



All-Party Parliamentary Group for **T Levels**

AGM and Introduction to T Levels: Securing the Skills for Britain's Future NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday 27 April 2021

TIME: 14:00-15:00

Method: Zoom Meeting

Chair: Rt. Hon. Damian Hinds MP (Con, East Hampshire), Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for T Levels

PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ATTENDANCE:

- Chair, Rt. Hon. Damian Hinds MP (Con, East Hampshire)
- Baroness Garden (LD)
- Baroness Hooper (Con)
- Rt. Hon. Baroness Morris (Lab)
- Christian Wakeford MP (Con, Bury North)
- Christina Rees MP (Lab, Neath)
- Lord Aberdare (Crossbench)
- Rt. Hon. Lord Blunkett (Lab)
- Lord Lucas (Con)
- Lia Nici MP (Con, Great Grimsby)
- Jane Stevenson MP (Con, Wolverhampton North East)
- Jonathan Gullis MP (Con, Stoke on Trent North)
- Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP (Lab, East Ham)

MINUTES

The Chair opened the session by welcoming all speakers and guests and noted that the number of attendees on the call illustrates the level of interest in T Levels. He introduced the first speaker, Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, who he said has been a strong and consistent champion of technical and vocational education.

Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson thanked the group for the invitation to speak and the Chair for his ongoing work on T Levels. He argued that T Levels would not be as developed if not for the work Damian Hinds in his time as Secretary of State. The

Secretary of State argued that the speed with which T Levels are being taken up demonstrates the real interest that there is in the qualification, and technical vocational qualifications. He outlined that this coming academic year will see a further seven qualifications being rolled out, and that it was his intention that colleges would adopt T levels as the mainstay of their technical education offering. He stated that he recognised the qualification would take time to embed and argued that the Government had taken a cautious approach to ensure colleges and providers were supported. The Secretary of State noted that T Levels are “*very much, very much at the heart of what the Prime Minister, sees and wants to see developed*” and that the Government aims to expand into Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and ultimately, internationally.

The Chair thanked the Secretary of State for his contribution and offered to start the Q&A session. He asked how the Government planned to overcome the challenges of coronavirus, particularly around industry placements and the marketing of the qualification. The Secretary of State outlined that there was a moment in the spring of 2020 as to whether it was right to proceed with the launch of T levels, however the ‘*overwhelming*’ response from colleges was that they wanted to continue with the rollout. He said the Government was working closely with businesses to ensure the industrial placements can go ahead but have recognised there is a need to have some elements of flexibility in terms of delivery.

Lord Aberdare asked the Secretary of State to provide more information on the involvement of employers the potential benefits to industry of enrolling T Level students. He asked for detail on how the Government are pitching the qualification to employers, including SMEs and what the key obstacles to enrolment are. **The Secretary of State** stated that the main challenge to business engagement was capacity in organisations to have the means to take on additional placements. He added that there was a hunger and enthusiasm within businesses to bring young people on directly into the workforce and that the placement component of the qualification was designed and developed alongside industry.

Jane Stevenson MP (Con, Wolverhampton North East) said that she believed T Levels would be of great benefit to students in Wolverhampton and said there was sufficient help there for schools who wish to take up qualification, such as training and extra equipment. She asked what the main barriers that schools are facing when rolling out the qualification. **The Secretary of State** responded that at this stage, the Government has not received any feedback over any particular concerns. He noted that many schools offer a strong technical vocational strand of education alongside more traditional a level routes, so the Government did not foresee any barriers to rollout in schools.

Benjamin Silverstone, Programme Lead, UK Electrification Skills Framework, University of Warwick asked what the Government was going to do to ensure the education system is dynamic and responsive to the needs of industry. The Secretary of State outlined that T Levels are a “*brilliant example*” of how qualifications can be responsive to the needs of employers through co-design. He added that it would be crucial that T Levels were constantly evolving and adapting, with input from employers and industry.

The Chair thanked the Secretary of State for his contribution and welcomed the **Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, Gillian Keegan MP**. She stated that the pandemic and its economic impact meant that countries around the

world were facing similar challenges. She added that this also means that the skills that are required are going to lead to global skills challenges, meaning the sooner nations can start building the pipeline that can help solve those challenges, the better. The Minister added that Sir Michael Barber is advising the Government on the delivery of T Levels, and was determined to ensure the qualification was actually implemented and embedded in the curriculum. She maintained that the success of T Levels came down to implementation and delivery, ensuring that students and parents are aware of them. She noted that McKinsey has predicted that about 7 million additional workers are predicted to be unskilled by 2030 and so it is vital work begun as soon as possible. She outlined that the physical workplace placements were particularly attractive to students, and that delivery of these had been challenging during the pandemic. She concluded by stating that she believed T Levels could revolutionise the skills agenda and outcomes for young people.

Paul Steven, New College and **Kate Lovelock, National Theatre** asked how the Government you looking to promote the brand of T Levels further with employers and users. Gillian Keegan responded that the brand building of T Levels has been “*fantastic*” and was closely linked with the skills white paper.

Heidi Williams, NHS Employers asked if there will there be an option for industry placements to become blended or include simulation options in line with other education training pathways in healthcare. Gillian Keegan MP outlined that she had spoken to students who have consistently said that they prefer in-person placements. She stated that “*when I tell them that they may get a virtual placement or even a blended placement, the face, falls, they are so let down*”. She added that it was vital that the NHS built an effective skills pipeline to end a reliance on overseas staff.

Christina Rees MP (Lab, Neath) asked about the T Levels available for the barbering and cosmetology sector in 2023. She noted that development of trainees had been stunted as a result of the pandemic. Gillian Keegan MP responded that the catching up of practical apprenticeships is one of the areas the Government are focused on. She outlined that it worried her that the apprenticeship wage was lower in the first year.

The Chair introduced the final speaker **Ben Harrison, Director of the Work Foundation**. He outlined that ahead of the T Levels session, he had spoken to local stakeholders including local enterprise partnerships, to gain a better understanding of how T Levels are perceived on the ground. Ben argued that *T Levels* had a role to play in both preventing people from falling into insecure employment and in providing a route out of insecure and low paid work. He argued that because there is a correlation between insecure low paid work and low skills, improving the qualifications of young people will lead to better long term employment outcomes, particularly if qualifications are responsive to the labour market. He maintained that the shift would not come without its challenges, such as ensuring the rollout of T Levels is joined up with local economic growth planning and that employers are fully supported. He noted it is likely that central government will have to play a key role in supporting the connections between local institutions. The Chair asked what methods could be used to incentive businesses to take on T Level placements. Ben responded that it was vital to ensure the Government implemented a targeted and clear communications strategy that was easy for employers to understand.

The Chair reiterated the aims of the Group:

1. Increase cross-party Parliamentary awareness, understanding of, and support for, this new qualification;
2. Ensure T Levels are positively received by Parliamentarians, key stakeholders and the wider public;
3. Provide a forum for stakeholders to demonstrate their commitment and understanding of the challenges facing young people today and in the future, and how the T Level qualification programme widens participation.

He concluded by thanking the sponsors of the group, AECOM, ETF, and Gatsby Foundation.