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Evaluation of T Level Industry Placement Pilot: route reports

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Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care

Key points

- Broadly, within the Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care route there is a tradition of undertaking work experience either as part of vocational courses or professional qualification structures. This provided a platform to build on for the pilot. The requirement for work experience was already discussed in course information – a facet of good practice that many providers plan to embed for the placements in future.
- The route was characterised by a relatively high reliance on self-sourcing. Where learners were already networked in relevant industries this worked well; those who were not benefitted from help and support from their providers.
- Providers believed that self-sourcing increased learners' commitment to the placement, and supported retention on placement. However, as providers typically did not have a foregoing relationship with the employers, they needed to ensure sufficient resource was available to lead full, first-time due diligence checks in the run up to placements.
- The predominance of micro and SMEs business in the route created some challenges as these employers could find it hard to accommodate placements because of the higher impact in respect of supervision costs and lost productivity of supervisors.
- Messages that encouraged employers to offer a placement included having extra resources to assist with jobs or to provide a 'buddy' for safety critical tasks. Many employers were also motivated by the 'opportunity to give something back' by encouraging young people to join the industry; some hoped to build a new talent pipeline for hard to recruit skills. In addition, those employers that offered apprenticeships welcomed the placement as an opportunity to determine learners' suitability before offering them an apprenticeship after they had finished their course.
- Employers accommodated the range of models available and had reasons for different preferences, including needing help at busy times (block models) or regular assistance on a longer term basis (day release). There was evidence of employers in this route accommodating multiple models effectively.
- A learning point from the placement this year was the need to change the timing of some aspects of the curriculum in order to best prepare learners for placement and to ensure their maximum utility. This included bringing training in some technical skills (such as chainsaw operations) earlier on in the year.

- High quality and varied placement experiences were noted that developed technical and soft skills. Some learners achieved industry accreditations as part of their placements.
- The rural location of many businesses increased the time and resource needed for learner monitoring. To manage this better, providers trialled the use of Skype/video calls between themselves the learner and employer. This worked well, although providers believed it was necessary to mix technology-mediated meetings with in-person meetings.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time qualifications at post-16 providers to gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of 'design dimensions' for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help

providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care route, which unites 2 occupational pathways¹: agriculture, land management and production; and animal care and management.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 3 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 5 courses covering both pathways. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. To aid interpretation of the table, it is worth noting that 1 of the providers operated 3 models and another offered 2 models.

Table 1: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|---|
| Block | Spring/Summer blocks (1) Summer vacation block (1) Autumn block (1) |
| Day Release | 1-day release from Autumn (3) 3-day release from Autumn (1) |
| Mixed | 1-day release from Autumn with a Summer block (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers and project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 3 providers.
- Interviews with 12 employers engaged with the 3 providers.
- Interviews with 17 learners involved with 2 of the providers.

¹ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

- 13 learner survey responses covering 2 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 433 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 419 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 2: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Agriculture, environment and animal care | 433 | 419 | 97% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively straightforward to source for.

Sourcing placements

Amongst employers offering occupations associated with this route, there is well-established practice of extended work experience for young people to support their courses and to provide career entry routes. This meant there was a platform for providers to build on for the pilot. For example, the providers involved already knew that some employers in agricultural and land management and production had preferences for placements involving summer block models, due to seasonal work patterns, and those in

animal care and management were used to providing placement opportunities to people who want to enter the profession, for example as a veterinary nurse.

Furthermore, due to the existing expectation for placements (of shorter duration) in this route, providers' course information covered this requirement; this meant that learners expected a placement would form part of their course experience from the start of the year. This contrasted with the experience in some other routes, where placements are not the norm and, due to relatively short lead in times for the pilot, it had not been possible to cover the industry placement in course brochures. Overall, providers believed that setting learners' expectations appropriately early on was valuable. Accordingly learners said they had expected to be out on a lengthy placement as part of their course and were very open to developing their CVs and honing their skills while on placement.

Self-sourcing was prevalent

In the pilot, the Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care route stood out because of the extent of self-sourcing in use. The providers have used this approach when brokering work experience in the past. They opted to continue this in the pilot and the approach worked effectively. Because of the tradition of sourcing work experience using this method, providers had already included information in course brochures which meant that learners knew in advance that they would need to find their placement. Accordingly, learners in the survey indicated that it was they who had contacted their placement employers and most did not have a pre-existing working relationship with the employer they selected.

The approach worked most effectively for those learners with pre-existing contacts in the relevant industry – broadly, within this route, reliance on personal networks to find work is relatively common. However, those learners who lacked industry contacts found the experience more challenging. For this reason, providers aimed to lead some sourcing activity in parallel. It should be noted that none of the learners responding to the survey in this route had their placement sourced by their provider or the national support organisation. These learners indicated that the level of support they had received to source their placements had been satisfactory.

Preparing learners to self-source and helping those who struggle

A provider reported that where learners were expected to find their own placements this was made clear during the interview for their course place – the placement and its benefits were discussed and learners' capability and networks to enable self-sourcing were explored. This meant that when learners started their courses they were already prepared and had established some contacts. However, if they could not find a placement, the provider would help by supplying the learner with contacts.

There was a challenge in respect of whether placing learners in the provider's farm was an acceptable industry placement - currently this does not meet placement guidance. In the past, providers had used their own farms in situations when they struggled to source work experience and believed that these commercial farms provided a valuable industry placement for some learners, such as those learners with SEND.

Benefits and concerns of self-sourcing

Providers believed self-sourcing had some benefits. These included learners being more committed because they had requested the placement from the employer and worked with the employer to set it in place. Providers also believed that this early learner involvement led to better retention on placement. The wider evaluation findings indicate that where providers also led some sourcing alongside learners this could overcome social equity and mobility criticisms made of self-sourcing.

Self-sourcing meant that providers extended beyond their own networks of employers. This intensified pre-placement activity on due diligence since they were not updating earlier checks but potentially starting from a blank sheet.

One concern relating to self-sourcing is that providers might need to make concerted efforts to develop relationships with employers at a provider level, rather than solely through learners. This is likely to be important to persuade employers involved with the pilot to continue offering extended placements in the future.

Challenges to sourcing, and creative solutions

Nevertheless there remained some challenges related to sourcing. These included the route being characterised by SMEs and micro-businesses – the evaluation evidence more widely indicates that small employers could find it harder to accommodate placements because of the relatively higher impacts in respect of supervision and productivity.

Additionally, in this route, placement opportunities were sometimes not available in the immediate geography of the providers or learners – due to these often being rural businesses – which had implications for learners’ travel and for monitoring arrangements (see later).

Finally, animal care and management pathway employers could have a niche or specialism, for example, horse stables or dog grooming services. Providers sourcing placements reported that specialised/niche employers expected them to be knowledgeable about their specific area of work. Being able to demonstrate relevant industry knowledge could help to establish a rapport to build on. These employers could similarly expect that learners would be specialised and providers questioned whether general animal care courses would struggle to source placements in contrast to specialised ones, for example equine studies.

Provider perspective on using knowledgeable staff

A key lesson emerged in the animal care and management pathway that those sourcing and brokering placements needed to have industry relevant knowledge to have credibility with employers. Being able to demonstrate that brokerage staff share common practice (such as professional language, values and experiences) could mean that employers took them more seriously, gave them more time and were open to being persuaded to try new things within the industry placements. The pilot year allowed staff to ‘get the measure’ of the employers. This suggests that in future years they will be able to better match learners with increased levels of confidence and competence.

Messages on involving employers

Organisations in this route were typically SME or micro employers. These employers could be persuaded to offer placements by the opportunity to have an extra person to assist with physical jobs such as dog grooming or to provide a ‘buddy’ for safety critical tasks. If learners were also available during busy periods such as harvest, this could also prove attractive.

It was clear from many employers’ accounts that there was a tradition of work experience and many also offered apprenticeships. Those employers that offered apprenticeships welcomed the placement as an opportunity to determine learners’ suitability before offering them an apprenticeship after they had finished their course.

Given the traditions of placements within the industries, there were also employers who were motivated to take part in order to give something back, having themselves

benefitted from placements in the past. There were also concerns to build a diverse talent pipeline amongst employers who found it hard to recruit the skills they need.

Case study: Giving something back and developing the talent pipeline

The employer runs a horse livery yard offering stabling and equestrian care, and employs 4 staff in addition to herself and her daughter. She had hosted shorter duration work experience previously, and this led her to consider signing-up for an industry placement.

She preferred the longer industry placement as it gave learners a chance to gain more hands-on experience and to get involved in a wider range of activities. She felt particularly strongly that the placement meant that learners gained valuable stable yard management experience, which would be valuable for their future career transitions.

Employer and learner responses to the models

It was apparent that the employers could accommodate the models on offer, and some were able to work very flexibly to provide opportunities for a number of learners, each on different placement models (day release, block and mixed). For those involved, this worked because of the range of tasks in the business – of differing durations – that meant flexible staffing worked well. It was notable in this route that several employers offered opportunities to more than 1 learner, offering multiple models as part of doing so.

As with other routes, it is not possible to say that a particular model of placement was most effective, although aligning with the business cycle and high pressure periods was beneficial. For example, employers in the agriculture, land management and production pathway valued learners being available to help at busy times, including harvest. During busy periods block models could be particularly appreciated. These employers could also value placements that extended into evenings and weekends – to match shift patterns in the industry. However, the day release model also worked well for some agricultural employers because it was seen as an industry norm.

Similarly, some employers in the animal care and management pathway, for example veterinary practices, believed regular day release models could work well, building on existing practices. Tasks within the business cycle could often be completed in shorter periods or repeated often enough for learners not to miss out on their days in the classroom. Some employers in this pathway believed that mixed models or day release worked best – as blocks made the placement too intensive and learners would learn more in the format of smaller doses. This also meant that critical information on health

and safety was retained by learners – rather than needing reiteration for each block – and meant tasks could build cumulatively and time be allowed for repetition and mastery.

Learners responding to the survey had mostly taken part in mixed model placements that combined block and day release. In contrast, most of those taking part in the interviews experienced block models. These latter learners reported that tasks could get repetitive and that the block could interfere with coursework and independent study. Overall the block model could prove quite tiring when combined with attending the provider, independent study and, in many cases, part-time work. In terms of what would have improved their placement experience, the learners in the survey would have liked to change the timing and model of their placements².

