

Education Secretary visits the West Midlands

Today (12 September) Education Secretary Gavin Williamson visited Dudley College of Technology in the West Midlands to see first-hand the work they are doing to support young people to gain the skills they need to forge great careers.

As one of the first institutions to deliver new T Level qualifications next year and one of the largest apprenticeship training providers in the West Midlands, Dudley College is at the forefront of building a world class, technical education system that will deliver the workforce the country needs for the future

On the visit Mr Williamson met with Neil Thomas, College Principal, as well as full-time students and apprentices. He also experienced hands on learning and had a go at perfecting his welding skills in a state-of-the-art virtual reality welding bay – just some of the state-of-the-art equipment the college uses to train their students.

Mr Williamson's visit follows the recent announcement that the Government will provide an additional £400 million boost – the single biggest uplift since 2010 – for providers of 16-19 education for the year 2020- 21. This significant investment means colleges like Dudley will benefit from even more cash so they can continue to deliver high-quality courses, including T Levels.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

It was brilliant to meet with staff, students and apprentices at Dudley College of Technology today. The college is at the forefront of delivering the skilled workforce the West Midlands and the country needs for the future and I've been really impressed with what I've seen here today.

It is absolutely vital that we continue to grow the nations skills. The £400 million boost we have provided for colleges and sixth forms will help to get even more young people on the path to a rewarding job. This major investment will help make sure colleges, like Dudley, can continue to provide high-quality education and recruit the brilliant teachers and leaders they need.

Neil Thomas College Principal , Dudley College of Technology said:

I welcome the emphasis the Minister is placing on further education and the recognition that we are at the forefront of training the skilled workforce our economy needs. We believe first class

technical education can change lives and plays a significant role in supporting our local employers as they face the skills and productivity challenges of the future. We are proud to be delivering the new T Levels and hope this attracts more young people to pursue training and careers in these rewarding sectors.

Dudley College of Technology is also the driving force behind the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology – [one of 12 that are being established across the country](#) to specialise in delivering quality higher level technical training (primarily at Level 4 and 5) in STEM subjects, such as digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering to help close skills gaps.

While he was in the area, Mr Williamson also visited Walsall Studio School and Sixth Form, part of the Mercian Multi Academy Trust, which specialises in Business Social Enterprise and a broad range of Creative and Digital disciplines for 14-19 year olds. The school will also be among the first to offer the new T Level in Digital Production, Design and Development from September 2020. During the visit the Education Secretary met with students and staff to discuss how the new qualification will help young people in the West Midlands to secure rewarding, sort-after jobs in the digital sector.

Mr Williamson added:

Digital skills are in high-demand. Our new T Level in Digital Production, Design and Development which will be taught at Walsall Studio School from next September, will make sure more young people can gain the skills and experience they need to get ahead in their careers. It was great to meet students and staff and hear all about how they are ramping up preparations in readiness for the introduction of the new technical qualification next year.

Mr Dan Parkes, CEO The Mercian Trust said:

We are delighted to be pioneering excellence in the field of technical education as we further develop qualifications that employers value and real-world experiences for students that prepare them for their future careers. Walsall Studio School has a track record of innovation and students working collaboratively with industry professionals. The digital economy in the West Midlands has created record levels of jobs and it is our job to ensure our local young people have the skills employers need. Through Walsall Studio School the Mercian Trust aims to be at the forefront of this digital revolution.

Mr Darren Perry, Studio School Principal added

Our Digital Production, Design and Development T Level is being

developed ready for September 2020 as part of our new St Matthew's Learning Campus and provides our students with even more opportunities to work closely with the creative and digital industry professionals as they prepare to meet the growing demand for higher level digital skills.

[The first three T Levels for Digital, Education and Construction will be taught from September 2020](#) by further education providers across the country. A further seven will to be taught from 2021, including three in Health and Science, with a further 15 coming on stream from 2022 onwards in sectors such as legal, financial and accounting, engineering and manufacturing, and creative & design.

Institutes of Technology will build on and complement the further and higher education on offer in the areas where they are located but will have their own distinct identity and physical presence with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. The Institutes will provide a natural progression route for young people taking T Levels or A Levels (Level 3) enabling them to take the next step up to higher level technical education and training (Level 4 or 5) – like Foundation Degrees and higher level apprenticeships in STEM subjects – helping to upskill the next generation and ensure employers can access the skills they need.