

T-Levels – building on apprenticeships





Introduction

Ahead of the June general election, the Association for Project Management (APM), the Chartered body for the project profession, identified seven policy issues that the next government would need to tackle to ensure that the UK is well positioned to develop and maintain the skills base required by today's emerging workforce to compete on the global stage.

Underpinning APM's manifesto is the need to strengthen the transition from education to work by providing a good foundation of skills – both vocational and academic – on which to build, while empowering the next generation to make informed career choices. We asserted the following themes should be foremost in the government's thinking:

Call to action

1. A stable policy framework – resist the temptation to continually tinker with skills policy.
2. Apprenticeships – work with industry and professional bodies to further promote the benefits to employers and potential apprentices.
3. Recognition for professional bodies – make better use of the UK's expertise and experience.
4. Stronger core skills – improve the literacy and numeracy of those leaving our secondary education system.
5. Improved careers guidance – providing support to develop this process for the young workforce.
6. Create and maintain an audit of UK current and future skills deficits.
7. Invest in digital skills

APM is the Chartered body for the project profession and its vision is to create a world in which all projects succeed.

In contemporary society, we need to deliver more for less and, in these extraordinary times, we need to manage change effectively and efficiently, and capitalise on the opportunities available while driving forward new and innovative achievements.

A key challenge is identifying current and likely skills gaps across all trades and professions, such as project management, to help deliver future prosperity and growth.

Our manifesto outlines how APM and the project management profession are embracing the next generation by driving forward an agenda for skills investment.



Introduction: Review and reform

Shortly after the 2015 general election, the Government published its **Productivity Plan** *Fixing the foundations: creating a more prosperous nation* in which reform of technical and professional education featured as a key pillar. Subsequently, the Skills minister announced the Government's plans for "ground-breaking reforms to technical and professional education" – starting with a review by a panel led by Lord Sainsbury of Turville. The *Independent Panel on Technical Education* was established in November 2015 to advise ministers on actions to improve the quality of technical education in England with a remit to "assist with simplifying the current system, ensuring that the new system provides the skills most needed in the 21st Century."

Key recommendations [see Fig. 1] made by the *Independent Panel* were published in July 2016 in a **report** by Lord Sainsbury, with the Government accepting these recommendations unequivocally in its greatly anticipated **Post-16 Skills Plan** – published on the same day as Lord Sainsbury's report – committing to implement them "where possible within current budget constraints."

Lord Sainsbury's Report on the Independent Panel on Technical Education key recommendations:

A single, common framework of standards should cover both apprenticeships and college-based provision. These standards must be designed to deliver the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform successfully in specific occupations, not the narrower job role-focused needs of individual employers.

A common framework of 15 routes must be established, encompassing all employment-based and college-based technical education at levels 2 to 5

The remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) should be developed and expanded to encompass all of technical education at levels 2 to 5. ... This will allow the Institute to maintain a single, common framework of technical education standards, qualifications and quality assurance.

The IfA should convene panels of professionals to advise on the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be acquired for the standards

At the earliest opportunity, the IfA must review all existing apprenticeship standards to satisfy itself that there is no substantial overlap between standards, and that every standard is occupation - rather than firm- specific and contains sufficient technical content to warrant at least 20% off-the-job training. Standards found to be overlapping or wanting in terms of breadth or technical content should be revised, consolidated or withdrawn.

Figure 1

A key pillar of the
Productivity Plan
*Fixing the foundations:
creating a more
prosperous nation* was
the reform of technical
and professional
education.



T-Levels

While 16 – 18 year olds have previously been able to opt for a *mixture* of academic and vocational qualifications, the **Post-16 Skills Plan** mandated that at the age of 16, students would have to choose between the "academic option", comprising A-levels leading to an undergraduate degree, or the new "technical option" leading to qualifications dubbed 'T-Levels' by the media.