Learner preparation

Learner preparation in this route did not vary particularly from that in other routes, once placements had been sourced and matched, or self-sourced. Before this point, where self-sourcing was the expected norm, it was valuable for providers to offer some support with this, such as equipping learners without networks or contacts with a list of employer contacts to approach. Some of the learners interviewed for the evaluation noted this support had been offered and had been welcome as some struggled to find suitable employers. Providers also need to ensure that learners provided a handover of contact information to be able to undertake due diligence checks.

The learner survey responses indicated that learners felt prepared or very well prepared for their placements, with the proportion feeling very well prepared being considerably higher than the average (mean) in the survey. The respondents indicated that preparation had taken several forms – ranging from their own prior work experience, to that led by the provider and offered by course content, to information given by employers.

Changes to preparation in the future

Reflecting on the experience of the pilot and on learners' application of technical skills on placement, some providers intended to change the order of skills inputs in the curriculum, to ensure that learners had the skills to match employers' expectations. This included, for example, changing the timing of a module on chainsaw operation to ensure this occurs before placements begin, in order to better prepare learners for working in land

² As this was a closed response survey question, learners did not state how they would have liked their model to have changed.

management industries. The case study below discusses how a provider has amended the timetabling of its learner preparation.

Case study: Timetabling learner preparation

A provider had an assessed module called 'work experience' within the normal timetable. This taught learners the process of finding a job, writing an application letter and CVs, and interview preparation. It also examined the characteristics of jobs and the skills required, helping learners to identify strengths and areas for development. However, during the pilot, depending on learners' placement timings, the module sometimes took place after their placement. As a result of this, the provider has scheduled the module to take place during the first year of all courses to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to undertake the module prior to their placements.

Placement experiences and content

Providers believed that typically high quality placement experiences were possible in this route, although there were some limitations, in respect of health and safety, to some of the tasks that learners could get involved in. The range of placements achieved varied, including opportunities within zoos and wildlife charities, as well as veterinary practices, farms and land management companies. Learners who were interviewed reported the development and practice of wide-ranging technical and soft skills, and some identified how the placement had helped develop their thinking on their future career by helping them understand what they liked/did not like and where their strengths lay. Several learners identified how they had achieved industry accreditations for health and safety as part of their placements and gained experience of using particular equipment or performing specific tasks.

Similarly, employers described application and acquisition of a range of skills on placement. Where job roles could be broken down readily into smaller component parts, it appeared easier to allocate learners a range of activities. In an animal care business, for example, an employer involved the learners in customer service, dog grooming and training. In a landscaping company, the employer described how learners got involved in plant selection, tree-felling and pruning. Placements worked well where learners could receive instruction on how to do a task and then have opportunities to repeat and hone those skills. It was relatively common for employers to financially recompense learners for their time and travel in this route in recognition of the additional capacity they had offered which enabled jobs to get done.

National support staff³ noted that employers in the agricultural industry would prefer to complete digital forms for placement administration rather than paper-based forms. It was hoped that, in the future, greater use of technology would help to resolve this.

Case study: Placement content in a landscaping business

A landscape design and maintenance business which focused on high end domestic and business projects noted that it took around 2 hours to brief learners about the tasks ahead of them in the placement and to go over the personal protective equipment (PPE), to get them placement ready. The content of the placement then included, in the first week, briefing learners on health and safety on site and then showing them, incrementally across the placement, the process for block-paved drives, how to select plants from nurseries, how to precision cut, the approach to tree-felling, excavation, painting, working with wood, and tree-planting, seeders, turfing skills, shrub-cleaning and pruning. It is a year round business, although the busy period falls between spring and winter. The employer found it easier to accommodate the early induction activities over the winter period when the business was less busy.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement completion in this route.

Table 3: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|--|-----------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Agriculture, environment and animal care | 29 | 7% | 393 | 94% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

³ 15 of the 21 pilot providers received support from an external national brokerage and support organisation. The support included the sourcing of a proportion of their placements, project management and/or a learner preparation programmes (although not all 15 providers received all forms of support).'

Challenges to placement experience and solutions

The rural location of many businesses in this route led to challenges in a couple of respects. Firstly, learners needed help to travel to the placements – both financially and practically. Not all employers were on public transport routes so solutions included equipping learners with bicycles, relying on families to provide transport or learners driving themselves (sometimes subsidised by the provider). From employers' accounts, not all of these solutions worked and the challenges of travel could have an impact on placement attendance. Having agreed to a placement, employers expected that learners would attend. While workable and sustainable solutions did not emerge from the pilot, providers believed that including travel arrangements as part of learner matching activities could reduce the problems encountered.

A second challenge was the implications of the rural locations for learner monitoring. While providers had intentions to conduct regular monitoring on employers' sites (up to 5 times across the course of the pilot), the spread over a wide geographic area meant this was an unsustainable use of work experience coordinator time. During the pilot, some providers trialled the use of video-calling learners and employers on placement – as an enhancement to telephone contact. While effective to a degree, these providers still believed they would need to blend some face-to-face meetings with technology-enabled meetings. A related point made by providers was the difficulties of scheduling review and monitoring appointments with SME and micro employers who valued flexibility. This meant that providers needed to, wherever possible, make themselves available at times that suited employers.

Placement outcomes

Despite the challenges it was apparent that learners could gain a great deal from a placement experience where it was well matched to their aspirations. Learners responding to the survey in this route indicated that they had had chances to determine the sorts of tasks they would do, and had enjoyed the activities they took part in. These learners strongly agreed that they had gained technical skills relevant to their courses, and their future careers and subject fields. Placements also served as a motivation to continue their studies, and increased confidence. The survey respondents indicated strong gains in respect of communication and interpersonal skills, as well as a positive attitude towards employment. Gains in respect of employability skills and attributes included team working, working independently, time management, problem solving and working under pressure. Gains were also reported in respect of commercial awareness.

Providers noted that placements had increased learners' industry contacts, boosted their confidence in talking to adults, and improved their skills in various areas, including customer service, business administration and knowledge of sales and purchasing. The placements led to jobs and apprenticeships for some. One provider had surveyed its

learners, and reported that the majority said they went straight into paid employment (either with their placement employer or another employer) following their industry placements. The providers reported that their own staff had benefited from the pilot too, by gaining experience in the organisational requirements of industry placements.

According to providers, employers gave the learners 'glowing reviews' and this was substantiated in the employer interviews: the majority were very satisfied with learners' performance. Employers saw improvements in learners' maturity, work ethic, timekeeping, appropriate business behaviour, language and attire. Benefits to the business included the opportunity to create larger teams in order to respond to greater demand for employers' products and services.

A learner's gains - careers insight and skills acquisition

Julian reported that his placement had been a very good experience⁴. He expected that he would gain experience working with animals but he also interacted with the public which helped him develop his customer-facing skills too. He was also looking forward to working in a small team and believed the opportunity to do so had been beneficial in developing his social skills. The whole experience boosted his confidence and sense of independence. Julian's placement exceeded his expectation and he felt very lucky to have had the opportunity.

Undertaking the placement also reassured him that he was on the right path; since the placement he has signed up to complete a higher education course in zoology.

Julian thought placements were a really good idea for people his age. *'It gives you a chance to see what working in that industry is really like and, even if you have a negative experience, at least you know that it's not the right industry for you.'* He believed the longer duration placements were better for employers as it was possible to work on 'live' projects – which helped the employer and enabled learners to develop valuable skills and knowledge.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively easily sourced in this route, with learners making a substantial contribution to sourcing. The route also showed high levels of placement completion and learners were highly satisfied with their experiences. Employers engaged

⁴ Learner's name has been changed.

well and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used.

The key challenge surrounded the location of businesses across a wide geographic range. In response, providers tested approaches to supporting learners to travel to placements, as well as new means of undertaking monitoring using technology. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Business and Administration

Key points

- The Business and Administration route covered a wide array of employers and job roles, including marketing, accounting, forecasting, and human resources. Sourcing placements was relatively easy, in part because relevant opportunities can be found in a number of industries.
- The diversity in the content of business and administration courses meant that learners did not necessarily have clear career aspirations focused on a particular specialism. This led to some challenges in the matching process, and some instances of placement breakdown where learners did not feel that the activities in their placement related sufficiently to their career ambitions or course.
- Most decisions about the model to operate were practical, and generally employers accommodated whatever model was offered by providers. However, blocks were felt to work well where the learner was undertaking a project-based task, since this allowed full immersion and for end-to-end experiences of tasks.
- The employers in this route did not identify particular skills or themes for learner preparation. Generally, employers commented that the learners were motivated and engaged with their work and were good calibre.
- Placement content varied greatly on this route. In organisations with several departments, it worked well when there was flexibility from the employer to move the learner around aspects of the business to match their interests. Given the nature of some of the tasks of relevance to this route, some employers, particularly those working with client or staff data, noted that it could be challenging to find non-confidential activities for the learner to get involved in.
- Several providers perceived there to be a relatively high level of non-completion in this route, which they attributed to several factors: the uncertain career direction of business and administration learners, that many want to go onto university, and the challenges of balancing the placement with their studies and other responsibilities such as paid work. However, the pilot Management Information (MI) showed that a relatively high proportion of business and administration learners *did* complete their placements compared with learners across the pilot as a whole. From the employer perspective, non-completions occurred where learners did not see the direct relevance between the content of the placement and their course curriculum. Where non-completions did take place, these may have been influenced by the pilot operating to short timescales with placements that were retro-fitted into existing courses.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time classroom-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of 'design dimensions' for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Business and Administration route, which unites 2 occupational pathways⁵: business and administration, and human resources. It should be noted that

⁵ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

although the human resources occupational pathway will be included in the T Level for business and administration, it was not covered by the pilot phase.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 7 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 8 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. As the table below shows, a range of models were tested in this route. A mixed model was the most common model to be tested, although there was variation in the timing and balance it took. The mixed models involved a block in either the autumn or spring term followed by a series of day(s) release.

Table 4: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|--|
| Block | Spring/Summer Block (3) |
| Day Release | 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Spring Block and 2-day release (2) Autumn Block and 1-day release (2) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers and project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 7 providers.
- Interviews with 21 employers engaged with 4 of the providers.
- Interviews with 16 learners involved with 5 of the providers.
- 13 learning logs drawn from 2 providers.
- 11 learner survey responses covering 3 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not

asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 289 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 182 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 5: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Business and administration | 289 | 182 | 63% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, a little easier to source for than was typical across the pilot.

