



## NON-VERBATIM MINUTE

### DETAILS

**DATE:** Wednesday 15 September 2021

**TIME:** 13:45-15:00

**METHOD:** Zoom Meeting

**THEME:** EGM & T Levels: One Year In

**CHAIR:** Christian Wakeford MP

**SPEAKERS:**

The Rt. Hon. Gillian Keegan MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

Jenifer Burden MBE, Director of Programmes, Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Colin Wood MBE, Chief Executive (Europe), Aecom

David Russell, Chief Executive, The Education and Training Foundation

Katie – T Levels Student from Blackpool and the Fylde College

Max and Kim - T Levels students from Cirencester College

**PARLIAMENTARY ATENDEES:** Christian Wakeford MP, Gillian Keegan MP, Lord Aberdare, Lord Lucas, Baroness Morris, Lord Blunkett, Ben Everitt MP, Dehenna Davison MP, Baroness Garden

### MINUTES

#### 1. Extraordinary General Meeting

The Secretariat (Connect) outlined that there was a vacancy for the position of Chair and outlined the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups as they relate to holding Extraordinary General Meetings (EGM).

The Secretariat confirmed that the meeting had been publicised at least a week before in the All-Party Notices and that the election was being held within 28 sitting days of the vacancy of Chair arising.

Parliamentarians confirmed that the meeting was quorate with at least five members of either House, and at least one MP was present.

Christian Wakeford MP was proposed as Chair by Dehenna Davison MP

Christian Wakeford MP was seconded as Chair by Ben Everitt MP

Parliamentarians attending were asked to cast their votes. Christian Wakeford MP was unanimously elected as Chair of the APPG on T Levels.

#### 2. Introduction



The meeting was at this point opened to non-parliamentary invitees. The Secretariat (Connect) welcomed invitees, and announced that the group held an EGM immediately before the main meeting, at which Christian Wakeford MP was elected as the group's new chair.

Christian Wakeford MP thanked colleagues for his election as Chair of the APPG.

Mr Wakeford informed the meeting that the planned first speaker for the event, Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, was no longer able to attend as a result of the ongoing Cabinet reshuffle.

Christian Wakeford MP highlighted that the meeting was particularly timely, celebrating the first year of T Levels, and the expansion of T Levels into a range of new subjects. He praised the role T Levels have played in further education, allowing young people to follow routes into employment, and their position in the levelling up agenda. He also stated that he had recently been to visit a local college the previous week with the Minister to meet T Level students and discuss the opportunities provided by their qualification.

He then introduced the first speaker, Jenifer Burden MBE, the Director of Programmes at the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

## Jenifer Burden MBE

Jenifer Burden MBE introduced the Gatsby Charitable Foundation as a charity committed to supporting technical education, supporting young people starting their careers and adults who are upskilling or re-skilling. She stated that they have worked with FE providers supporting curriculum networks, bringing together teachers to collaborate on preparations for T Levels. She said that T Levels are a 'key plank' of the ongoing reforms in further education, building on best practices. Jennifer Burden highlighted that new qualifications require investment, and national oversight for quality assurance, and she welcomed the existing support for T Levels, underpinned by occupational standards devised by employers.

She praised T Levels for engaging in content which reflects employer intelligence, providing a broad qualification, which gives young people essential employability skills. She expressed excitement to hear the feedback of T Level students after the first year of study, and said that the Gatsby Charitable Foundation looks forward to continuing to work with providers and partners in supporting the implementation of T Levels.

## Colin Wood MBE

Christian Wakeford MP introduced Colin Wood MBE, Chief Executive for Europe at Aecom.

He began by echoing the previous speaker's excitement about the contribution of the T Level students, and said that he had significant personal support and passion for the new qualifications. This is because he personally left school at 16 without a clear plan, and achieved success through a technical vocational route. As such, he believes it is important that everyone is provided a path to employment. From a professional perspective he said that, as an employer, he requires access to a broad range of skills in employees, which can help people find a skills niche. He said that the first year of T Levels had seen great success in awareness raising and engagement with industry, and that part of the onus is on industry itself to be supportive of T Levels as they expand. This has been more difficult during the pandemic, but it is important to bring people into businesses and provide them with the right mentorship and mental wellbeing support to succeed.

## David Russell

Christian Wakeford MP introduced David Russell, Chief Executive of the Education Training Foundation, or ETF.

David Russell introduced ETF as the professional body for the FE system in England, responsible for professional standards in FE, designing and delivering training, and recruiting new talent into the sector, initial teacher training, governance, and others. He said that T Levels have excellent qualification design, and that this must also be supported by the best teachers, training and development. He said that this is currently being done very well, with an excellent programme of professional development available. The T Level professional development programme is designed and delivered by the ETF alongside its partners and colleges. He said that T Levels have a transformative potential in the education system, but asked those present to remember that they are only as good as the teachers delivering them. He stated that FE teaching in England starts from a position of strength, but called for further support. He said that T Levels provide an opportunity to transform the quality, status, and prestige of technical education teaching,

## Gillian Keegan

Christian Wakeford MP welcomed Gillian Keegan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Apprenticeships and Skills to the meeting, and invite her to speak.

