Position Statement on T Levels

In developing a position statement regarding the current state of the introduction of T-Levels, the CBEE Education Advisory Committee took inspiration from Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework and asked itself three questions around **Intent**, **Implementation** and **Impact**.

Intent

1. Is the direction of T-Level development serving the original **Intent** of the reforms? The CBEE Education Advisory Committee see the following emerging strengths to build upon:

   T Levels have every potential to transform the talent pipeline of the future

   - T-Level programmes have the potential to offer an invaluable opportunity to provide more appropriately skilled, better informed, and work ready candidates to address skills shortages in the Construction and Built Environment sector.
   - If there is sufficient motivation for industry and providers to closely collaborate, partnerships with networks of employers have great potential to expose young people to career paths that have been traditionally misunderstood and undervalued.
   - A T-Level, if it becomes recognised as every-bit as valuable as an A-Level, is likely to motivate talented young people to enter the sector through a more employment focused education pathway.
   - If successfully implemented, the provision has strong potential to diversify the future workforce, through more socially inclusive choices of progression pathways through education.

2. The Committee see the following key issues which could divert from the policy intent:

   There is insufficient clarity in T Level progression pathways to help colleges, employers or young people make informed decisions

   - T-Levels must be accessible to a wider range of candidates than traditionally enter A-Levels and offer genuine and valuable stepping off points into employment.
   - A narrowly focussed and over-ambitious intent to broaden academic content to ensure progression into traditional HE, risks the creation of a substitute for A-Levels which competes for the same audience.
   - Unless candidates can easily understand their progression routes into the available employment opportunities through fast-tracked apprenticeships at Level 3 and direct entry in Higher or Degree Apprenticeships, they are more likely to consider A-Levels as the safe option.

- Take up for the On-Site Construction pathway is likely to be very limited, as there is insufficient alignment with trade career pathways via Level 2 apprenticeships or professional qualifications at Level 4. There is however value in the OSC T-Level and the potential that it offers to attract more people into the industry. To support progression, it is suggested that IfATE could usefully map out how these two routes will dovetail and consider ways in which T-Level students can achieve practical competency having competed the T-Level.

Implementation

3. How is the **Implementation** of T-Level Design shaping up, and what needs more work?

Work on the first wave of Construction pathways has been appropriately focussed and addresses specific employer needs

- The detail of the Design, Surveying and Planning (DSP) Technical Qualification meets with broad approval from the Nation's larger construction contractors.
- Employers welcome a new pathway which focuses on some difficult skills to recruit, and educators welcome more focused route into traditional Degrees and Degree Apprenticeship in these professions.
- Progress on the Building Services Engineering (BSE) pathway is encouraging as there have been some good pragmatic decisions to ensure the core content is appropriately adapted for a different audience to those on the DSP route.

The detailed implementation of Industry Placements is key to meeting the policy intent, and much more work is required on this

- The detail of how Industry Placements will be designed and evaluated is currently too sparse for educators to be confident in the capability and capacity of their staff and for employers to understand how realistically the outcomes can be achieved.
- Significant funding will be required to support what amounts to a revolution in Industry Placements if the current pilots are to be scaled up. There is currently scant detail regarding the funding to be made available to support each placement in the long term.
- An indication of how much work will be required to scale up the provision of industry placements is highlighted by the research that has been undertaken by the FMB that indicates that 57% of their members have never offered work experience placements before. Further information about this research is reported here.(see page 6).
- A young person's home location should not be a barrier to their aspiration to enter an industry which is not local to them. The lack of any structure of national co-ordination and funding to ensure fair access to T-Level placements to students in remote locations is likely to limit their choice to A-Levels alone.
- The currently available detail on Industry Placement is overly focussed on exactly how many hours it should be and with how many employers. Flexibility in design and simple but robust evaluation will be the key to achieving high quality content and outcomes. Industry has confident and consistent delivery of professional standards (such as NBS/ RICS) which could be utilised as suitable measures for students learning on placements.
- The consistency and quality of Industry Placements needs to be regulated to assure the development of transferable skills, and there is no clear structure in place to do this.

