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Dear Sally

10<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The introduction of T Levels represents a unique opportunity to reform technical qualifications. Alongside our apprenticeship reforms, T Levels are central to reforming technical and vocational education and training, to improve workforce skills and drive productivity growth. The Sainsbury review provided a clear steer of how we expect these new programmes of study to work, so that they better meet the needs of employers and students aged 16 to 19, and provide greater clarity and simplicity to the qualifications market. We committed to all of the recommendations put forward by the review in the Post-16 Skills Plan.

The proposals in the Government's consultation on T Levels received broad support from stakeholders and consultation respondents. Our response in May to the consultation set out plans for a measured implementation of T Levels. Teaching is to begin in September 2020 of the first three T Levels (out of up to 25 eventually) in around 50 colleges (out of a potential group of up to 1,000 providers, eventually including colleges, independent providers and other post-16 providers).

As you know, the Technical Education Act gives the Institute for Apprenticeships (the Institute) overall responsibility for all aspects of the T Level programme, which includes the Technical Qualification. The Government's consultation response reflected our intent to draw on all available levers to make sure that the Technical Qualification within each T Level is subject to the same rigorous standards of assurance afforded to the reformed Apprenticeship standards. We need the public and employers to be confident that T Levels are a reliable

indicator of technical occupational competence which add value for employers, in the same way that apprenticeship standards are a trusted measure of the skills held by an apprentice in relation to a specific job role. This has led to the introduction of a joint assurance model, based on a collaborative arrangement between the Institute and Ofqual.

The Government's consultation response reflected the need for Ofqual to work in collaboration with the Institute to deliver an assurance system that benefits from both the Institute's expertise in working with employers, and Ofqual's expertise in regulating qualifications. I welcome the agreement the two organisations have reached on key features of this collaboration and your commitment to the 2020 delivery timeline for teaching of the first routes.

As you know, this collaboration arrangement is being set up on an interim basis drawing on the current legislative framework, which we expect to clarify in due course. I know you also recognise the challenges of combining the two organisations' responsibilities seamlessly. I have asked officials to keep the assurance arrangements under review as we move through the delivery cycle for the first T Levels to ensure that we can act quickly to improve delivery and better meet the needs of employers where necessary.

In the longer term, we expect experience of the interim arrangement to inform future legislation in relation to the regulation and assurance of T Levels.

I know that you are now working with the Department and the Institute to develop further the detailed assurance requirements that will be set out in the Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents for the first Technical Qualifications in autumn 2018. In this context, I am writing to you to set out my policy steers for your work on Technical Qualifications as part of the overall T Level programme and successful implementation of a single-licensing approach for the new qualifications.

As set out in the Government's consultation response, we would like Ofqual to use its regulatory levers to assure consistent assessment quality and awarding of Technical Qualifications by education and training providers across the country and over time. We consider that this would be achieved by Ofqual

working with the Institute, to:

- Set recognition requirements for organisations that wish to deliver Technical Qualifications
- Set appropriate accreditation requirements as part of the Institute's overall approvals process
- Use regulatory powers as appropriate to maintain qualification standards for Technical Qualifications that meet the accreditation requirements; and
- Ensure that there is an IFA-led, coordinated process for approval and accreditation, streamlined communication with AOs, and effective collaborative and performance management and regulation, once the Technical Qualifications are approved and in the market.

Whilst recognising the potential for conflict between regulatory and development/procurement roles, I would be grateful if you could explore with DfE officials the scope for Ofqual to contribute expertise on qualification design and development to the procurement phase of the first three qualifications, to ensure that bids are technically robust.

The assurance system must build on the policy decisions set out in the consultation response and Technical Annex and the principles of collaboration already agreed between the Institute and Ofqual, including working together to ensure that the design, content and assessment of each Technical Qualification delivers the employer-led standards and content set by the Institute which are required for entry into the jobs covered by each T Level. I would also expect you to keep the needs of employers firmly and primarily in mind in considering approaches to the maintenance of standards. It will of course be important that grade standards for each assessment and awarding of each Technical Qualification are appropriate for the content and consistent from college to college and over time so that employers can be confident that holding a T Level is reliable evidence that a student has acquired the skills they need for the job. The regulatory approach needs to reflect the purpose of the Technical Qualification. It must provide reliable evidence of students' attainment at Level 3, in relation to: the core knowledge and skills relevant to the route and occupational specialisms covered by the qualification; and the knowledge, skills

and behaviours required for at least one occupational specialism relevant to the qualification. The new approach must be bespoke to the specific characteristics of the T Level. It must ensure reliability, validity and comparability whilst simultaneously reflecting employer primacy on standards and content, potentially small cohorts, skills based tests and innovative modes of delivery. In particular, the new regulatory approach should allow for and not prevent regular refreshes of content to meet employer skills needs.

Working with the Institute, you should build on the information in the Government response - and the Technical Annex in particular - to produce the rules necessary to accredit and then maintain Technical Qualification standards. These rules should complement the Institute's approval and ongoing monitoring requirements, which will be set out in the tender document and subsequent contracts with AOs. You will want to focus on providing Awarding Organisations with clear rules against which they can develop and deliver qualifications that support the maintenance of standards in the context of meeting the changing needs of employers. I would also expect you to consider mechanisms for ensuring that standards of student performance are maintained, and that employers have a role in ensuring these reflect, and continue to reflect, the needs of industry.

The development of the joint approach will need to take into account the lead responsibility of the Institute and the imperative for these to be 'employer-driven' qualifications. Equally, employers and students should have confidence that the level of qualification achieved as part of the overall T Level programme is comparable irrespective of where, and when, the assessment is taken. We accept that there may be delivery challenges, but I want to be assured that you have prioritised and fully explored the best approach to assessing in appropriate contexts, the full range of skills that employers have told us they need and which will be set out in the subject content developed by the Institute.

I would like to thank Ofqual for working closely with the Department and the Institute to progress this important Government programme. I look forward to working with you further to introduce Technical Qualifications as part of the wider T Level programme from 2020.

Very grateful thanks for  
all your work on this  
best wishes  
Anne

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