Select Committees and Secretaries of State have both decided against pursuing the policy of single licensing of qualifications, and the government's own research has recently highlighted the risks. In 2012 the Education Select Committee reported that,

“We feel that the cost, heightened risk and disruption likely to be generated by a move to a single board outweigh the potential benefits.... other problems, such as a lack of incentive to innovate, the risk of higher fees and of reduced quality of service may be generated.”¹²

More recently in July 2017, DfE’s own research paper¹³ reported that

“There is...a risk of system failure associated with limiting access to the market to a single AO (or consortia). If the AO (or AO consortium) fails there may be no alternative AO to step inIn the long term, limiting access to the market to a single AO (or consortia) could reduce the competition for that route.”

The policy will create monopoly positions and endanger the pipeline of development and supply through providing a disincentive to invest in research between the times that licences are awarded. Indeed, the consultation itself admits that the policy will create “a greater need for regulation to prevent situations that would lead to a lack of credible step-in provision or competition at points of retendering the licences.” This is a very interventionist approach that will inadequately mimic a process that the current market arrangement does very satisfactorily. It would be useful to know if there has been an active assessment made of expected sector attrition as a result of the procurement, and whether there is a view on the “correct” size of a market in order for the risks of cartel or market failure to be mitigated – if not, the risks of this policy are even higher than they currently appear.

The viability of development and delivery is a key consideration, but proposals to encourage consortium bidding will not necessarily help. Larger awarding organisations have enough generalist expertise to deliver as things stand without the need of consortia, which will merely add cost to the bidding processes of smaller organisations. “Bundling” more and less viable qualifications into lots would also skew considerations of the average cost of qualification development and is likely to preclude specialist AOs from bidding at all. Whilst there is nothing amiss in inviting consortia to bid, actively encouraging it may well produce more problems than it solves with regards to single licensing – albeit it is difficult to see what problem single licensing is seeking to solve in any case. If a single-license market policy would require tight regulation to make sure existing quality and supply is upheld, then we believe this is evidence that the policy itself is wrong.

Awarding organisations are also concerned that applied general qualifications may be switched off too early in the lifetime of T-levels, denying them a foundation of income to help embed T-levels and completely destabilising the infrastructure. The prospect of an early withdrawal of applied generals will also affect assessments of the potential viability of bidding and developing T-level qualifications in the first place. **The department must be clear on their plans for applied qualifications because they will have a direct impact on the risks associated with bidding (or not) for T-level development.**

The possible duration of a licence will be a key consideration, as will the question of what would happen in the event of a mid-term requirement to amend an existing T-level because of e.g. a breakthrough in technology – what responsibility would a licence holder have for this, and would they be granted further monies to do it or would further procurement be necessary? Awarding organisations will only be able to begin to properly assess the risk of an unexpected turn of events

¹² <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/141/141.pdf>, p.5.

¹³ “Assessing the Vocational Qualifications Market in England”, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629694/Assessing_the_VQ_market.pdf p.19

like this if the ITT specifies what actions (or at least approach) the department would take, and what liability/responsibility would rest with the licence holder to address it.

We would also refer again to the timetable presented earlier in response to Q28 with regard to current Year 9 pupils, who will be the first to experience T-level teaching in 2020 under the current timetable. If awarding organisations are to invest time and money in bidding, they will want to make sure there is a pipeline of willing students for it, but the initial timelines effectively prevent this cohort from receiving almost any advance information about what the T-levels may comprise. This in turn prevents a proper assessment being made of the potential size of the cohort and uptake.

The consultation indicates that there is consideration of funding for development and/or delivery of T-level technical qualifications being routed directly to the awarding organisations, as opposed to being routed via providers. Whilst this would make the process simpler, it may also have significant cash flow implications on the delivery infrastructure, the implications of which will need to be carefully considered before any such moves are introduced.

The current competition to identify the first providers to deliver the new T-levels in 2020 also appears to somewhat restrict the market. The requirement for Ofsted Grade 1 or Grade 2 is familiar from the introduction of Traineeships – where interestingly it was dropped as it became clear that this precluded some high-quality providers from participating in delivery. Moreover, we believe there is much more testing of the T-level delivery concepts in non-College environments required unless the plan is to default to a “standard” academic term model instead of utilising the full potential benefits of roll-on roll-off provision. This impacts on the size of the delivery market and will be another key consideration of AOs when deciding whether to bid or not for T-level licences.