Sourcing placements

Providers discussed how the industry pathways within the Business and Administration route covered a wide array of different employers and job roles, including marketing, accounting, forecasting, and human resources (HR). Overall, providers believed that sourcing placements for the business and administration pathway had been relatively easy because of the availability of relevant opportunities across industries – most organisations have a business and administration function, so sourcing was not industry specific as was the case in other routes.

Challenges and solutions in placement matching

The business and administration placements were generally felt by providers to offer high calibre opportunities, and ones which they could not usually gain via part-time work. In the Business and Administration route there is a range of occupations from marketing to database management, and sales to HR, each with specific skill sets. However, this

variety of career options alongside learner indecision on their chosen career could make it harder to achieve placements relevant to learners' career interests than in some routes. For this reason, providers emphasised the importance of a good match between learners' aspirations and employers' placement offers, which would allow strong technical and soft skill development to emerge and maintain learner interest.

In some instances, the diversity in the content of business and administration courses meant that learners did not yet have clear vocational career aspirations focused on a specific specialism within business and administration. This led to some specific challenges for providers with selling the placements to students on business and administration courses: some providers encountered reluctance from learners to participate in the placements. Reluctance affected the matching process, and there were some instances where it contributed to placement non-completion where learners did not feel that the activities in their placement related sufficiently to their career ambitions or course (see also placement experience and content).

The importance of the match between a learner's career interests and opportunities during the placement is illustrated in the case study below. Providers believed the solution would emerge from increased lead in time for future operations, which would enable them to carry out more detailed work to understand learners' aspirations.

An employer's view on the match

An employer in the charitable sector had prior experience of offering work experience. She hosted two placements for learners studying business. The employer offered the learners the opportunity to work in a number of business and administrative functions across the organisation, including finance, reception, and assisting and supporting clients to access information online.

She felt that the match between the content of the placement and learners' career aspirations could have been better as the job roles were not immediately relevant to their career interests. In future the employer felt that a critical success driver for placements was ensuring relevance to the learners' future career direction, and that this would ensure that the placement had the most value, both for the organisation and the learner:

'We want them [the learner] to get the maximum value when they come to us. We invest time in them, they invest their time in them [placements], and that's got to be to help them, you know, the whole point of the placement is to give that experience, that valuable experience and knowledge to move them forward, to complement the course work they're doing.'

Learners taking part in the survey indicated a greater propensity than those in other routes to have attended an interview with their employer and to have had contact with their employer prior to placements starting. Providers planned to further capitalise on this, using it as an additional strand of insight to ensure a good match was emerging.

Messages on involving employers

Providers said that employers were relatively easy to engage in the business and administration route, and they did not report any route specific messages that were most effective at engaging employers. Given the range of organisations that could offer business and administrative placements messages that vary according to size would be appropriate. For example, large employers were more likely to be receptive to becoming involved on the grounds of corporate social responsibility, and smaller organisations were likely to respond positively to messages about the placements providing extra staff resources.

Employer and learner responses to the models

Providers with placements in the Business and Administration route offered a range of models. They reported that their chosen model to deliver business and administration placements reflected their existing timetable commitments, the optimum start time of the placements from their perspective, and their capacity to accommodate block release within the existing academic calendar. Overall, employers had made the placement fit to the availability of the learners: most decisions about which model to operate were practical, and generally employers accommodated the model offered by providers.

Some employers, however, said that opening blocks could be particularly helpful at the outset of the placement because they acted as an induction – as it would for a regular employee – and allowed the learners to become embedded in the organisation from the outset. Blocks also worked well for business and administration placements where learners were undertaking a project-based task, since this allowed full immersion and for end-to-end experiences of tasks and projects, giving learners the opportunity to have ownership of a project and be responsible for its completion.

In contrast, there were employers who favoured day release. For example, an employer working with a provider that was implementing a block model, with learners attending placements for 4 days a week for 10 weeks, reported that they would have preferred a day release model over a longer period of time, because this would have supported deployment of the learner more effectively.

Usually only a proportion of the business and administration learner cohort participated in the placements, and some of the learners that did so were reported to have requested to

reduce the time commitment or to approach it flexibly. The provider case study below illustrates the flexibility required to implement these placements in practice and enable students to complete coursework and other commitments.

The need for flexibility

A provider noted that some business and administration learners reduced their time with employers from 2 days a week to 1 day a week⁶. This was due to the learners' time constraints and the amount of work required to complete coursework on business and administration courses. The work experience coordinator illustrated the flexibility that was required to accommodate this:

'The more successful students have already realised that this [the placements] is going to impact on their ability to do their course, so have been in and asked us to ring their employer and drop a day, which we do, and that tends to be fine.'

Some business and administration learners with this provider had offered to attend their placement every day during the Easter holidays in order to help ensure that they attended for the full number of days required by the pilot⁷.

Learner preparation

The industries in this route did not identify particular skills or themes for learner preparation. Several learners and providers discussed the various demands on learners' time, and the high degree of pressure to complete coursework successfully as many of the courses were at Level 3, and most learners were anticipating progression to higher education. Generally, employers commented that the learners on this route were motivated and engaged with their work and they felt they were of good calibre, although there were some notable exceptions to this where employers discussed poor timekeeping.

As noted earlier, the diversity of content on courses in this route meant that placements could be quite broad, and several employers and learners reported that matching a placement to learners' career aspirations could be difficult. Where providers knew learners' skills and interests they could best prepare and match learners to placements. For example a business and administration learner was allocated a role where they would be assisting with a company's social media activities because they had previously completed an IT course and provider staff felt it would therefore suit their interests.

⁶ This happened on other routes as well

⁷ In future, policy intends that placements will last between 45 and 60 days

Learners reported that they would have liked to have been able to discuss their interests with brokerage staff and employers in person so that incorrect assumptions about their interests and ambitions were not made. In the future, the opportunity for learners to meet employers before the placement, to discuss and set learning objectives should help mitigate this.

Learners responding to the survey indicated that they felt very well prepared for their placements. This sense of feeling prepared stemmed from prior, relevant and non-relevant work experience and, to a lesser degree, preparation activities delivered by providers, course content and information from employers.

Placement experiences and content

Placement content varied greatly throughout this route, as business and administration activities take place in all industries. Most placements were within an office environment, with the tasks that learners undertook including filing, general administration, telephone calls, working with databases, using Excel spreadsheets, making PowerPoint presentations, contacting suppliers and customers, book-keeping and payroll, and other basic accountancy tasks.

Learners taking part in the survey indicated that there had been considerable opportunity to negotiate the activities they would be involved in, and they showed high levels of enjoyment of their tasks.

In organisations with several departments, it worked well when there was flexibility from the employer to move the learner around aspects of the business to match their interests. Some employers, particularly those that were larger, were able to offer the learner 'rotations' through different areas, and most were open to providing the learner opportunities to experience whichever aspect of the business most interested them. For example, the owner of an artist management company created a learning plan covering social media, business management and bookings, administration and finance, and media and PR. Where employers had early sight of learners' interests, they were able to take those into account in planning activities. For example, an employer described taking two learners on placements, one of whom was given responsibility for the organisation's social media presence and the other was given control of the organisation's online shop.

Some employers noted that the length of the placement meant that it could be challenging to find non-confidential work for the required number of days. For example, HR work involved confidential data which restricted the tasks that HR departments could offer the learner. The same was true of charities working with confidential client data.

Placement completions

The management information indicated slightly higher rates of placement completion in this route than on average across the pilot.

Table 6: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Business and administration | 38 | 21% | 144 | 79% |
| Pilot total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Several providers reflected on the reasons why some business and administration learners did not complete their placements. They attributed this to several factors, many of which did not relate to the pilot: the uncertain career direction of business and administration learners, that many wanted to go onto university and consequently wanted to focus on getting good grades, and the challenges of balancing the placement with their studies and other responsibilities such as paid work.

Where non-completions did take place, these may have been influenced by the pilot operating to short timescales with placements that were retro-fitted into existing courses. From the employer perspective, non-completions occurred where learners did not see the direct relevance between the content of the placement and their course curriculum.

From the employer perspective, providers reported that non-completions occurred where learners did not see the direct relevance between the content of the placement and their course curriculum, and due to course workload in combination with the placement. From a learner perspective, the flexibility, understanding and accommodation of employers to alter working patterns was helpful to enable them to balance their placement, study and part-time work commitments.

Placement outcomes

The providers believed that, through work placements in business and administration, learners had developed technical skills of relevance to the industry, and in addition had developed soft skills and an understanding of work. Curriculum leads suggested that learners had gained significant insight into how businesses operate. They felt that this was particularly important for learners on the business and administration route since they were less likely than learners on some other routes, such as catering, to be able to access relevant part-time work.

A business and administration tutor reported that their learners had been able to draw on a more diverse and realistic set of examples and experiences for their coursework because of their placements, and those learners had developed a better understanding and focus on the curriculum:

'They are able to relate what they are doing for their work experience into their assessments. The conversations are different because it is all about what they are doing in the workplace... they have something that looks tangible and they are gaining underpinning knowledge.'

Tutor

In some cases, learners believed that they were now able to adopt a greater degree of professionalism in the workplace and had developed social contacts that would assist them in finding employment in the future. The placements were also felt to have helped some learners to make decisions about their careers, such as whether they wanted to specialise in a specific business area, as the case study below illustrates.

A good match that developed careers insight

Jack⁸ was in his second year of a Level 3 business and finance course. He aspired to work in accountancy and wanted to undertake a work placement because he felt it would help him to find employment relevant to his interests. He was matched to a placement at an accountancy firm and undertook tasks within the placement that were relevant and similar to the curriculum. For example, he undertook analysis of business accounts, bookkeeping and payroll, and looked at how gift aid is implemented.

Jack reflected that the placement helped his understanding of key concepts on his course and he had been able to apply his learning in a practical setting, and draw on his experience on the placement in his coursework and assessments.

He also highlighted that he developed technical skills, for example becoming more familiar with Excel and creating formulas. He also felt the placement had improved his business communication skills and confidence, and his employability skills more generally.

He found the placement enjoyable, it demonstrated the variety of aspects to accountancy work, and it confirmed his career aspirations: *'It has confirmed I should pursue this career.'* Jack was planning to attend university during the next academic year and felt that the placement would help him to demonstrate his technical skills in an applied setting and to stand out from other candidates.

