

## News

# T-level assessment organisations call for 12-month delay in response to Covid-19

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Exclusive

The awarding bodies designing the first three T-levels have called on the government to delay their rollout by a year because of the coronavirus pandemic, *FE Week* can reveal.

Pearson, City & Guilds and NCFE have agreed with the Federation of Awarding Bodies that their launch should be combined with wave two and begin in September 2021 instead of 2020.

In a letter to education secretary Gavin Williamson, FAB chief executive Tom Bewick warned that colleges, and therefore the “delivery network”, will be in “crisis management and recovery mode up until the autumn term”.

Similarly, asking employers to provide high-quality industry placements at this time “looks very challenging when you consider that the deep economic shock we are

experiencing will preoccupy company survival plans for at least the next 12 months”.

He added: “Following consultation with our members and, specifically, those AOs that have to date successfully secured licences from you to design these new technical qualifications, I am requesting that you postpone the wave one commencement of three T-levels in September.”

Fifty providers are signed up to deliver the first three routes – in digital, construction and education – from September 2020.

In response to the letter, apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan said: “We recognise the impact the Covid-19 outbreak will have on T-level providers.

“We are continuing to keep this under review, working closely with providers, as the situation develops and we will provide an update as soon as we possibly can.”

T-levels were originally meant to commence from September 2019, but

former apprenticeships and skills minister Anne Milton announced in July 2017 that she would delay delivery of the first qualifications by 12 months.

Then, in a ministerial direction in May 2018, the then-education secretary Damian Hinds refused a request by the DfE’s permanent secretary Jonathan Slater to delay their start from 2020 to 2021.

This latest call for a delay follows numerous concerns over the rushed timescales for T-levels.

A study in 2019 by the National Foundation for Educational Research, which conducted interviews with half of the 50 providers that will deliver the first T-levels, found that “extremely tight” delivery timescales, a lack of viable industry placements and limited public transport all threaten a successful rollout.

Detailed information on T-level content, assessment and the industry placement is not scheduled to be available until this month – less than six months before teaching commences.



Earlier this year, *FE Week* analysis identified a T-level cold spot in Greater Lincolnshire, where only two providers are scheduled to deliver the qualifications: DN Colleges Group and Grimsby Institute.

There is also a shortage of construction T-level providers in London, as no-one in the capital

is running the qualification from September 2020 and no-one south of the river Thames will be from 2021.

And just last week, this newspaper reported on how the government has embarked on a very last-minute mission to find out if students could fail to secure the mandatory T-level industry placement.

# £1m rap collaboration sends apprenticeship site visits soaring

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Exclusive

The government has celebrated nearly tripling the interest in apprenticeships after spending more than £1 million on the release of a grime song as part of its Fire It Up campaign.

*FE Week* can reveal the unusual partnership between a YouTube entrepreneur, rapper and the Department for Education (DfE) cost £542,009.65 to deliver, with an additional £323,446.42 spent on its partnership with The Guardian newspaper and £215,426.51 with streaming platform Spotify.

However, the DfE refused to disclose the individual fees paid to the famous participants on the grounds that it is “personal data”, which means the total amount is likely to be much higher.

*FE Week* has requested an internal review of our Freedom of Information request to find out these costs.



Jamal Edwards MBE, the founder of online music platform SBTv, collaborated with artist P Money, producer Teddy Music (aka Silencer) and director Matthew Walker, who previously worked with stars including Skepta, Stormzy and JME, to create the single and shoot the music video.

The DfE did confirm that it spent £44,000 on the production of apprenticeship track *The Calling*, and it said the launch event cost £8,800.

No fee was paid to SBTv, which uploaded a series of three behind-

the-scenes videos to its platform with more than one million subscribers on YouTube.

The song has now had more than 100,000 views on P Money’s own YouTube channel (said to be much higher than the DfE’s usual organic figures) as well as almost 90,000 views on SBTv’s channel.

The partnerships contributed to a 171 per cent increase in the number of users of the apprenticeship website in January to March compared to the same period last year, from 300,380 to 814,991,

and a 180 per cent rise in sessions, from 385,998 to 1,079,207.

An extra 270,000 people were also reached through YouTube and Instagram.

A DfE spokesperson said: “This campaign was designed to directly appeal to young people and their parents to showcase the huge range and diversity of apprenticeships on offer.

“The success of this campaign shows that by thinking differently, whether it’s by using grime artists or drones, you can successfully reach new audiences and open their minds to the idea that a life-changing apprenticeship could be right for them.”

In response to the FOI, the DfE added that it worked with partners it knew “young people, in particular, respond to, follow, trust and respect”.

For example, Edwards was selected as a digital influencer to increase reach and engagement for his “large and diverse” audience and background, which made him a “great fit” for the campaign.

The YouTube entrepreneur previously said he was “passionate about showing

young people that there are many ways to reach their potential” and that he hoped the track would “help get the message out” that apprenticeships are not just for trades such as plumbing and construction.

Seven apprentices volunteered to help record, produce and promote the song, working on sound and video production, drone engineering, logistics, lighting, hair styling, marketing and social media. Their parents, teachers and employers also volunteered to take part.

Shola West, a 19-year-old level 3 digital marketing apprentice at WhiteHat Apprentice BAME Network, organised the launch party event, promoted it on Twitter and Instagram and recorded a voiceover for the Spotify advert as part of the Fire It Up campaign.

West previously told *FE Week* it was a “great experience” because it showed she was able to put the skills developed during her apprenticeship into practice.

She called the opportunity to work with Edwards and P Money “really exciting” and added that her involvement made the digital marketing apprentice consider working in creative industries in the future.

The Fire It Up campaign was first launched in January last year. The latest phase started in January 2020 and will run until the end of this month, which is considered a key application and recruitment period.