- As part of the cultural change in recruitment in construction, it is key that designated industry mentors for students are supported to offer inspiration and valuable mediators for providers.

The focus on creating T-Levels pathways which align with L3 apprenticeship standards may have some unintended consequences.

- The current range of apprenticeship standards is limited, under-developed and provides an unstable basis for a T-Level structure with any longevity.
- The design of the On-Site Construction T-Level pathway is focussed on narrow range of trade occupations and it is difficult to understand how some of these will reflect a rigorous Level 3 academic content and still appeal to a broad range of learners.
- In contrast, the range of specialisms available in the BSE Pathway covers niche occupations which will be unfeasible for most providers to offer.
- There are proposed specialisms in the BSE and On-Site pathways which correspond to trade apprenticeships which are traditionally entered-into at Level 2 and Level 3. This progression route will only be of value if the T-Level pathway specialism provides an adequately funded fast-track to achieve this.
- The planned T-Level pathways do not reflect the full breadth of occupations available within the sector, or meet the available skills gaps in local areas On completion of a T-Level, some students will have opportunities to progress into occupational areas not covered by the pathways, and could be penalised if there is no scheme for recognition of their transferable skills and knowledge.

Impact

4. What recommendations can be made to ensure T-Levels in Construction and the Built Environment have the most eventual **Impact**?

In order to ensure that T-Levels have broad appeal and accessibility, there must be more focus on the details of industry placements, and careful management of the breadth and academic rigour in the Technical Qualifications.

- T-Level programmes need to attract the brightest and best vocational learners, and their parity with the prestige of an A-Level should not be totally conflated with the academic rigour of a series of A-Levels, otherwise they will serve the same purpose and appeal only to the same target audience.
- Providers should not be forced to gamble the future of a young person on the availability and affordability of a suitable work placement. Detail is urgently required on how the placement outcomes will be evaluated, quality controlled and validated, and how financial and geographical barriers to participation will be overcome.

T-Levels must be as focussed on routes into employment as they are on progression into Higher Education. There must be clarity on how a T-Level completer could complete an apprenticeship at Level 2 or 3 in their chosen specialism.

The DfE and ESFA should work quickly to resolve unanswered questions.

- Will learners wishing to progress from T-levels to apprenticeships at Level 2 be funded to do so?

- Will the minimum duration of 1 year be relaxed so that learners could take End Point Assessment after a shorter period of workplace competence development?
- If a T-Level completer embarks on an apprenticeship, the amount of off-the-job training already achieved will limit the need for them to complete some of this training once employed, but they may still require a lengthy period of competence development. How will the 20% off the job training rule for apprentices be adapted to account for the level of off-the-job learning already achieved in the T-Level?
- Will the T-Level be accepted in place of existing mandated technical qualifications in apprenticeship standards?

To provide diverse and broadly accessible educational pathways, the adoption of a direct 1-to-1 mapping of T-Level Pathways to Apprenticeship Standards at Level 3 must be re-considered. The construction industry needs to establish holistic methodology for recruitment and progression, observing individual competences that meet industry standards. T-Levels offer educationalists an opportunity to recognise individual progress, which should not tie them to a specialism.

- The assumed equivalence between the challenge and rigour of a notional NVQ level and an academic qualification at the same level should not be relied upon in the design of T-Levels. Educators in the group do not accept that this equivalence exists in practice. An NVQ level 3 tends to reflect task difficulty and planning complexity, whereas in academic qualifications, level 3 reflects the extent of evaluative depth and cognitive complexity. Traditional level 2 occupations should be part of T-Levels at level 3.
- To better encourage young people with exceptional craft talent to progress into Construction and Built Environment professions, there should be the option to undertake trade specialisms which map to apprenticeships at Level 2 as part of a T-Level.
- Specialisms within pathways should be rationalised to promote progression to a range of apprenticeship standards but retain simplicity in design and structure. Niche occupations should not be part of a T-Level just because they exist as an apprenticeship standard.