⁸ Learner's name has been changed.

Learners taking part in the survey broadly confirmed the picture from providers, employers and the learners who were interviewed. Those in the survey noted gains that were broadly in line with the average across the pilot, that were relevant to courses, subject areas, and future careers. The soft skills gains that were highlighted included improved communication skills in terms of employability, ability to work independently, improved time management and commercial awareness.

Eleanor's⁹ view on her skill gains and the value of the placement

'After working in my placement, I have the ability to work under pressure. For example, there was a time when I had to work under pressure because I was given a lot of work to complete within a week, so rather than stressing out I created a detailed schedule that allowed me to complete all the tasks on time. Another thing I have learnt from working under pressure is that I actually find that I do my best work when under pressure. I enjoy undertaking challenging tasks and finding creative solutions. In addition, I have also built my confidence level because before starting my placement I was very nervous as I was thinking whether I will understand the tasks or not, but the level of support the office manager and other colleagues have given me built my confidence because they assisted very well in every task or project. I now also have the ability to work independently as sometimes in the workplace I had to use my own initiative to complete the tasks. This helped me to understand that I can work independently and complete the work to a good standard. For example, there was a time when I had to use my own initiative and work independently because the office manager was not in, so I completed the work and the business received two positive emails from customers keen to take up our services, which was very big deal for the company.'

In terms of benefits to employers, while some were disappointed with learners' performance and/or had experienced non-completions, several reported positive changes to their business as a result of the placements. Examples included charities that had previously been shorthanded, being able to get on top of their workload; employers producing goods or services that were able to deliver jobs faster; learners helping colleagues with IT support and administrative tasks.

While non-completions were higher than providers would have liked, they were satisfied that it was an easier route to source. One provider also suggested that industry placements were an excellent fit in preparing learners, who otherwise might not be quite ready, to embark on a business and administration apprenticeship.

⁹ Learner's name has been changed.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively easily sourced in this, because relevant occupations existed across many businesses. The route also showed good levels of placement completion and learners were often highly satisfied with their experiences. Employers engaged well and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used. Employers who could provide rotations across different relevant occupations were particularly appreciated.

The key challenge surrounded identifying learners' key goal for the placement in order to make the best match. In response, providers planned to start work on this with learners earlier in their courses to feed into matching processes. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Catering and Hospitality

Key points

- Employers within the service industry are generally more experienced than employers in some other routes in working with Level 2 and 3 learners, and placement opportunities were generally plentiful.
- However, food preparation practices in some workplaces occasionally limited opportunities for technical skills development. Some providers needed to supplement placement content by involving the learners in other activities such as visits to local markets or stints in student-run college restaurants.
- It was relatively common for learners to convert an existing part-time job into a placement. In those instances it appeared helpful for the provider to work with the employer ensure that the placement contained additional elements to boost learners' development beyond the skills already acquired in the job.
- Industry-specific learner preparation included teaching learners about wearing the right clothes and being clean and tidy in the kitchen. Some providers used their learner-run restaurants to prepare learners, and spoke to chefs to identify which catering skills learners would need to develop further. Doing placement 'trials' with the employer was also noted to be effective learner preparation, but was not common practice.
- It was helpful for providers to share a summary of course content with employers and to discuss, in detail, the employer's technical requirements to achieve an appropriate match with the learner's skills, confidence levels, and career goals. This was particularly important for learners who had no prior experience of working in a kitchen.
- Both day release and mixed models proved workable for catering and hospitality employers and providers. However, it was important for brokerage staff to work flexibly with employers to fulfil their requirements for seasonal, weekend and evening working. The predominance of late shifts sometimes entailed additional expenditure on taxis to safeguard learners. It was important to clarify the shift patterns and travel commitments with the employers and learners during placement sourcing and matching.
- Messages that encouraged employers to offer a placement included the opportunity to have extra resources to carry out kitchen tasks during busy shifts. Employers also appreciated the possibility of securing future talent to address skills shortages - a particular concern for large employers - and sometimes saw the placement as providing useful through-put to apprenticeships.

- Given employers' enthusiasm for converting placements into a job or apprenticeship, it was important to ensure that employers committed to encouraging learners to complete their course.

Introduction

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- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different Industry Placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Catering and Hospitality route, which comprises a single occupational pathway¹⁰: catering.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 7 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 10 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. As the table shows, a mixed model involving a block in spring or autumn, followed by 2 days a week release was the most common model tested in this route.

Table 7: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|--|
| Block | None |
| Day Release | 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Spring Block and 1-day release (1) Spring Block and 2-day release (6) Autumn Block and 1-day release (2) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers and project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 7 providers.
- Interviews with 7 employers engaged with 4 of the providers.
- An interview with 1 learner involved with 1 of the providers.
- 8 learner survey responses covering 3 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.

¹⁰ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 134 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 88 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 8: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Catering and hospitality | 134 | 88 | 66% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

In terms of sourcing Catering and Hospitality placements, the management information indicated it was a little easier to source than was typical across the pilot.

Sourcing placements

Across the pilot, industries where there is a tradition of undertaking some form of work experience as part of career entry routes were typically viewed as easier to source placements in. Placement opportunities in this service industry were generally plentiful. Employers were often experienced in offering placements and had longstanding arrangements with local providers for them to supply learners, which formed a helpful foundation for placement sourcing. Providers and the national support organisation sourced placements at varied employers, from large hotel chains to small employers, such as family-run cafes and nursing homes. Larger kitchens offered more opportunities

to try a range of sections. Smaller settings were sometimes noted to be less intimidating for less confident learners.

The national support organisation established a national employers' partnership to aggregate supply from large national firms. Through this placements were sourced from 1 large national catering and hospitality employer who was able to offer around 18 placements which were spread across 3 pilot providers. However, most brokers and providers sourced employers locally (although some of those included national employers such as hotel chains).

Knowledge of the potential health and safety issues in kitchens helped provider and brokerage staff to cover those issues in discussions with employers.

Self-sourcing

In addition, catering and hospitality learners sometimes sourced their own placements, occasionally converting an existing part-time job into a placement. A possible downside, observed by employers, of jobs converted into placements was that some learners did not show the same progression in their skills. Giving employers greater insight into learners' development needs and setting clear objectives for the placement could help to ensure learners' progression on placement.

Opportunities for skills development

However, there were sometimes challenges in sourcing placements that offered opportunities to practise technical skills at an adequate level. Several provider staff noted that it was common practice amongst some catering and hospitality employers to microwave packaged meals instead of preparing food from scratch. Providers were concerned that these placements would not give learners sufficient opportunity to apply their technical skills. For example, a provider deemed these placements unsuitable and asked brokerage staff to source alternatives:

'For us [re-heating packaged food] wasn't appropriate. Some of our students leave here to work in Michelin Star restaurants and the top hotels and top chefs in the county, and that was the calibre of placements we were used to. So we provided the brokers with our feedback on that.'

Curriculum staff

Some providers took steps to supplement learners' technical skills development by 'contingency' arrangements such as visiting local markets, taking part in hospitality events or working in student-run college restaurants. However, under current policy, such experiences would not count as industry placements.

Learners' job-readiness

Providers and employers noted that, as in other routes, catering and hospitality learners' job-readiness varied and, as noted in the case study below, it was important to take learners' different skills levels into account when sourcing placements. Many learners had experience of working in the industry, resulting from work experience during earlier Level 1 and Level 2 courses and/or as part of part-time jobs. Those learners typically had a more mature attitude, were familiar with the 'hustle and bustle' of a professional kitchen and were sure they wanted to work in the industry. However, a few learners were less experienced, less focused on catering careers and had less developed soft skills.

Sourcing a range of placements to suit learner capabilities

A provider recognised that each learner was 'in a different place' and tried to match the learner to the appropriate employer. He noted that fine dining establishments required learners who were confident, resilient and job-ready, whereas a smaller café, for example, could be more suitable for a more nervous, inexperienced learner.

Employers and providers agreed that a summary of course content and an understanding of the employer's technical requirements helped those leading sourcing and brokerage to achieve successful matches.

Safeguarding and transport, and solutions tested

Shift patterns in the catering and hospitality industry sometimes limited placements' suitability. Some employers expected learners to work late shifts and providers considered that health, safety and wellbeing considerations made these inadvisable. In those situations, providers were sometimes able to re-negotiate the working hours with the employers. Nevertheless, some learners did undertake placements with late finishes. In those cases, public transport for the journey home was often unavailable and learners relied on parents or taxis. Providers offered pilot funding to pay for taxis. While this was expensive, they considered this the only option to make the placement safe for the learners. Providers thought it was essential to clarify the shift patterns and travel commitments with the employers during placement sourcing.

Learners taking part in the survey indicated that the quality of public transport links had been a factor in their decision about whether a placement was suitable.

Learner views on starting a placement

Learners in this route who responded to the survey indicated that they were satisfied with the support they received to match them into their placement. This included the support they received to identify a suitable placement, and then to set-up and start the placement.

Messages on involving employers

Employers welcomed the concept of extended placements, because they valued having additional resources to carry out kitchen tasks, especially during the busy Christmas period and in the summer. It was important for brokerage staff to take the industry's seasonal peaks into account.

In addition, some employers, such as large hotel chains, found it challenging to attract young people to their workforce and saw the placements as an opportunity to acquire tried-and-tested employees or apprentices.

An employer's motivation to get involved

A large catering and hospitality group agreed to provide kitchen placements for 3 learners. The employer hoped to 'give something back', provide staff with supervisory experience, reduce workload at busy times and generate a talent pipeline. In the past, the employer had advertised chef roles for which he had received many unsuitable applicants. He hoped that the industry placements would enable him to recruit tried-and-tested trainee chefs.

'Hiring someone who's done an industry placement means that we already know them, they already know how we work [...] You know what you're hiring already, which certainly makes my life a lot easier.'

Employer

Employer and learner responses to the models

Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, as well as the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to say what worked in any route or pathway, although it is possible to say why employers and learners believed a model worked in particular circumstances.

Generally, the evaluation findings suggest that employers preferred models that fitted in with demand in their business cycle or supported the completion of tasks during the time available.

As noted, most providers used a mixed model for catering and hospitality; only one tested a 2-day release placement. Employers received the mixed model well, but did not express a clear preference in respect of what worked best for them. As a provider expressed, catering and hospitality learners on placement typically carried out similar tasks on any given day, so either blocks or days were workable in that context.