Gillian Keegan MP congratulated Christian Wakeford MP on his election as chair, and welcomed the opportunity to celebrate and raise awareness of T Levels. She said that one of her early decisions in Government was not to delay T Level rollout. Whilst the pandemic created additional difficulties, T Levels represent the most significant reform to technical education in a generation. She said that she recently spoke at an event with the new cohort of T Level providers to launch the second year of delivery. There were a range of FE stakeholders present, all of whom had positive feedback on the qualifications. She also noted that she herself had been through technical education, which had provided the basis for her career, but that T Levels were providing for the jobs of the future, particularly through provision of digital skills. She said that fully online workplaces do not offer the same to young people, and that T Levels provide high quality work experience, providing a clear line of sight from study to future employment. She gave examples of T Level health and science students who might go on to become nurses or midwives, and construction students who might become civil engineers or quantity surveyors. She said that we are at “*the beginning of the T Level journey*”, and that more can be done as they expand. She said that T Levels will continue to face challenges, but that one in a generation reform will not be easy. While the qualifications are still in infancy, students she has spoken to have already been offered degree apprenticeships. She said that introduction of T Levels is a “vital pillar” in technical education. She thanked everyone for their support for T Levels, and said that she has noticed growing interest in the qualifications.

## T Levels Students

### KATIE

Christian Wakeford introduced Katie, a T Level student at Blackpool and the Fylde College.

Katie said that she had initially completed a transition to T Levels course through her college to prepare for her current course in Childcare and Education. She said that she had been given many opportunities through the course, despite being primarily online through the pandemic. She



said that placements had been disrupted, but that there were still opportunities for them to take part in skills learning through college.

## MAX

Christian Wakeford introduced Max, a T Level student at Cirencester College.

Max said that he began the Childcare and Education T Level last year, and has been working on placement and in the classroom. He had the opportunity to do an extended placement in one setting, and he said that this has really helped to develop his knowledge and skills, by applying what he learned in class. He said that he felt prepared for the workplace, but at this stage was planning to go on to university, and that he felt supported to develop employable skills whilst still learning.

## KIM

Christian Wakeford then introduced Kim, another T Level student at Cirencester College.

Kim said that she is also on the Childcare and Education T Level, and agreed that her placement had been helpful, and was a significant part of why she chose to study a T Level course. She also wants to pursue a university course at this stage, but said that she feels confident that she could change her mind and have the appropriate skills and experience to begin work. She said the course has helped her gain independence, and she enjoys the content that she studies. She said that she has “*nothing bad to say*” about the course.

## Questions and Answers

Christian Wakeford MP invited questions for the speakers from parliamentarians and other stakeholders, and first asked the students if they had received good guidance to pursue a T Level course.

Max said the teachers had communicated the course’s content well and had helped the students understanding. Kim agreed, and said the shift from practical to theory lessons had been done well. Katie said that she had completed a transition to T Levels course, which had explored all of the T Level options, and that she had been advised which course to pursue based on her work in the earlier course.

Christian Wakeford MP asked the minister to what extent alternative routes into teaching careers could support T Level delivery.

Gillian Keegan MP replied that there had been significant investment in teacher training for T Levels. There are some teaching apprenticeships, but she wants to broaden all routes into FE, and gave the example of industry exchange programmes. She said that there was a shortage of teachers, and so we need to make sure we broaden these routes. She also said that she had been working on a new apprenticeship standard for the FE sector. She praised FE teachers in general for their passion and quality.

Christian Wakeford MP called on Baroness Morris to ask a question, but technical difficulties meant that the audio was too unclear for her to be heard.

The Chair moved onto a question from Lord Lucas, who asked the minister how to avoid T Levels deepening the academic vocational divide, as it asks young people chose to pursue a vocational route at 16, which may be difficult if parents have an entrenched view of university as the major acceptable route. He asked if BTEC qualifications could be retained and integrated into this framework. He also asked how placements can be offered in areas without large employers.



Gillian Keegan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Apprenticeships and Skills, said that ensuring there are enough quality placements will be a significant challenge, but it is one that's been overcome in many countries, requiring a cultural shift in which employers take on a higher educational burden. She said many companies are facing skills shortages, and as such it is a good opportunity for them to benefit by taking on a role in an employer led system, both for young people's education and upskilling. She also said that there is some kind of industry everywhere, such as NHS and digital workforces.

Lord Aberdare asked what challenges the pandemic has presented to the range of industry placements available, and what happens if placements are a poor match.

Gillian Keegan MP replied that, given it is the first year, there may not be much experience in handling placements, but that there has been significant investment in building capacity and engaging with employers .

Christian Wakeford MP then asked questions which were submitted in writing to the secretariat. The first question was what role T Levels can play in social mobility.

Gillian Keegan MP said that any good education can be a driver of social mobility, and that work placements in particular were important here, as they allow young people to enter and progress in the workplace. She also said that T Levels present many options, whether that be progressing to university, degree apprenticeships, or going straight into work. She said that there should be student choice, but that there is currently too many types of level 3 qualification available, which is difficult to navigate.

The next question which had been submitted to the secretariat was how employers had been brought into the process of T Level development.

Jenifer Burden MBE said that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education had worked to convene expert employer groups to shape the standards underpinning technical education, and panels who have worked on the educational content. She also referred back to the earlier question from Lord Aberdare on potential difficulties within placements. She said that the capacity and delivery fund has been in place to help providers prepare for running placements, and that there is a wealth of guidance for providers if a student isn't able to complete a particular placement.

Colin Woods MBE said that, from an industry perspective there is an onus on them to provide capacity and flexibility, and to work with providers to determine what exactly they are able to offer.

Another question submitted to the secretariat asked if the learners felt they had received good quality careers information and advice.

Katie said that this had been done much better in a college setting than in school. She said that school advice had given an idea of what it would be like to begin the range of level three routes, but the full extent of each course was discussed with less clarity. However, she said that her college had been able to give her very comprehensive advice. Kim said that she had received T Level advice during a college open day, and found the placement and sense of direction of study appealing. She said that she would have liked to have had it advertised to her earlier while at school so she could plan earlier. Max said that he also learned about the course through visiting college, and chose it because it allowed him to focus solely on the area he knew he was most interested in.

Christian Wakeford MP thanked the speakers and closed the meeting.