OVERVIEW POINT 6

Much more testing of the T-level delivery concepts in non-College environments is required to ensure the policy utilises the full potential benefits of roll-on roll-off provision.

Question 38:

Which of the proposed performance measures are most important? Are there any other measures, such as student and employer feedback that should be part of the accountability system for T levels?

The five metrics specified (completion, attainment, progress, and destination, and maths/English) are vital in enabling ensuring the system as a whole is achieving its purpose. We have reservations about value-added progress measures in that for these to be meaningful or comparable across a range of providers they have to take into account a very wide range of factors ranging from household income to social background and much in between. Our experience of previous attempts has been that they tend to emerge as inordinately complicated formulae with little real value. If a simpler approach can be found, then this may be worth considering further.

We have mixed views on whether performance measures should be published at route level. If the routes contain pathways or occupations that are not easily comparable then it will be difficult to form accurate and meaningful comparisons of how well or not any particular provider is doing. On the other hand performance measures at too low a level are burdensome for little clear gain.

Question 39:

Do you have any comments about how we might approach the funding of T levels? How could the funding formula be adapted to distribute funding for T levels?

The initial approach of in-year funding is welcome. Overall, **we support the introduction of a funding system that allows responsive growth in the early stages and then settles to a more stable funding approach once uptake has stabilised.**

The proposal for lagged provision over time does however meet with a mixed response amongst independent providers as it is more suited to classroom-based provision than work-based learning, and better suits bigger scale. It also tends to be more inert and less responsive to sudden changes in demand, providing some stability over time.

However, this also means that it can be difficult for the system to respond quickly where there is a spike or fall in demand, which can mean the sector can both become quickly over-stretched, or under-used, depending on the direction of demand. It will also generally tend to discourage the provision of roll-on roll-off teaching of T-levels which could limit learner choice and access.

It is clear that partnerships will be key in making T-level delivery work; particularly in its early stages between those best able to deliver classroom-based learning and those best placed to manage and administer work placements. It is absolutely vital that funding flows do not seek to limit the ability of the infrastructure to partner or subcontract in ways that will allow this delivery to happen. **Terms of payment between lead and subcontractors should be reflective of overall payment flows but must have the flexibility to allow for particular local circumstances, so a one-size-fits-all of prescription of funding flows to subcontractors would not be welcome.**

Question 40:

How might we adapt funding flows to AOs to make sure that the full range of T levels is available to students around the country?

The consultation talks clearly about “funding flows to awarding organisations” which tends to infer that at least some funding may be routed directly to AOs rather than as at present via the provider. For the most part the money could be considered a “pass-through” so this may simplify the system, but inevitably a change may cause cash flow issues to some providers, which would be very unwelcome at a time of such wide ranging and profound change across the sector as a whole.

Of more overall concern is that the move to single licensing of AOs for T-level technical qualification, is likely to put an upwards pressure on fees in some areas by creating what amounts to a monopoly situation. Fees are a major cost of delivery and any significant rise will be a major disincentive to involvement. The obvious way to limit this effect would be by price caps and market manipulation, but as noted elsewhere the need for such regulation would suggest that any move to a single licensing policy would be a mistake.

Question 41:

How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any ways we could better advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

The Equalities Impact report¹⁴ asserts that the reforms will benefit disadvantaged groups because it is those with SEND and more generally with lower prior attainment who are most likely to access it. It does not however make any judgement about whether the policy is any better than what is already in place.

The concept of the “transition year” is potentially key here, because it could proactively play a part in facilitating access for those with protected characteristics, but the consultation proposes it mainly as a remedial maths/English course, rather than facilitating entry for LLDD/SEND or other identified learners with general disadvantage. As a result it is not clear on what basis the Equalities Impact assessment can conclude that the reforms will benefit the more disadvantaged. Most of the “transition year” concept as it stands can be delivered through the existing Study Programme strand of provision, with equality of opportunity for those with protected characteristics being advanced by a “transition offer” that is created with these groups in mind.



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About the Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Members of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) support employers in the delivery of over 75% of apprenticeships in England and they deliver other publicly funded skills and employment programmes. The majority of AELP’s 800 members are independent private, not-for-profit and voluntary sector training and employment services organisations with employers, universities, FE colleges, schools and end point assessment organisations joining AELP in increasing numbers.

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¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536072/Technical_Education_Reform-Assessment_Of_Equalities_Impact.pdf