'With catering, apart from learning a menu, the processes will stay very similar for set periods of time, so blocks or day release would be suitable.'

Provider

However, catering and hospitality employers called for greater flexibility in how the models were delivered, to enable them to cover peak times and to mirror the reality of work in the industry. Many employers would like learners to be with them over Christmas, which would entail the learner starting on placement in the autumn term. Other outlets were busy over the summer period; in some cases learners agreed to attend their placement through the summer holidays. Most employers preferred learners to work over the weekends, ideally including evening shifts. Providers, employers and learners arranged some placements on this basis. On others compromises were reached, such as the learner working Fridays. It was important for providers to negotiate and clarify shift times up front, in discussion with the learner and the employer. This included providing appropriate safeguarding and transport support to the learner.

An employer's perspective on making the placement work for their business

An employer, who was very experienced in hosting learners, preferred that they start their placement early in the week on a daytime shift. He found that a less busy shift was a good place to begin since the learners were often nervous at first. However, as the learners gained experience, he wanted the flexibility to increase the placement to 2 days a week, over Saturday and Sunday, and to include an evening shift. He said that this would allow him to staff the busiest shifts and would give the learners the chance to experience as many different meals as possible, and at the highest volumes.

Learner preparation

As noted in the main evaluation report, providers and employers believed it was necessary to tailor learner preparation to particular industries. The way in which this tailoring could be achieved varied between industries.

In addition to teaching general employability skills, catering and hospitality providers thought it was important for learner preparation to cover wearing the right clothes and being clean and tidy in the kitchen. Some providers were able to use internal workplaces, such as learner-run restaurants, to ensure learners underwent realistic preparation. Running trial kitchen shifts with the employer before accepting a learner onto a placement was another effective way of preparing learners, although this was not common practice.

A learner's view on the types of preparation that are helpful

Nadia recommended that learner preparation include an overview of what to expect from different types of catering and hospitality employers¹¹. She thought that this would help learners to 'understand who they're serving' and the different technical skills required by varied employers such as food trucks, wedding catering companies, hotels and cafes.

In addition to involving employers, providers also considered adapting curriculum coverage of particular skills in order to include this in learner preparation. For catering and hospitality, this included curriculum staff speaking to chefs to identify what specific technical skills were required. For example, an employer informed curriculum staff that the learner would need pastry-making skills, so the learner practised pastry making in the provider's learner-run restaurant to prepare.

Learners who responded to the survey indicated that the forms of preparation they received were led by provider staff in the form of tutorials, their own prior work experience in the industry, as well as information supplied by employers.

¹¹ Learner's name has been changed.

Placement experiences and content

Providers and employers indicated that placements generally provided useful learning opportunities¹². Catering and hospitality employers interviewed found it straightforward to slot the learner into entry-level activities, such as vegetable preparation. Learners worked across a range of kitchen sections such as fish, bakery and pastry.

How an employer organised the placements

In a large hotel kitchen hosting several learners, the employer initially grouped the learners in the same section to settle their nerves. Once they were familiar with the environment, he then allocated them to separate sections. Learners began by being trained to prepare starters and sides. They were then progressed to prepare more technically demanding dishes like pasta and fajitas. Eventually all learners would try their hands at cooking a full 'service'.

Learners in the survey indicated that they had a degree of choice over the types of activities they did as part of placements, which they negotiated with their employer. They also indicated that they had enjoyed the activities they took part in to some extent. The skill gains where there was greater consensus for this group of learners was improved motivation to do well at college and increased confidence more generally. They also highlighted improvements to their communications and team-working skills.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement non-completion in this route.

Table 9: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Catering and hospitality | 29 | 33% | 59 | 67% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

¹² There are limited learner interview data for this route.

Most of the employers and learners interviewed for the evaluation had completed their placements and were unable to comment on the reasons for non-completions. More generally the evaluation evidence indicated there could be a range of reasons for this, and many of these did not relate to the placement. However, the provider staff revealed that some placements in this route fell short of 40 days because learners left the placement early to take up an apprenticeship or job with the placement employer or with another employer. While this was a satisfactory result for the individual learner, providers were obliged to report these as non-completed placements. Occasionally changes at the employer's organisation, such as insolvency or a new manager deciding to stop offering placements, led to placements ending prematurely. Similarly, staff turnover within providers could affect the focus on completing placements. Learners sometimes had personal reasons for leaving the placement, such as deciding to withdraw from their course or suffering a bereavement. In addition, a few learners did not settle well into their placement. At 1 provider, curriculum staff intervened to withdraw learners who were not coping well with the placement and placed them at the providers' learner-run restaurant. This gave the learners alternative workplace experience, but these placements were recorded as non-completions.

Placement outcomes

Generally, this route showed a high level of technical skills development. On placement, the learners developed technical culinary skills such as knife skills and pastry, bread and pasta making. They also learned to cope with working at speed, and developed their team working skills. Those responding to the survey indicated that they had gained both technical skills as well as soft skills and employability attributes.

Case study: a learners perspective on what works in placements

Jasmine was studying a Level 3 Catering and Hospitality course¹³. She planned to go into a catering career once she qualified, but did not know which area to specialise in. During her Level 2 course, she had worked in a local café. For her Level 3 course, she decided to ‘push myself more’ and agreed to do an industry placement in a hotel ‘carvery’ restaurant. The employer gave her responsibility for vegetable preparation and desserts presentation. Jasmine felt daunted at the start of the placement. It was the run-up to Christmas and the small crowded kitchen was very pressured. However, a junior member of staff ‘took me under her wing’ and she also worked closely with 4 other chefs. Jasmine’s tutor was very supportive throughout her placement. His advice helped her deal with her worries about coping with customers’ expectations and the high volume of orders. Jasmine thought the placement had made her more confident in working at a fast pace, in teams and in a confined and hot environment. She felt she became more organised and developed better time-keeping. Her technical knowledge, such as knife skills, improved too. Jasmine concluded that the placement was very good because it gave her a ‘baseline’ of what this type of catering employer was looking for. She anticipated she could obtain a good reference from the employer when she needs it. What pleased Jasmine most was learning that the head of kitchen had previously been wary about taking on a learner, but changed her mind because of Jasmine’s good performance: *‘I changed Susan’s mind and that felt really good’¹⁴*.

As well as references, some employers offered learners a job or apprenticeship on completion of their qualification, or took the learner on in a part-time paid role, alongside their studies. As noted above, one provider reported that this led to some catering and hospitality learners leaving their course prematurely, to take up opportunities with their placement employer. This provider concluded that it was essential to ensure that employers committed to encouraging the learner to complete their programme, rather than using the placement as an accelerated recruitment tool.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively easily sourced in this route and were able to build on established practice of offering work experience and apprenticeship. The route also showed good rates of completion. Employers engaged well and sought to provide a

¹³ Learner’s name has been changed.

¹⁴ Employer’s name has been changed.

range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used. Many had entry level roles from which, once mastered, learners could progress to higher level roles.

The key challenge surrounded the unsociable hours often worked in the industry. Providers needed to prepare and support learners to be flexible as well as to ensure suitable transport arrangements were in place. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Construction

Key points

- The nature of the construction industry raises some challenges for sourcing and for placement learning, particularly in ensuring learners' safety on construction sites and in identifying tasks that learners can contribute to on tightly-resourced construction projects. Adverse weather conditions and downturns can also affect the availability of placements.
- Many principal construction contractors and major house builders require construction workers on their sites, including learners on placements, to hold a valid Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card¹⁵. In some cases safety training is also a pre-requisite. Providers need to build these requirements into their learner preparation.
- As with other routes, it is important for providers and brokerage staff to advise employers – particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and other employers who lack experience in providing extended placements – on safety, insurance and the types of tasks that learners can successfully undertake.
- Construction employers often recruit by word-of-mouth. Providers, brokerage staff, and those learners self-sourcing, therefore found these employers placed less reliance on CVs and formal approaches.
- Messages around creating a talent pipeline, a feeder into apprenticeships and providing extra resources to fulfil day-to-day tasks and projects are likely to be successful with many employers in this route. Large employers also appreciated the contribution to their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and their reputation amongst customers and communities.
- Employers favoured placement models and timings that avoided winter working. Generally mixed and day release offered advantages for employers, learners and providers, although block models were sometimes preferred when learners were undertaking highly complex tasks over a sustained period of time.
- Learners valued opportunities to specialise although these were not always available. Generally learners and employers responded positively to the placements. Outcomes included the acquisition of technical and soft skills and learners embarking on new roles as employees or apprentices with their placement employer.

¹⁵ CSCS website, accessed 28th November 2018 <https://www.cscs.uk.com/about/>

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of ‘design dimensions’ for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different Industry Placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Construction route, including 2 occupational pathways¹⁶: onsite construction and building services engineering. It may be useful at this point to note that

¹⁶ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

building services engineering covers skilled occupations such as plumbing and electrical work.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 8 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements across 21 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. However, some employers described placements of 10 4-day blocks later in the year, with some alternative arrangements agreed later in the pilot.

Table 10: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|-------------|---|
| Block | Short Autumn/long Summer block (6) |
| Day Release | (None) |
| Mixed | Short Spring block and 2-day release (14) 1- and 2-day release with 1-week block in February (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 8 providers.
- Interviews with 9 employers engaged with 8 of the providers.
- Interviews with 5 learners involved with 4 of the providers.
- 1 learning log drawn from 1 provider.
- 22 Learner survey responses covering 6 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a

quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 224 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 98 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 11: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Construction | 224 | 98 | 44% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively challenging to source for. The main reason for this was the predominance of sole traders in this industry. Micro employers were deterred from offering placements for various reasons, including uncertain work flows (particularly over the winter) and lack of time to supervise learners. In addition, the pilot lead-in time was relatively short, giving providers less opportunity to secure placements.

Sourcing placements

This route is characterised by the variety of its employers. These range from sole traders to large national companies and cover a range of specialisms, including building services, electrical services, installation, maintenance, refurbishment and hard landscaping. Provider and national support organisation staff adjusted their sourcing approaches according to the needs of the varied employers in the route.

