Implementation of T level programmes

Government Consultation

A response from the British Academy

January 2018

For further information, contact
Maxime Delattre

m.delattre@britac.ac.uk

Introduction

1. The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. A Fellowship of over 1000 of the country's leading academics, the Academy received its Royal Charter in 1902. It exists to promote and champion its disciplines, and awards funding to researchers at all career levels. The humanities and social sciences provide a critical lens through which Government and society can address the wide-ranging challenges we face today.

2. The British Academy welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. The Academy has undertaken extensive work to address the deficit in quantitative skills (QS) in the UK, through its Quantitative Skills Programme, a 5-year programme funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The programme was guided by the British Academy's High-Level Strategy Group for Quantitative Skills, chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA. It led to the production of several policy outputs, including our report *Count US In*[1] which offers a vision of how the UK can rise to the potentially transformational challenge of becoming a data-literate nation.

3. This response will also draw on the work the Academy has undertaken as part of its new Skills Programme, also chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA. In particular, the response draws on the Academy's recently published report, *The Right Skills: Celebrating skills in the arts, humanities and social sciences*[2], which for the first time articulates the skills that the 1.25m students who study arts, humanities and social sciences (AHSS) in higher education develop through their degrees. The report also investigates the contribution that AHSS graduates make to the economy.

4. The Academy welcomes the Government's commitment to developing a highly skilled and productive workforce which will be well equipped to respond to the challenges that the country will face in the coming years. Despite the uncertain future ahead for the economy and labour market, high-skilled jobs will become increasingly essential to guaranteeing the UK's success. Demand is growing for individuals to be equipped with higher level skills which they can deploy in different contexts, in a career which may cross many sectors of employment. In the *Right Skills*[3]*,* the British Academy demonstrated that in order to be fit for the future and able to engage in portfolio careers, graduates will need a broad base of knowledge and higher-order cognitive skills, as well as more specialized learning needed for specific occupations.

5. The Academy believes that there has never been a better time for Government, businesses and education professionals to work together to rise to the challenge of creating the highly-qualified workforce of the future and delivering a modern industrial strategy. It welcomes the Government's decision to take forward the direction of travel proposed by the Sainsbury Review[4] in transforming the provision of technical education in the UK. Moreover, the

[1] British Academy (2015). Count us in: quantitative skills for a new generation: http://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Count-Us-In-Full-Report.pdf
[2] British Academy (2017). The Right Skills: Celebrating skills in arts, humanities and social sciences: https://www.britac.ac.uk/node/8554
[3] Ibid. note 2.
[4] Sainsbury Review – Independent panel on technical education (2016)

Academy suggests that in addition to the 15 technical education routes set out by the Sainsbury Review, the Creative Industries are also a place where a T-Level programmes could be useful in developing skills in a growing area of the economy.

Principles of T Level Programmes

6. The Government aims to develop a technical education system which will lead to parity of esteem between academic A levels and technical education routes. In order to fulfil that ambition, the Government will need to succeed in transformational change of the system by ensuring, promoting and maintaining high quality provision of the new T level programmes. This will be possible through the development of robust, flexible and sustainable funding, quality assurance and regulatory frameworks.

7. The Academy welcomes the Government proposal to develop T level programmes for young people and adult learners that would support progression to higher education options including higher technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships and technical degrees.

8. The British Academy believes that the new T level programmes should also allow progression to academic routes, which would reflect the need for flexibility identified by the Sainsbury Review (Recommendation 4)[5]. Experts are predicting that in the future individuals will need to be ready to adapt to changing circumstances and demands, and be comfortable navigating uncertainty. We have demonstrated in our latest report on skills in arts, humanities and social sciences[6] that as a consequence, careers paths are also set to change, with portfolio careers perhaps becoming the norm for most workers. This means working flexibly in different jobs, adapting to new environments and regular training. The opportunity to follow either technical or academic routes will allow students to be more flexible and to receive high quality training for a wide range of professions.

The components of the T Level Programme

9. The British Academy welcomes the decision by the Government to include a work placement as well as numeracy, literacy and digital requirements as part as the newly developed T level programmes.

Numeracy

10. As stated in our report *Count Us In*, The Academy believes that numeracy and quantitative skills are vital for all citizens, enabling them to participate fully in the democratic process and supporting the economy. The new T level programmes have the potential to provide a rich context for students to develop these skills throughout their education journey post 16.

11. The British Academy welcomed the recommendations of Professor Sir Adrian Smith's Review of Post-16 Mathematics, especially recommendation 3 which calls on the Institute for Apprenticeships to work with the Royal Society Advisory Committee on Mathematics

[5] Ibid "Recommendation 4: We recommend the Government incentivises the development of short, flexible bridging provision to enable individuals to move, in either direction, between the academic and technical education options and to support adults returning to study."
[6] Ibid note 2 p.1

Education to ensure appropriate expert advice is available to the panels of professionals determining the mathematical content of the 15 technical education routes.

12. The British Academy also supports recommendation 15 of the Review, which encourages the Department for Education, in conjunction with partners such as the Institute for Apprenticeships, to fund online professional development resources and materials aimed at increasing the numbers of teachers of mathematics and quantitative skills within new technical education routes and core maths.