The *Independent Panel's* recommendations included replacing the current system, comprised of more than 20,000 qualifications, with a framework of **15 routes** to skilled employment [see Fig. 2]. These would extend from levels 2 and 3 up to higher skill levels. The breadth of some of the 15 pathways – spanning a range of occupational areas – means that it wouldn't be possible to develop a *single* qualification that would cover the whole areas. Although the *total* number of qualifications has not yet been decided, the final decision will be informed by employer-led sector panels who will develop new "standards" that will underpin the technical routes. These standards will underpin both the T-Levels and apprenticeships. Occupational maps will be developed and will demonstrate relationships *between* occupations in each route. Technical qualifications (T-Levels) will then be developed based on these standards. Crucially, where apprenticeships do exist or are currently planned, these will be mapped to the occupational maps in all 15 routes. With *Project Management* currently sitting in the *Business and Administration* route, there is the potential that Project Management could be mapped across a number of T-Levels.

It is currently anticipated that *eleven* of the fifteen routes will be available as two-year college courses or as apprenticeships, with the remaining *four* routes available exclusively via apprenticeships (protective services; sales, marketing and procurement; social care; and transport and logistics).

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Framework of 15 routes - grouping related occupations together

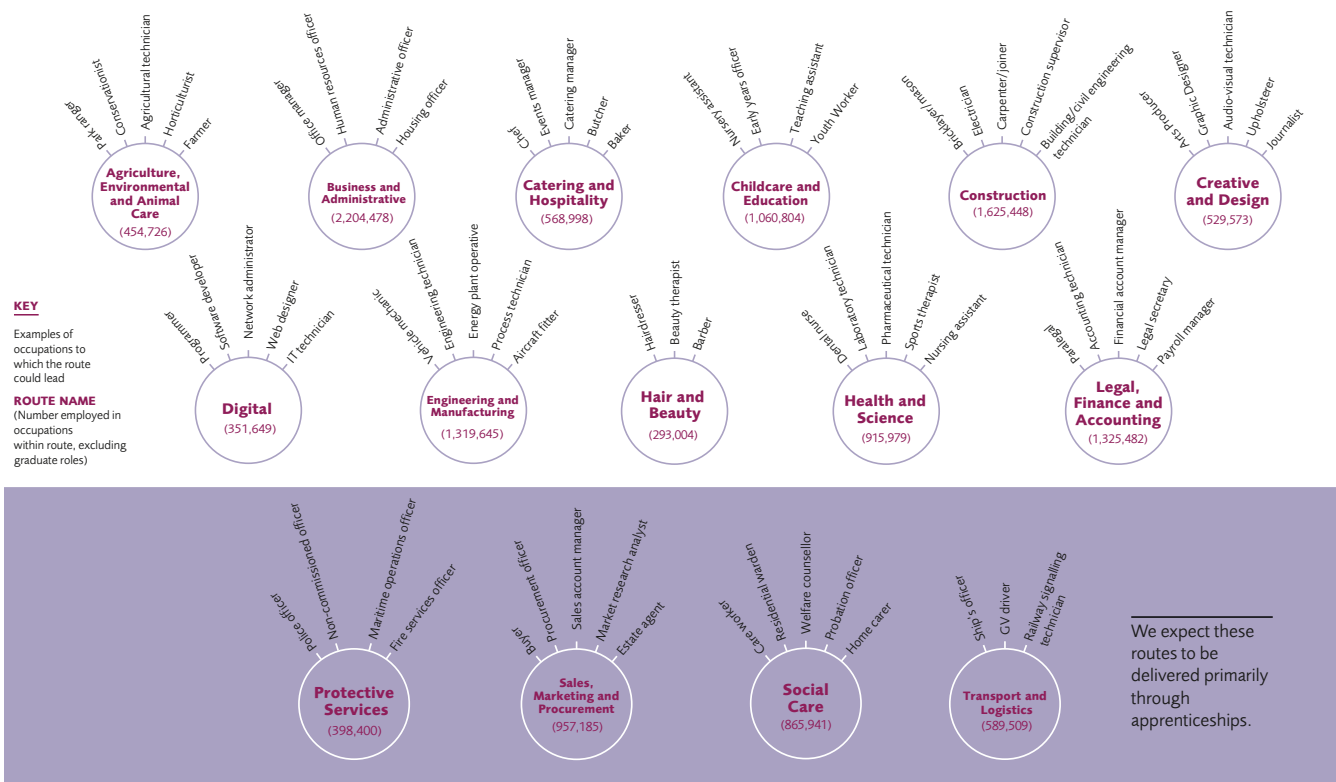


Figure 2

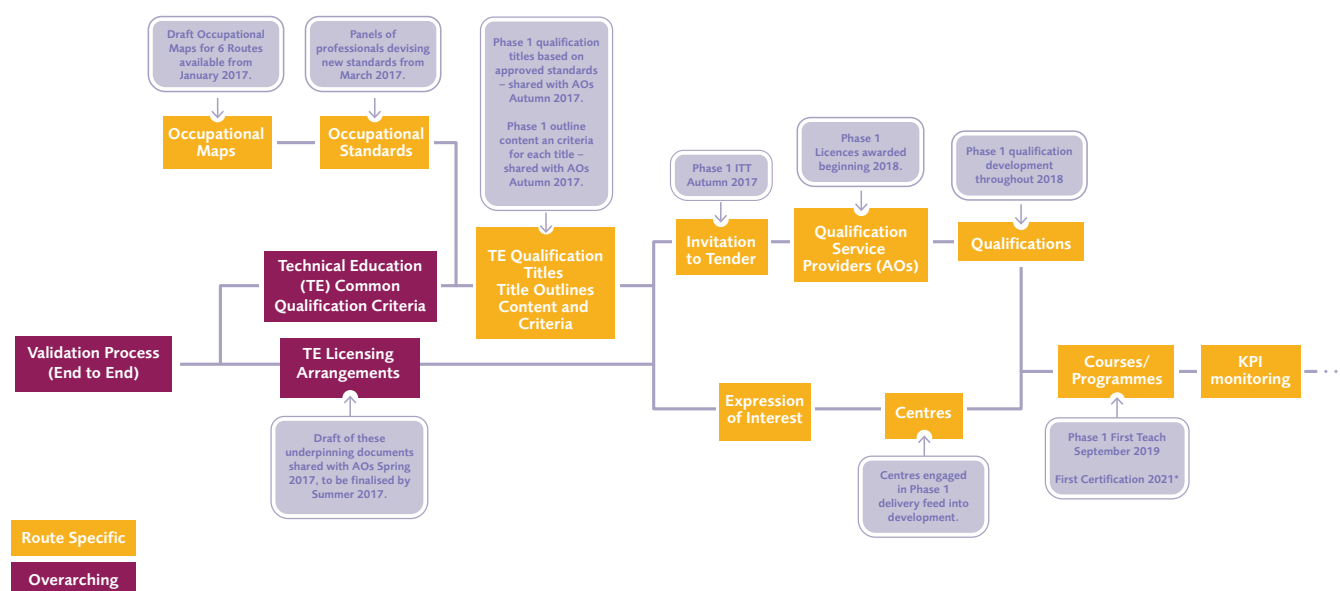
The challenges of T-Levels

Mindful that since the 1980s the FE sector has been subject to just short of 30 major pieces of legislation – with 48 secretaries of state handling responsibility for FE – and with no organisation surviving longer than a decade, it is understandable that a mass overhaul of technical education is greeted tentatively by many. Furthermore, there are a number of similarities between the plans for T-Levels and the 14-19 *diplomas* that previous governments tried to develop – introduced in 2008 and phased out in 2013 (a 2005 *White Paper* asserted that the reform of introducing 14-19 Diplomas “seizes a **once-in-a-generation** chance to transform 14-19 education and skills.”).

A critical factor in the success of these reforms is *adequate funding* – the **Spring Budget 2017** contained a headline announcement of an *increase* in spending on technical education. This increase is to ensure that the 15 technical routes are well-designed and that colleges are properly prepared, with the government announcing that it will increase the number of programme hours of training for 16-19 year olds on technical routes by more than 50%, to over 900 hours a year on average, including the completion of a high quality industry work placement during the programme. Funding will be increased in line with the roll out of the new system and will equate to over £500 million of additional funding per year once routes are fully implemented.