Placements with SMEs: the concerns

Providers mainly attributed their differing approaches to sourcing for the Construction route to the size of local employers. SMEs predominated in this route. The downsides of sourcing placements from SMEs were that these smaller organisations usually lacked

training and HR experts, which could contribute to challenges in devising suitable placement content. Moreover, placements in micro businesses and sole traders raised safeguarding issues. Smaller construction employers were sometimes less experienced than large employers in carrying out due diligence to make placements safe for learners in this dangerous and highly-regulated industry. In the wider evaluation, national brokerage and provider staff also reported that SMEs in general often had concerns about employer liability insurance. Adverse weather conditions or downturns in the amount of work available could particularly affect SMEs' ability to provide placements. Knowledgeable brokers who could offer advice on these matters and the tasks that learners could engage with on placement were seen as a way forward.

Placements with SMEs: the benefits

The preponderance of SMEs amongst construction employers had some benefits when sourcing placements. SMEs typically lack HR functions which meant employers could be engaged using informal methods such as word of mouth. This offered opportunities in respect of learners self-sourcing - as discussed in the case study below - as well as providers extending beyond their existing networks. Providers emphasised the success of learners sourcing their own placements and followed up these initial contacts with risk assessment and due diligence activities before placements started. Learners in this route who responded to the survey showed some reliance on self-sourcing, although placements sourced by providers and brokers were also prevalent. The case study illustrates the success of self-sourcing, and the need for providers to make and sustain communications with employers who are sourced in this way.

‘Self-sourced’ learner provided extra resource for SME

A sole trader operating a general maintenance company was nearing retirement. He found it useful to employ a younger colleague to undertake the physical work, while he was responsible for project management. He had already employed a learner from the local provider part-time. This young person took the initiative to broker an industry placement.

The employer expected the placement to enable the learner to continue to provide extra help to his organisation, while supplementing what the young person was learning in the classroom. On the placement the learner was developing skills in construction and installation which the employer thought were preparing the learner for his future career. The employer saw hands-on experience in the construction industry as vital in the learner's development.

The employer's biggest concern was that he didn't know how to set up a placement with the provider and he felt fortunate that the learner had done this for him. In the future the employer envisaged taking on more learners on Industry Placements. He hoped that the provider would improve its communications and liaise with him more proactively going forward. In time, he hoped that offering placements would help him to identify a successor to take over his business when he retires.

Placements with large employers: the concerns

National brokerage staff noted some difficulties in engaging large construction employers. Extensive construction projects were often set up a long time in advance, meaning that it was difficult to incorporate learners into existing staff resourcing plans. In addition, construction projects worked within very tight resourcing constraints. Consequently, brokerage staff needed to negotiate with employers about the types of roles that learners could feasibly undertake, without tying up costly extra staff resource to supervise the learner. When sourcing placements for projects of this type, it appears important for brokerage staff to allow time in their employer engagement to accommodate the employers' project resourcing plans. Again, advice from providers and brokerage staff on suitable placement content was valued by employers.

Placements with large employers: the benefits

Providers and the national brokerage organisation were successful in engaging large construction employers. Contact was made with diversified facilities firms that could potentially host multiple placements, and large companies that had dedicated Public Relations and CSR functions and were keen to be seen as active in their local

communities. As a result of brokerage staff's efforts, several national construction companies committed to providing extended placements.

Many of the larger construction employers interviewed were already involved in offering apprenticeships (although this was true of some small and medium-sized employers too). These employers were receptive to Industry Placements because they allowed them to trial learners before an apprenticeship, as in the case study below.

Trialling learners before offering an apprenticeship

A national employer provided building and engineering consultancy services. They were highly experienced in offering study and work opportunities for young people, collaborating closely with their local provider. Over recent years they had taken on several new apprentices, funding their studies in HNC, HND or an engineering degree. They also regularly provided 2-week work experience for pupils at local secondary schools.

This employer decided to offer a placement because they hoped it would enable them to source and test another new apprentice.

'If at the end of it, we think they'll fit in with the company, then we'll offer them an apprenticeship. So we jumped at the chance to do it.'

In the employer's opinion, only industry placements offered an opportunity to really get an insight into a learner's personality and see how well they fitted in with the business.

The placement used the mixed model. The employer was pleased with the addition of a 2-week block at the start because it allowed learner to get to know everyone in the office and feel comfortable in the working environment – *'a brilliant idea'*.

Encouragingly, several of the large construction employers interviewed thought that, because of the success of the placements, scaling up in the future to provide a sustained talent pipeline was a possibility:

'We've built something we can hopefully work on in the future.'

Employer

Additional sourcing challenges and solutions

There were additional industry-specific barriers to placement sourcing for construction. Industry patterns of work included seasonal patterns of employment and the need to complete work within specific timescales. Construction firms tended to be busy over the

summer, during the academic vacations , and experienced stoppages during the winter. Providers therefore aimed to time placements to align with these seasonal trends; in other routes there were examples of placements happening over the summer vacation. It remains challenging to time substantial components of placements for the summer term, since this brings clashes with exam schedules.

A further issue encountered concerned the location of construction sites. In some occupations, and often in SMEs, employment moves between sites - as one job completes another must be started and this may be in a different location. As such, learners sometimes needed to travel to different locations during the placement, which acted as a barrier for some learners. In the future, providers believed this could be addressed by focusing on this issue in learner preparation and ensuring learners were briefed about the possibility of changing locations during the matching process.

Providers also highlighted the potential tensions that could arise if business development staff were chasing apprenticeship and Industry Placement opportunities from the same pool of employers. As in other routes, providers and brokers need to communicate effectively with employers, and internally with other employability staff, to show how placements can be an effective route into apprenticeships, rather than competing with them.

For the future, provider staff suggested that Industry Placements could be used to 'back fill' Construction apprenticeships: on the days when apprentices attended the provider, their place at the employer could be taken by a learner on an Industry Placement. They expected this to generate more sourcing opportunities.

Messages on involving employers

The brokerage staff detected a range of motivations for employers to take part in the pilot. As already noted, promoting the learner as providing extra resources to fulfil day-to-day tasks and projects for an SME was an effective message. At interview, employers of all sizes reported skills shortages and were open to messages about building the recruitment pipeline and using placements to trial future apprentices. Large employers were particularly concerned about their company's reputation in the community and therefore CSR-related messages were appropriate for this group.

Employer and learner responses to the models

Mixed block and day release models predominated on this route and both these models proved workable for employers. Day release was seen as useful in allowing learners to acquire skills over a longer period of time, while an initial block was appreciated because

it allowed the learner to 'settle in'. Employers generally favoured 2 days over the single day release and would prefer 2 consecutive days to provide continuity.

Advantages of day release for an SME

An SME employer that provides general building services decided to offer 2 industry placements. He hoped they would enable him to identify reliable learners who could progress to a permanent job with the organisation. This employer expressed his preference for the day release model which allowed him to schedule jobs requiring additional capacity for days when the learners were at the workplace, which suited his customers' needs well. He thought that a block model would have provided a much less flexible option. The employer was able to involve the learners in a wide variety of construction tasks, such as fitting, tiling, joinery, decorating and plastering. While the employer had to invest extra time to manage the learners, he appreciated the long term benefit of gaining a potential new member of staff.

However, a few employers reported that they would prefer a block placement models as they saw this as more valuable for learning opportunities. Typically this was when the learners were engaged in complex tasks requiring training. On a day release model, employers reported that the learner would need regular refresher training, as they could not retain their knowledge during their time away from the workplace. In such cases, employers preferred blocks.

In delivering the models, as noted above, brokerage staff needed to take into account the fact that construction work is more readily available during summer. As with other routes, providers and learners indicated there were challenges to combining placements with study commitments including maths and English re-takes, and in some cases, part-time work. As on other routes, brokerage staff needed to negotiate flexible solutions that balanced the needs of the employers with the needs of learners and providers.

Learner preparation

The necessity of tailoring learner preparation to the industry has a particular significance in construction, where learners usually needed to have certification in place to work on-site, notably the CSCS card. One provider secured agreement from a large construction company to pay for learners' CSCS cards, but this was not a common solution. Obtaining the CSCS card represented an additional cost, in time and money, for most providers in delivering the construction route. Some employers also required learners to have undergone safety training.

Providers reported that learners also needed suitable outdoor clothing and to have access to tools. There was also an example where an employer requested that learners be provided with a basic tool kit to avoid expense for the firm. Providers reported stepping in to ensure learners had suitable clothing and equipment. They felt able to do so because of the pilot funding, but they were unsure if this solution would be sustainable in future.

Learners in the survey indicated that they felt prepared for the placement, although lower numbers than average reported feeling well prepared. This preparedness stemmed in their view from having contacts in the industry, the content of courses and information from family and friends. From the learner interviews it was clear that prior work experience in the industry made a big difference to how prepared learners felt going into the placement.

Specialist preparation was often geared to providing learners with the maximum opportunity to make an effective contribution in the workplace. Practising work activities on providers' sites was effective in developing learners' technical skills. Going forward, a suggestion from one provider was that providers could perform a 'skills scan' to assess the type of work that the employer carried out and to check the employers' expectations against the individual learners' skills.

As in other routes, employers and providers expressed concerns about how learners' soft skills could be prepared in order to make the best use of learning opportunities on placement. In an example, a provider discussed the need to encourage learners to take the initiative on-site and negotiate with construction employers to be able to practice and hone technical skills.

Learner recruitment experiences

Learners who responded to the survey indicated a lower than average requirement to develop a CV ahead of placement recruitment. This could reflect the fact that, as described above, employers in this industry rely more on word-of-mouth when undertaking recruitment. In the survey, learners had similar experiences to those in other routes when attending interviews and negotiating start dates, and were broadly content with the support they received at this stage.

Factors that fed into learners' decision making about whether to take up the placement included the costs involved, the travel distance involved and public transport links. These learners were less concerned about impacts on their coursework, compared to the average across the pilot. As discussed in the case study below, construction learners seemed mindful of the value of placements in giving them the experience they needed to obtain future jobs and apprenticeships.

Placement experiences and content

Most learners who secured placements spoke favourably of their experiences. Typically they went into the placement aiming to acquire practical experience in specific areas to match their course curriculum and career goals, and hoped to obtain paid work or an apprenticeship with an employer in their chosen field. This is in contrast to learners in some other routes, such as Business and Administration, where learners' objectives were sometimes less clear-cut. Learners undertook diverse tasks on placement, including tiling, plumbing, decorating and plastering, joinery, carpentry and fitting. When responding to the survey, learners indicated that there had been opportunities to tailor their activities to their interests and ambitions. While the extent to which they enjoyed placement tasks was broadly the same as averages across the routes, their responses showed that they felt this more strongly than learners on other routes. This suggests a good match between the placement content and the learners' career goals and course content.

