

# T LEVELS: TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

Pathology Services Manager **Sue Alexander** introduces a new qualification and outlines its development.

**A** little over a year ago, I answered an advertisement for scientists with an interest in education and training to join a panel working with the Department for Education (DfE) on the development of a new national qualification.

I was successful and joined a panel of around 10 scientists from different backgrounds plus a few science education providers. We are supported by a wonderful link person and an education advisor and have a great panel chair. We meet monthly to work first on the outline ideas for the qualifications and more recently a much deeper development of the whole programme.

The group has gelled very well and there is a true spirit of collaboration, appreciation of what everyone brings and

robust discussions. We are very pleased that we are one of the only groups working on T levels that has met all its targets for time and meeting the requirements of the department. It's exciting to be working on a programme to reformat national technical education.

## What are T levels?

They are a new technical, A level standard qualification aiming "to prepare students for entry into skilled employment (including higher-level apprenticeships), either immediately or after higher levels of technical education (L4+)," says the DfE. "T Levels and apprenticeships are two options within the same technical education system, and both are based on the same occupational standards,

developed by employers as part of Institute for Apprenticeships." These quotes from the official DfE slides show where T levels sit. They are basically a vocational alternative to the academic A level, which in many cases is used as preparation for university. Both qualifications, however, will have equivalence to allow entry to university via either route if desired. The T level also takes two years, but rather than being fully classroom-based the programmes will be delivered over two years by a further education (FE) provider (80% in college and 20% in a relevant work setting).

The courses will have a workplace element as part of the overall structure of the course as opposed to apprenticeships which have an 80% work-based/20% college element.



## CONSULT AND ENGAGE



**Phase 1:** Increasing audience insight, developing our branding strategy, delivering direct content to parents, young people, employers and FE providers, 2018-2019.



**Phase 2:** Supporting launch and roll-out in the early adopter areas through advertising/social media channels, ramping up each year, 2019- 2021.



**Phase 3:** Supporting launch and roll-out in the early adopter areas through advertising/social media channels, ramping up each year, 2021 onwards.

The study period is around 1,800 hours over the two-year course. The behaviours are of real importance to us as a group as that is a significant part of preparing someone for the workplace. The placement will take between 45 and 60 days to give a real flavour of the workplace and what it is like to work. There will also be a "substantial" project requiring to be written up and presented to demonstrate communication skills.

Once the outline content has been developed, it goes to the Institute for Apprenticeships for final approval. The next step is to procure for awarding organisations to turn the content into a qualification, which can be assessed. FE providers will then finalise the curriculum.

The outline content for the first three T Levels, which will be delivered in September 2020, has been finalised and included in the Invitation to Tender to find an awarding organisation, published on 3 September this year. Overall, there are 25 T level panels in place, the full set

required, with 16 working now and the last nine recently announced.

There is a consultation, engagement and communication strategy in place to raise awareness across all relevant areas of the educational world (see box, left).

## Funds

The DfE has allocated nearly £60m to education providers through the Capacity and Delivery Fund to help them establish the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver industry placements. Working alongside ESFA, more arrangements are being put in place to ensure more intensive support for those providers who need it. There is also an investment of £5m into the National Apprenticeship Service to expand their current remit to raise awareness and promote industry placements through their employer networks.

There will be "how to" guidance for both providers and employers, based on good practice from the pilots.

There has been an industry placement pilot scheme testing different models and approaches to delivering T Level placements in the academic year 2017/18; 21

providers piloted these, which involved over 2,000 students. From these comes the message that "one size doesn't fit all", and models need to vary between route, pathway and employer type. The qualifications will be across a very wide range of subjects - from metrology technicians, laboratory technicians to beauty subjects - hence the need for a diverse delivery model.

This is just the beginning, so look forward to hearing more about the programme at the upcoming IBMS Congress and in the media. 

**Sue Alexander** is the Principal Biomedical Scientist and Pathology Services Manager at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust.

