



T Levels - Transforming Vocational Education in the United Kingdom

Challenge

In 2017, Chancellor Philip Hammond announced a £500m per year plan to reform technical education and introduce a new T Levels qualification - “the most ambitious post-16 education reform since the introduction of A-levels 70 years ago”.

DfE immediately set about writing policy for the new qualification, working across a complex environment (Figure 1) with stakeholders across multiple teams and organisations.

ESFA asked Methods to help them to integrate work happening across the T Levels programme under a unified vision.

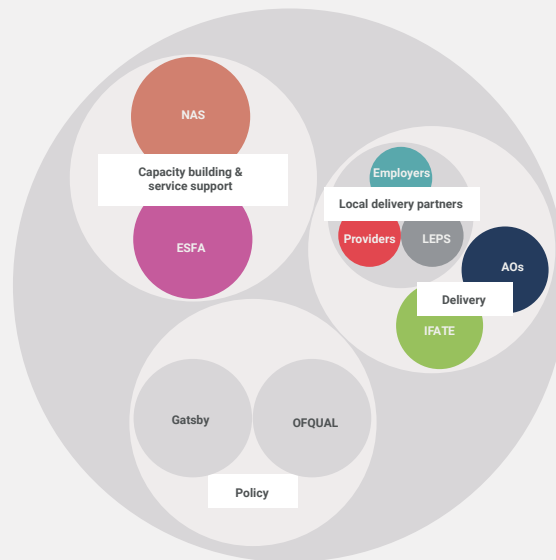


Figure 1: the complex stakeholder environment for T Levels

Background

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people, and adults. It oversees the financial management and governance of c.20,000 training providers, e.g. schools and academies, and is responsible for a budget of £59 billion per year (2019 to 2020).

ESFA’s vision is to support, develop and fund world-class education and skills provision for every learner to reach their potential, regardless of background.

Our Approach

Our team worked closely with 10 senior leaders from across the programme to pull out core interaction points with users, helping to define the scope of the service. The team also conducted user research to better understand their expectations of the service. This combined approach (Figure 2) enabled us to create a service vision for T Levels that consolidates multiple streams of work into a unified service strategy, which in turn supports the T Levels delivery strategy.



Figure 2 : Method's process for facilitating a shared service vision

Since developing the service vision and strategy, we have continued to support the programme through:



Developing the T Levels Service MVP (minimum viable product).



Providing multidisciplinary, on-site teams.



Facilitating stakeholder alignment and collaboration across the programme.

The Results

Methods has supported the discoveries, alphas and betas of the new systems and services that will ensure the delivery of T Levels is a success, including:



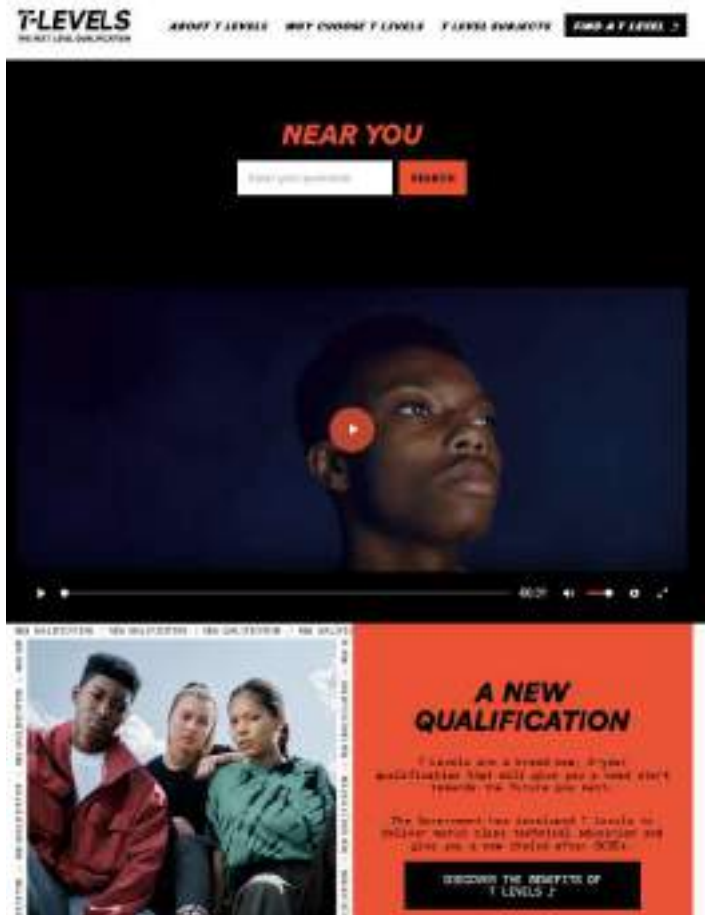
Marketing and communications campaigns and website.



The results and certification process: ensuring students receive their qualification.



Underlying systems supporting education providers to successfully deliver the qualification to thousands of students across the country.



Screenshots: Methods continues to work on the T Levels campaign site to meet the needs of users - tlevels.gov.uk

Along the way we have:

- Developed a service vision map to help illustrate to the wider programme what scaled delivery should accomplish from a user-needs perspective.
- Defined the strategy and supported the delivery of the T-Levels MVP.
- Supported the delivery of the T Levels website MVP to ensure students and employers learn more about T Levels.
- Conducted delivery assessments of previous work and gaps, and made recommendations to ensure ESFA meets its tight deadlines with systems delivered to the highest quality.
- Created a target operating model and roadmap to support how capabilities across the programme will transform as it scales and matures over the next ten years.

Next Steps?

We are continuing to support ESFA with T Levels. This includes running multiple projects to look at the provider experience with T Levels, to ensure the service adequately supports this user group, who are responsible for making the T Levels a success for thousands of students across England.

What Did We Learn?

Working with ESFA, we could see how multiple departments across the organisation face similar challenges: duplicated or disjointed systems, provider information and data capture and processing, and siloed practices that often make government a difficult place to understand and navigate. Through the T Levels Service we have had the opportunity to understand ESFA more deeply and identify what capabilities are working well now and which may have further

potential in the future. As we build out our future T Levels implementation strategy, we're exploring how we leverage existing capabilities and also potentially spur new ones that could help shape what best practice within the organisation could look like from a data and systems perspective.



What Difference Did Methods Make?

- Our work to leverage and partner with existing ESFA capabilities and services, eg Apprenticeship Service, built strong trust, partnerships and relationships across the ESFA and policy teams.
- Taking a user-centred approach that reframed how stakeholders think of the service ensured users were put at the forefront of everything. This has led to a strong evidence base that's helping to form ideas and build our understanding of T Levels and user needs.
- We made ESFA think about their longer-term Programme strategy. As a result of our work, ESFA now has plans in place to improve the customer experience of providers across the country, as well as an evolving roadmap for how the Programme will be sustained in the short, medium and long term.