Case study: learner appreciates the value of placements

Jabin was studying electrical installation and aimed to become a fully qualified electrician and have his own company in the future¹⁷. He had previously undertaken a work placement and recognised the value of workplace experience:

'For me work experience is quite a big thing, because you learn a lot more being on-site and doing hands-on stuff rather than being sat in the classroom reading from a book or reading off a white board [...] As long as you show up on time and show a real interest in what you're doing, you have a better chance of getting a paid job from it.'

Jabin appeared well organised and motivated. He wondered if his good attendance and performance at college had influenced why the provider offered him such a good placement with a security alarm company. He was pleased because it was close to his home and college and the content aligned perfectly with his course.

On the placement Jabin was responsible for setting alarms, fire alarms and CCTV equipment in commercial and domestic premises. He appreciated the variety of the work and the opportunities to learn from other electricians. He had no problem combining 2 days a week on placement with his coursework throughout the academic year. At the end of the placement the company offered Jabin a paid role.

'It shows you the reality of things seeing other tradesman around. It opens your eyes to new doors, you've just got to be open to things [...] From the work experience I got to know the people I'd be working with better, so I knew what I was going into when I went back and worked for them full-time, which I think is a positive thing.'

As noted above, health and safety requirements can potentially limit the possibilities for placement learning. Although providers took steps to provide safety training and CSCS cards, learners were, according to providers, sometimes limited in the tasks they could undertake on-site. However, there was less evidence of this in the learner interviews where learners, including under-19s, reported they had undertaken safety-critical work such as wiring.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement non-completion and accordingly, lower rates of completion in this route. There was some evidence that placements were affected by whether employers were able to go ahead with planned work or had to cancel. Cancellations were affected by factors such as

¹⁷ Learner's name has been changed.

adverse weather conditions or downturns in the amount of work available. During the pilot there was a short lead-in time which meant that providers were unable to give employers much notice of the placements. Going forward, providers expected to have more time to liaise with employers before the placement started, which they anticipated would make it easier for the employers to commit to the placements.

Learners sometimes opted not to complete the placement, usually for personal reasons such as leaving their course, moving away from the area or taking a part-time paid job. In addition some placements in this route fell short of 40 days because learners left the placement early to take up an apprenticeship. While this was a satisfactory result for the individual learner, providers were obliged to report these as non-completed placements.

Table 12: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|--------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Construction | 33 | 34% | 66 | 67% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Placement outcomes

Overall, the placements resulted in positive outcomes. Provider staff were delighted by the *'fantastic reports'* from employers about productive placements that benefited the learners and employers alike. This is reflected in the learner survey and the employer and learner interviews, as illustrated in the case study above. The survey data shows that learners acquired skills similar to the average in respect of relevance to courses, careers and subject areas. They also indicated that the placement had increased their motivation levels and greatly increased their confidence. Other improvements included communication and interpersonal skills. Several learners and employers spoke about placements that led to paid work or an apprenticeship. Those progressing to an apprenticeship saw their placement more as preparation for the apprenticeship than as an additional dimension of their classroom-based learning.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively challenging to source in Construction because of the predominance of sole traders whose uncertain work flows and lack of time to supervise learners were barriers to offering placements. The route also showed a relatively weak

rate of completion, caused by changes in learners' circumstances and by some employers withdrawing from the process. Where they could be engaged, employers provided varied placement content that reflected learners' career goals and interests. Learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used.

Providers planned to build on their successes in engaging large employers, communicating how Industry Placements can be an effective route into apprenticeships. Improving support for self-sourcing is also likely to help generate placements. Learner preparation that incorporates the provision of the CSCS card and safety training is also a priority. The lessons that providers learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Creative and Design

Key points

- The Creative and Design route was difficult to source because of competitive entry points to these professions and the prevalence of micro employers, many of them freelancers, who felt they lacked the resources to host and supervise a learner on placement.
- Learners often wanted opportunities to practise niche skills, but employers that required those skills were few, outside London and other major cities. The lack of local labour market opportunities was particularly acute in rural areas.
- Providers and brokers showed ingenuity in devising innovative solutions to sourcing issues. They successfully sourced placements within non-specialist employers, such as public sector organisations. Client-commissioned project placements and working with freelancers on providers' premises were also solutions that proved quite effective. To be fully effective, these innovative placements required providers to bolster communications and support for employers and learners alike, in order to underpin learners' technical skills development and to maintain the connection between the learner and employer.
- Providers adjusted the standard block, day and mixed models freely, in order to make placements feasible for freelance employers with uncertain workflows. Employers experienced many different model variations and there was no one-size-fits-all model. The learning from this is that employers in this route need flexible models to suit the varied specialisms within the industry.
- Effective sales pitches to employers included appealing to their desire to open up access to an industry seen as hard to break into and offering a free product to small medium enterprises (SMEs), such as the production of a corporate video.
- Learners were sometimes placed in the relevant industry but not in a placement where they could practice their specific creative skills. Potentially this could impact on their motivation and engagement with the placement however, the survey data showed that learners felt that the technical skills they learnt on their courses did transfer well into their placements.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements

embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of ‘design dimensions’ for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different Industry Placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Creative and Design route, which unites 2 occupational pathways¹⁸: media, broadcast and production and craft and design.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 7 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 14 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. Of the providers involved, 1 offered a course each

¹⁸ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

in media, broadcast and production and craft and design, whereas the remainder operated in 1 of the pathways only. As the table below shows, a mixed model was the most common model to be tested in this route.

Table 13: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|---|
| Block | Summer block (5) |
| Day Release | Autumn 1-day release (1) Autumn 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Autumn block and 1-day release (1) Autumn 1-day release and blocks (3) Spring block and 2-day release (3) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers and project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 7 providers.
- Interviews with 13 employers engaged with 5 of the providers.
- Interviews with 7 learners involved with 2 of the providers.
- 4 learner logs drawn from 2 providers.
- 14 learner survey responses covering 3 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved had 202 learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses); in practice, they were able to place 97. The table below shows the learners in scope, the number placed, as well as the number of placements started compared to the pilot total.

Table 14: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Creative and design | 202 | 97 | 48% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

In terms of the ease of sourcing placements in this route, the management information indicated that Creative and Design placements were slightly more difficult to source than the overall picture in the pilot. Compared to the experience in the other routes, providers and brokers considered that sourcing placements in the Creative and Design route was challenging.

Across the pilot, industries with no tradition of offering work experience were seen as more difficult to source, and this was true of Creative and Design. Other sourcing challenges included the prevalence of freelancers and limited opportunities in local labour markets. In addition, the pilot lead-in time was relatively short, giving providers less opportunity to secure placements.

Sourcing placements: challenges

The Creative and Design route includes a wide variety of specialisms, including music, visual arts, creative media production and broadcasting. Employers and brokerage staff noted that these specialisms were often under-represented in local labour markets, particularly in rural areas, although some were easier to source than others (for example, sound engineering and creative media production were found to be easier to source than music performance). Job entry to these highly specialised occupations was also competitive and FE learners were sometimes in competition with graduate interns.

Another sourcing challenge was the prevalence of self-employed freelancers such as photographers and musicians. Providers noted that freelancers often found it difficult to provide structured '9am to 5pm' placements and had concerns that supervising a learner could reduce their productivity. In addition, these employers typically worked from home, off-site or from rented desks and could not readily provide workspace for a learner. The alternatives of homeworking and off-site working raised safeguarding concerns. As in

other routes dominated by SMEs, these smaller employers were unable to support more than 1 or 2 learners at a time.

Sourcing placements: solutions

Despite the above challenges, brokerage staff successfully sourced placements with diverse employers. They generated opportunities in large creative industry employers such as artist management agencies, media organisations and communications consultancies. Smaller creative industry employers involved with the pilot included recording studios, radio stations, animation companies, video production and games design companies.

Brokerage and provider staff also had some success in broadening their placement search to include non-specialist creative organisations such as public sector departments or schools. Sourcing placements in this way was an essential solution in labour markets outside major cities where there were fewer specialist employers.

In addition, providers devised other innovative solutions to accommodate the needs of micro employers and freelancers and to overcome the lack of specialist employers in local labour markets.

Client-commissioned projects

A rural provider organised placements in which an employer commissioned a small team of learners to use their media production skills to produce a promotional video. The provider designed these placements to enable learners to experience what it would be like to produce a piece of work for a corporate client. Tutors saw this as an opportunity for learners to develop technical and soft skills. The learners attended the workplace for meetings, risk assessments, script-writing, filming and editing but also worked independently on the video on the provider's premises. Curriculum staff concluded that this was a valuable way of securing Creative and Design placements in this rural area, although the model did not fit with placement guidance. In addition, a few employers (who had only had limited contact with the learners) expressed concerns about the quality of the end-product; this may have been influenced by the lack of steer they were able to give the learner.

Creating a 'freelancer hub'

Another provider established work space for freelance employers on its premises so that they could work alongside placement learners. Employers set tasks for the learners at the start of each week, and learners could access college IT facilities to complete the projects. Providers generally viewed learners working with freelancers positively as it offered a realistic portrayal of what it was like to work in the creative field.

Engaging freelancers

A provider led outreach work with freelance employers to encourage them to offer placements. The provider made use of alumni contacts to identify suitable employers and invited the freelancers to attend a presentation about Industry Placements. The provider asked the freelancers about the equipment the learners would need to bring with them on placement and tried where possible to supply it for the learners. As a result of this outreach, the provider was able to identify freelancers who were willing and able to offer placements and match suitably equipped learners to the placements.

Client-commissioned project placements and working with freelancers on providers' premises were solutions that proved effective. However, they required providers to bolster support for learners' technical skills and to work with freelancers to support them to keep in touch with the learner.

Messages on involving employers

Many of the employers who had engaged with the pilot said the reason they offered a placement was to give young people experience in the field, which they recognised as being hard to access (especially for women, disadvantaged groups and in rural areas). For example, a pottery owner expressed her desire to help young people to enter the art world:

'It's nice to be able to help someone do something in the art world. There's very few places for them to go and do it in any area, and especially round here, and what we do is a bit different from like a graphic designer or a printers' and after that there's not a lot of choice in the area.'

