



**Response from the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education regarding the Agriculture, Land Management & Production T Level  
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For the attention of Dr Jude Capper, Route Panel Chair – Agriculture, environmental and animal care

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The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) represents more than 850 UK businesses, including retailers, breeders, importers and manufacturers (many of which are SMEs). We promote high welfare standards in the industry through a wide variety of initiatives, such as our Code of Conduct, customer care sheets, biosecurity document and our Primary Authority scheme for pet shops.

We are writing to express our concern with regard to the generic nature of the new Land and Water T Level qualifications given that they do not appear to recognise the importance of the aquaculture, ornamental fish and fishery management industries. Without such recognition from both the Department for Education and the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education, there is a considerable risk of an employment gap developing at a time, as we enter a post-COVID recession, when such courses are critical to the continued growth of our respective industries. Collectively (and pre-pandemic), it is estimated that our respective industries employed a combined total of over 60,000 people and contributed in total £3 billion to the UK economy.

The ornamental aquatics industry, which we represent, and which pre-pandemic contributed approximately £400 million per annum to the UK economy, is dependent upon a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Many of those employed in our industry, will have undertaken specialist Level 3 courses such as the fish courses offered by Sparsholt College, Hampshire and other educational establishments. Those employed in our industry (and the other fish industries) who have undertaken such courses develop an awareness and knowledge of the importance of aquatic ecosystems to biodiversity, and given their sensitivity to disruption, how such ecosystems need to be protected. Those working within our specific industry have frequent interactions with the public and so are crucial in disseminating messages on the importance of legal, responsible and sustainable sourcing not only to protect aquatic organisms but the livelihoods of communities that depend upon them and in turn, the ecosystems for which such communities are custodians e.g. Amazon river, coral reefs etc.

We therefore note with great concern that the new Land and Water T levels do not make provision for the importance of the various fish industries and without such specialist courses, such as those offered by Sparsholt College, there will be an employment gap which will have detrimental effects.

The lockdown period saw an upsurge in hobbies which could be safely undertaken at home such as fishkeeping, which has also provided a crucial link to nature via indoor nature interactions. Along with the other fish industries such as aquaculture and fishery management, an increase in growth will provide opportunities for employment for young people, which will be extremely important as we head into a post-COVID recession. However, such growth will be impeded if the importance of our industry and hence the necessity for ongoing specialist courses, i.e. Level 3 fish courses, is not recognised in these new T Levels.

We therefore urge both the Department of Education and the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education not to forego our industries by the introduction of generic T Levels which will fail to provide the specialist knowledge sought by our industry.