Timing is another critical factor if these reforms are to succeed: according to the timescale [Fig. 3] set out in the *Post-16 Skills Plan*, the next step in the process of introducing T-Levels was to develop the technical content for the “pathfinder” routes in **October 2017**, with the first T-Level qualifications to be approved in **February 2019** for teaching at the start of the **2019-20** academic year and remaining routes intended to be phased in between 2020 and 2022. These timescales were labelled as impossible by several major awarding bodies including City & Guilds.

Proposed end-to-end process, with potential timings for phase 1 (first teaching Sept 2019)

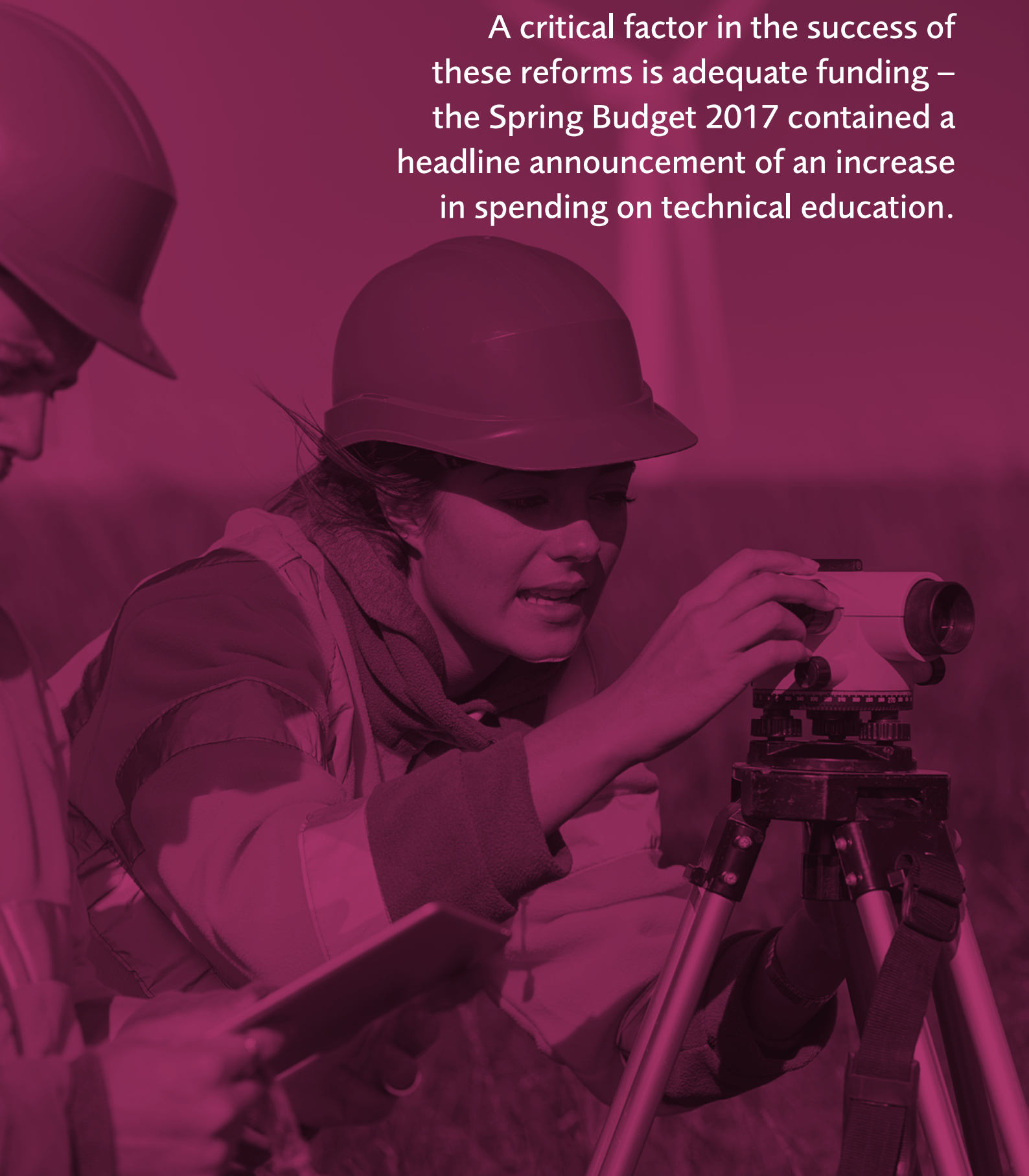


Assuming all qualifications part of two-year programmes.

Figure 3. Original timescale as set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan

Following a review of this timetable by officials and extensive testing of the *current* delivery plans, skills minister Anne Milton announced in July that the first two “pathfinder” qualifications, scheduled in the *Post-16 Skills Plan* for approval by February 2019, with teaching to commence from *that* September, have been delayed by 12 months. The remaining T-Level routes will still be available as planned in September 2022.

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A lack of joined-up decisions?

There was wide-spread confusion about a call by the IfA in June for up to 150 *unpaid* industry experts to join 15 new employer-led advisory panels – distinct from those planned for technical education. These IfA panels are separate from those being set up by the *Department for Education* to advise on T-Levels – even though the 15 occupational routes are the same. Earlier in 2017, 100 *paid* panellists had been sought for these new bodies (see Fig. 4 for IfA panel Chairs).

Additional challenges of T-Levels have been identified as:

- Getting employers to provide *specific* work experience and asking employers to certify skill levels
- Being able to develop comparable, coherent programmes of study
- Being able to provide sectors where there is significant freelance delivery

IfA panel Chairs:

Agriculture, environment and animal care: **Richard Self**, project manager, Edge Careers, and agricultural manager, Co-operatives UK

Business and administrative: **Andrew Ground**, CEO and co-founder of Tutorfair

