

Written evidence submitted by Thomas Pocklington Trust (ITL0001)

What we know

We support the government's agenda for introducing a higher quality and more effective post-16 technical qualification. However, we are uncertain as to how these qualifications are meeting the needs of blind and partially sighted (BPS) young people.

It is imperative government take appropriate steps to review the accessibility of T Level. Currently the move towards T Level being the predominant post-16 qualification risks leaving BPS students further [locked out of college](#).

The rapid expansion of T Levels has the potential to exacerbate long standing barriers to post 16 education for BPS young people.

'There is currently no data showing that T Levels are accessible, scalable nationally, and are more effective than the qualifications they replace at promoting social mobility'.

[Education Select Committees Future of Post-16 report](#), 2023

Our areas of concern

We are concerned that:

- There is no evaluation of the disabled students experience of T Levels and plans to do this remain unclear
- BPS young people need flexibility to be able to access the essential [specialist VI curriculum](#) alongside their studies. T Levels appear to lack this necessary flexibility and this is not addressed in the Department for Education's (DfE's) equality impact assessments.
- [Existing barriers](#) preventing BPS young people from gaining work experience will be further exemplified in T Levels. Additionally, specialist colleges, such as the Royal College for the Blind, will struggle to meet these requirements.
- Awareness of T Levels amongst the specialist workforce remains low; BPS young people will not receive adequate advice and may not be supported to be ready to undertake the qualifications.

What we believe

The timeline for standing down BTEC qualifications is too rash, given the unknown impact for this group of disabled young people. Concerns have repeatedly been raised about the accessibility of T Levels for SEND learners, however the mitigations to address this appear to be minimal. It is vital that BTEC technical qualifications are not replaced by T Levels before we can be confident that T Levels meet the needs of all learners.

How does the specialist VI education fit in?

BPS young people must engage with the specialist VI curriculum alongside their studies to equip them with the skills to engage with learning, the world around them, and to ensure they are prepared for adulthood. The specialist VI curriculum is set out in the [Curriculum Framework for Children and Young people with Vision Impairment](#) (CFVI), and is delivered by QTVI's and Habilitation specialists.

The size of T Levels and associated workload removes the necessary flexibility for BPS young people accessing specialist learning. For many this will make T Levels unviable, disadvantaging them from their sighted peers. The T Level transition programme does not address this issue. There is a significant risk that BPS young people will be further locked out

Written evidence submitted by Thomas Pocklington Trust (ITL0001)

of technical education. This is not because these young people lack the academic ability and potential to achieve these qualifications.

Work experience

We agree that technical education should have work experience at its core. However, how the work experience requirements can consistently be met for BPS young people is a concern. Evidence continues to demonstrate inconsistent access to quality work experience. Barriers include the willingness of workplaces to take on a BPS person, orientation skills, and access to and use of assistive technology.

DfE have attempted to mitigate barriers to gaining work experience by permitting young people with SEND to participate in some of their work experience remotely, within college; this is inadequate.

Advice and guidance

For BPS young people choosing a post 16 pathway is complex and requires the specialist workforce to support them to help determine the best route to achieving their goals. We surveyed QTVI's about their knowledge of post 16 qualifications. The survey confirms that QTVI's are not confident about T Levels. Significant work needs to be done to ensure that the specialists advising BPS young people have adequate information to provide the best possible advice, guidance, and support.

What we do

We are calling on the government to:

- To review how T Levels are meeting the needs of students with SEND, including blind and partially sighted students.
- To review the equality impact assessment for T Levels to ensure mitigations are in place to address:
 - barriers to accessing work experience for BPS young people
 - how the specialist VI curriculum (CFVI) can be studied alongside.
- Implement training for the specialist VI workforce on post 16 qualifications.

About Thomas Pocklington Trust

We believe blind and partially sighted children and young people should have the opportunity to thrive in their education. That is why we are here. We work with blind and partially sighted children and young people to address barriers in accessing education.