13. The demand for quantitative skills in the UK workforce will continue to grow, with changes in the nature of work as a result of increasing competitive pressures, the development of technology and growing availability and use of data. It is not just in professions where a high level of numerical skill is intrinsic to the nature of the role, such as economists and accountants; there are many jobs where data literacy is an essential element, including nurses needing to calculate medical doses and paralegals responsible for reviewing evidence as part of an investigation in a civil case.

14. Moreover, growing numbers of firms are now committed to data-driven decision-making using the increased availability of 'big-data'. Such firms need employees with hybrid and technical skills sets, combining quantitative and computing skills with business understanding and the ability to communicate. The development of quantitative skills beyond traditional academic educational routes offers a valuable opportunity to respond to this need.

15. The Academy believes that numeracy and quantitative skills should be compulsory for all up to 18, with all education routes, both academic and technical, designed to develop the ability to apply mathematical knowledge in ways appropriate to particular situations, not just basic arithmetic skills.

16. We have stressed that to enable more students to continue to study quantitative skills post-16 there is a need to continue to develop and promote alternative routes, in addition to A-levels in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers in Scotland, including ensuring there is quantitative content in subjects and education routes beyond traditional STEM disciplines. The design of the new T levels is a critical opportunity to fulfil this need.

17. The Academy believes that stronger links could be built between school and college education and the workplace through continued support for the apprenticeship and technical education route, and further and continuing training and other schemes that allow people in work to up-skill. The T level programmes will combine school-based training with work placements related to the field of training. They are, therefore, in principle well suited to developing quantitative skills which can be applied in workplace settings.

Literacy

18. The British Academy welcomes the inclusion of the requirement for an English language element in the new T levels. Strong communication skills, which can be developed through the study of English, are vital for students to thrive in a wide range of sectors of the world of work. In an increasingly global labour market with more mobility in the workforce, strong communication skills are vital part of intercultural understanding and global awareness.

19. As we demonstrated in our recent report[7], entrepreneurial skills, the ability to generate new ideas and turn them into a new venture or business, will be key for future workers, whether self-employed or within an existing company. Communication, originality and creativeness are vital to success as an entrepreneur.

20. The British Academy also recommends that Government consider including in the new T level programmes, opportunity for students to develop some basic communication skills in a foreign language. Through its recent publications (*State of the Nation*[8], *Lost for Words*[9], *Born Global*[10]) the British Academy has repeatedly shown that languages are essential for employability, trade, business and the economy, social understanding and cohesion, even more so in the context of Brexit.

Digital

21. In *The Right Skills*, we demonstrated that technological, socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic changes are transforming the way we work. New jobs are constantly being created, and existing roles evolve.

22. Technical education routes should provide appropriate training for students to be prepared to operate in a cultural context where digital technologies are at the forefront. With the explosion of videos, blogs, podcasts and social media publications, providers will need to develop training that will help students to become digitally literate and enable them to manage a world rich in information streams and deal with cognitive overload.

Work placements

23. A high-quality work placement in the relevant industry as a compulsory part of a T level could bring a range of benefits in terms of experience and skills gains. The Wilson review[11] on business and university collaboration demonstrated that placements, internships and other work experience could be extremely valuable to students both in terms of their academic performance and their employability skills, but also to providers and employers.

24. Placements give students the opportunity to develop skills which are specific to their industry of choice as well as the behaviours and attitudes that would be expected in the workplace. It also increases their knowledge and understanding of the sector in which they are pursuing their technical education route and therefore contribute to their success on the school-based training modules which is turn beneficial to the provider.

25. Work placements can also bring significant value to employers. Students often come with new ideas and represent additional resources to the business. They make future recruitment easier and more economic by reducing the hiring risks and the costs of initial training which is normally dedicated to a new full-time employee given their prior familiarity with the business.

[7] Ibid note 2 p.1
[8] British Academy (2013), Languages: The State of the Nation.
[9] British Academy (2013), Lost for Words: The Need for Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security.
[10] British Academy (2016), Born Global: A British Academy Project on Languages and Employability.
[11] Wilson Review (2012) A review of Business-University Collaboration.

26. For those reasons, the British Academy welcomes the Government's proposed approach which would consist of the integration of 45-60 days within the T level programme. We believe that in order for the work placement to be successful and relevant to the student's training, it will be vital for the provider and employer to work together with the student to set learning objectives that should be met at the end of the placement.

27. We encourage government to look at the lessons which can be learnt from the higher education sector, where work placements are a long-established form of provision. For example, ASET, the work based, and placement learning association publishes a number of good practice guides[12].

Equalities

28. Achieving parity of esteem between A and T levels should allow students who choose the technical education route to have employment prospects equal to those of their counterparts who had chosen to pursue the academic route for their post-16 education journey.

29. It is important that the relevant bridging pathways between T levels, further technical education and degrees, and traditional academic routes are put in place in order to allow motivated students to exploit their full potential on the basis of their merit and ambitions.

30. The British Academy believes that the new T levels could offer an important context for the provision of numeracy and digital skills to those students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are usually underrepresented on traditional STEM routes.

[12] http://www.asetonline.org/resources/aset-publications/