Catering and hospitality: **Alison Gilbert**, HR and board director, CH&Co

Childcare and education: **Sir Nick Weller**, executive principal, Dixons City Academy

Construction: **Tanja Smith**, technical director, Gradon Architecture

Creative and design: **Iain Smith OBE**, film producer, Applecross Productions

Digital: **Mark Sherwin**, managing director, global digital customer services lead, Accenture

Engineering and manufacturing: **Dr Graham Honeyman CBE**, chief executive at Sheffield Forgemasters

Hair and beauty: **Suki Kalirai**, director, GKC Infocus Ltd and Qi Spa (Spa WMC Ltd)

Health and science: **Kirk Lower**, national lead for apprenticeships, Talent for Care, widening participation and volunteering, Health Education England

Legal, finance and accounting: **Mike Thompson**, director, early careers, Barclays

Protective services: **Sir Jonathan Murphy**, former chief constable, Merseyside Police, professor of advanced policing studies, Liverpool John Moores University

Sales, marketing and procurement: **Godfrey Moger**, station director for Free Radio, Bauer Media

Social care: **Sir Roger Singleton**, chair of the Independent Safeguarding Authority and previously chief executive of Barnardo's

Transport and logistics: **Michelle Nolan-McSweeney**, head of training strategy, Network Rail

Figure 4



Next steps

The assertion that the schedule for implementation was impossible is given further momentum when considering that the DfE's consultation on new qualifications has been pushed back until later this autumn, and that as late as July, no one had yet been appointed to the T-Level advisory development panels – due to have convened for the first time in March. Additional information is expected soon, but it is likely that we will see additional delays to the T-Level schedule. Further details on financial aspects will likely be contained in the Autumn Budget on 22nd November 2017.

Relevant APM Publications:

Apprenticeships: an employer guide

APM Skills Manifesto: An agenda for Skills Investment

Policy Briefing: What does the government's industrial strategy green paper mean for the project management profession?

External links:

Institute for Apprenticeships

Latest publications from the Department for Education



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