

Maths, English and digital requirements: response to UK Government consultation on the implementation of T-level programmes

Introduction in the consultation document:¹

'Maths and English

As recommended in the Sainsbury Report, we will not set maths and English entry requirements to enrol on a T level programme. The setting of entry requirements is a decision for education providers to make, mindful of the standards that a student will need to achieve to secure a T level.

However, in order to achieve a T level, students must achieve a minimum level of maths and English. This will be set at level 2 to align with the existing policy on maths and English requirements for level 3 apprenticeships. Therefore, students may meet the requirement through achievement of either a GCSE standard pass or a level 2 Functional Skills qualification.

This minimum requirement will ensure that employers can be confident that every student who has taken a T level has good numeracy and literacy skills.

For some occupations, higher standards of numeracy and literacy may be required. The T level panels will be able to recommend that these are embedded within the technical qualification where necessary, subject to Institute approval. The Institute will also be able to set higher maths and English requirements for a T level where they judge that a higher standard of numeracy and literacy is required.'

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?

Royal Statistical Society (RSS) response:

Yes, students should be able to opt to take higher level maths and English qualifications. Our focus is on advancing people's use and understanding of data and statistics, to benefit them in work, in society, and in their everyday lives. By facilitating access to academic study alongside T-Levels, and by advancing numeracy and literacy alongside and within T-Levels, great strides can be made toward enhanced education and skills. The mathematical skills set by T-level panels should be seen as a minimum standard. Encouraging students to aim higher would be of wider benefit to their chosen profession and industry.

We are strongly aware that there will be issues for providers in delivering this, in particular to teach mathematics, statistics, and data skills. As was found in the recent independent review of post-16 mathematics (the Smith Review), there are not enough specialist mathematics teachers in England to boost participation in mathematics, and this forms an important issue in the UK's industrial strategy for future prosperity and skills.

In the Autumn Budget it was announced that schools and colleges will receive £600 for every extra pupil who decides to take an eligible academic level 3 mathematics qualification. A range of funding arrangements were also announced to support teacher training and development in maths. The Government should be doing all that they can to support teachers in these areas and to gather evidence of how well policies to support maths are working.

¹ P. 24 in Department for Education (2017) *Implementation of T level programmes: Government consultation* [PDF], 30 November 2017 https://consult.education.gov.uk/technical-education/implementation-of-t-level-programmes/supporting_documents/T%20level%20consultation.pdf

We can anticipate that much of the funding for colleges to prepare for T-Levels will be put towards provision for GCSE mathematics resits, in light of the 'Level 2 English and mathematics' requirement of the T-Level qualification. However, we would be glad to see colleges and learning providers offer more of a range of options for the pursuit of mathematical education. England's curriculum includes Functional Skills, Core Maths, AS and A Level Mathematics, Further Mathematics, and Statistics. The Smith Review recognised all of these as important. There are also mathematical requirements within other subjects, and we would be pleased to see the expansion of mathematical training so that it can be widely accessed, including by those providing technical education.

Extract from the consultation document²

'Funding maths and English for those who do not yet meet the minimum requirements
As set out above, in order to achieve a T level, students must achieve a minimum level of maths and English. To achieve this level some students on a T level may need to continue studying maths and English at level 2. We are keen to seek views, particularly from providers, on how this is funded. There are two possible options we are considering:

Option 1: Provide the maths and English study from each student's T level programme hours, in the same way as it is currently provided from within the set 16 to 19 study programme hours. All students would have a similar number of total funded hours, but some students would spend part of this time studying for their maths and English level 2, and therefore have less time for their technical study.

Option 2: Provide the maths and English study for these students as additional funded hours on top of their T level hours (with the hours funded from the overall T levels funding). This would mean these students would have more hours of study each week, and students not needing this English and maths would have fewer hours of study in total.'

Question 18: Which of these options for funding maths and English within the T level programme do you think would be the most appropriate? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

RSS response

Option 2, because Option 1 would reduce the time for technical study by making a trade-off between technical hours and hours for maths and English, which is not ideal.

Extract from the consultation document³

"10. Equalities

[...]

The purpose of this section is to ask for your views on the proposals set out above in this consultation, and whether they are likely to have a positive or negative disproportionate impact on any student with relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010."

Question 41 [required]: 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? Please provide evidence to support your response.

² P. 25 in Department for Education (2017) *ibid.*

³ P. 45 in Department for Education (2017) *ibid.*

RSS response:

The RSS is not expert in this, however the options discussed at Question 18 may have implications for those with low prior attainment. We have read anecdotes about learners' experiences reported by BBC news, 'The pupils stuck in a cycle of maths and English resits' (published 6 March 2017, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-39142646>), as well as a review commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation of 'mathematics in the successful technical education of 16-19 year olds' (published January 2017, available at: <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/maths-in-international-systems.pdf>). The review concludes that the improvement of maths for students in technical education requires additional curriculum time for mathematics-related teaching. This supports Option 2, because Option 1 does not allocate additional time on maths and English.

Response submitted 1 February 2018