A smaller number of employers said they wanted help with a specific project or business need. Appealing to employers who wanted to 'give back' was an effective sales pitch, as

was marketing the placement as an opportunity for smaller or medium-sized businesses to commission learners to work on client projects. However, in doing so it was important to recognise that employers in the creative fields (many of whom are freelance micro employers) often had concerns about the time and resources they would need to dedicate to hosting a learner.

Messaging for Creative and Design employers

A work placement coordinator found that an effective way to engage media, broadcast and production employers was to help them see how they too had just needed 'a chance' to help propel them into their career – and how they could offer that opportunity to a young person through an Industry Placement. The work placement coordinator also spent time having 121 conversations with learners to gain an insight into each individual's aspirations to showcase to the employer the benefits of having that particular learner and enable an appropriate match between them and an employer.

The coordinator identified that a mass engagement approach does not work to attract employers in this industry – the approach needs to be bespoke to both the individual learner and employer.

Employer and learner responses to the models

Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, as well as the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to say what worked in any route or pathway. However, it is possible to say why employers and learners believed a model worked in particular circumstances. Generally, the evaluation findings suggested that employers preferred models that fitted in with demand in their business cycle or supported the completion of tasks during the time available.

The variety of types of employers in the Creative and Design route, the many variations on the models that they experienced, and their differing responses to those, means that it is not possible to identify a one-size-fits-all model that would suit all employers in this route.

The employers interviewed represented the range of models but most experienced day release models. Learners recruited to the research interviews were spread across the 3 placement model categories and they had differing views on how well models worked. They were able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches, although their views were not particularly route-related.

The main finding was that Creative and Design embraces diverse industries that required different models across different occupational areas. In the future, providers will need to work closely and flexibly with employers to identify the models that best suit their needs.

Adaptations to the models

In this route, providers adapted the placement models extensively in response to the needs of creative and design employers working in different specialisms. The mixed model that predominated in this route was adapted to encompass a varied set of mixed day and block models.

For example, in the craft and design pathway, some of the placements comprised projects offered off-site or by freelance employers. For these placements the models were modified; they varied from single blocks to day release and mixed models. The evidence about how well these models worked was mixed.

In the media, broadcast and production pathway, the day release models were sometimes arranged flexibly with no fixed dates. Some of these placements did not complete because the employer could not offer more work or because of competing demands from the employer or the learner.

Another example of a modified model that emerged in the creative and design route was split block placements (i.e. placements split between 2 or more employers). The model came about during the brokerage phase when a provider reported that employers were unable to accommodate learners for the full duration of the placement but would consider shorter block placements. Multiple employer placements are not in line with current policy thinking however, providers and some employers took the view that shorter blocks were a realistic option for freelance SMEs with uncertain work flows, who undertook projects on a short business cycle.

Block model suits freelance 'gig' workers

Creative and design work often takes the form of 'live briefs', projects and 'gig' contracts. Employers working in this way often favoured the block model because it suited this mode of work delivery. Learners had varied responses to the block model. A learner in the media, broadcast and production pathway said they liked the block model because it felt *'like a normal job'*. However other creative and design learners disliked consecutive, desk-bound 9am to 5pm days.

Despite some favourable responses from employers and learners, providers shared fears that rolling out a block model universally in the creative industry would be problematic for brokerage as well as timetabling.

Day or mixed models suit others

In contrast, some employers in the industry were also said by providers to prefer a day release or mixed model. This could accommodate freelancers' needs, such as having office space available only on certain days of the week, work commitments on particular days of the week, or limited work activity. Other providers reported the benefits of the 2-day release being consecutive days to embed learning in the workplace while also allowing the learner time to engage with the curriculum and the theoretical side of their work. Providers also reported that, where it had been used, an immersive opening block at the start of the placement worked well as it formed a comprehensive 'induction'. In settings where the business was more full-time, a 3-day a week release preceded by a block was suitable.

Learner preparation

As noted in the main evaluation report, providers and employers believed it was necessary to tailor learner preparation to particular industries. Evidence from employers regarding creative and design learners' job-readiness was mixed, with similar numbers of employers stating that the learners had not been job-ready to employers who were happy with the skills and qualities learners had upon starting. Learners responding to the survey indicated that they felt well prepared for their placements.

The learner interview data suggests much of the learner preparation in this route was focused on general employability skills, such as workshops or tutorials on interview skills and CV writing. Prior but non-relevant work experience was a factor in helping learners to feel prepared, as was the content of courses, according to the learners' survey.

Learner preparation around technical skills was varied and no unifying message arose about specific learner preparation activities required for this route, reflecting perhaps the varied nature of the creative skills covered in the route. In the learners' survey, learners rated their courses highly for preparing them well for their placement.

Technical skills preparation – example 1

Tutors at a provider offering music technology courses thought that their learners were already ‘job-ready’ and technically capable because they had used sophisticated music technology software at college on a daily basis. In their view it was more important for a placement to give the learners a practical application of their technical skills in a work context rather than to further develop their technical skills. The learners and employers who experienced these placements reported that, while placements offered some opportunities for technical skills development, they tended to focus more on developing business and soft skills such as networking with industry professionals, proficiency in using software, digital promotion and learning how to run a small business.

Technical skills preparation – example 2

In a provider where industry placements were offered as project-based work for clients – in this case creating corporate videos, preparation involved the tutors worked with learners to analyse previous client corporate videos to gauge the technical requirements for the task and encouraged the learners to be confident in communicating their ideas to the client. Learners also attended sessions on codes of practice and working with external clients, reflecting the unique set-up of these placements.

Placement experiences and content

Providers and employers indicated that placements generally provided useful learning opportunities in workplaces that were relevant to the general area of study, but not always for the precise creative skills that learners wanted to practice. Provider staff tended to regard these opportunities as meaningful learning opportunities even where technical skills development had been limited.

However, providers recognised that occasionally learners’ motivation and engagement may have suffered where the placement did not align with the learner’s specific interests. In addition, there was recognition from providers and learners that a few placements provided limited opportunities for learners to practise technical skills, because some employers (particularly freelancers) lacked the time to engage learners in what they were doing.

‘Because I work by myself the majority of the time, it’s very difficult just to say “Oh, I’ll just show you how to do this just because it’s nice to”. It has to fit in with the

business and I did say to college that I don't have spare time just to do stuff for fun as it were, so the student has to be prepared to either shadow or pitch in and do what I'm doing at the time for that day.'

Employer

Despite this, during research interviews learners indicated that they were usually able to extract useful learning from the placements opportunities, even when they were not a perfect match. Some were also able to negotiate duties that better suited them. However, the few learners interviewed who were less engaged - because the match was less appropriate to their skills and interests - complained that the full duration was too long.

Even if not the perfect match, placements develop valuable and demonstrable skills

Ahmed was studying creative media production, specialising in games design¹⁹. When he was allocated a placement in a web design company he was initially disappointed not to have been placed with a games design company. However, he was given a project to design the first level of a cyber-security training interface. His virtual reality (VR) and 3D computer modelling skills were new for the company and he found that '*I know more than they do*'. Although he found the placement hard work, it was very enjoyable and highly relevant to his course content. Ahmed's attitude to the placement was pragmatic: he was glad that he had chance to further develop his VR and 3D design skills, even though his placement was not in his first choice of games design. He recognised that the placement would look good in his portfolio when he applies to study games design at university.

¹⁹ Learner's name has been changed.

Learner negotiates a better match

Kaitlyn was finishing her Level 3 music performance qualification when she was placed in a radio station as part of the pilot²⁰. When she was first told about the Industry Placement pilot, she was not enthusiastic, but when she heard about the placement at the radio station she became more interested. Kaitlyn thought that it would give her an insight into how radio works, especially around the kind of music that she wanted to create.

At the placement she did audio-editing, picking out playlists and digitising sequences. Kaitlyn had a rocky start at first, feeling *'they advertised it as working with music but instead I was just editing a lot of audio'*. After first trying to do the placement tasks, but with little enthusiasm, she and her supervisor discussed the kind of tasks that she was more interested in doing. This resulted in her being given duties that she felt she could excel at, such as creating playlists. Kaitlyn reflected that her supervisor treated her *'like an adult'* when discussing her interests and placement preferences which she appreciated.

Kaitlyn concluded that the placement had refined the skills she already had and that it was *'useful and relevant'* for her career goal of working in music composition. She was *'quite satisfied'* with how the placement had matched her plans.

'It's a lot more relevant than other things I've done – it's been good for me.'

The learners' existing skills enabled them to undertake projects such as adding advertising to a website, developing a mobile app or designing a media campaign. Some employers allocated learners large single projects, such as corporate videos, producing a portfolio of photographs or undertaking social media promotion. Others involved learners across all aspects of the business, sometimes requiring that learners first shadow them before they assumed responsibility for tasks. For example a learner in an artist management company was involved in research, administration and business tasks. The employer thought these were important to convey the less glamorous aspects of running a small creative sector business.

Working on employers' client-commissioned projects, sometimes limited learners' opportunities for technical skills development. It appeared that learners on this kind of placement often worked with colleagues who lacked the knowledge to teach the learner technical skills. In these cases, employers instead spoke about the interpersonal and

²⁰ Learner's name has been changed.

softer skills gained by learners. The course tutors pointed out that learners still had the benefit of curriculum staff guidance during their college days or by phone and that significant gains could still be achieved. College staff thought that these placements had taught learners valuable technical and soft skills: script-writing, filming, sound, editing, audio and visual post-production, as well as client liaison and communication skills. There was limited data from learners' interviews about the impacts of working on employers' client-commissioned projects.

Challenges associated with 'employer brief' placements

A local library service approached a pilot provider to discuss celebrating their upcoming centenary. The college offered their placement learners to work on producing a corporate video. They set it up so that the employer acted as a client commission a project from the learners, and the learners were organised as if they were film production business.

Learners spent most of their time working on the project from the college campus, fitting the project work around their studies. The employer met with the students periodically when the learners visited the libraries to undertake project work.

In future, the employer would like to be involved in the project more and have the learners on-site to oversee them more frequently as they felt that the end product was not quite what they hoped. They think this could have been avoided had the employer been involved more and able to guide the students.

Despite some of the placements being hard to source – especially in rural areas and for music performance learners – providers recognised the positive development opportunity that the placements present in terms of soft and technical skills. They saw the combination as important in ensuring a rounded experience for learners, preparing them well for the freelance careers that learners might experience in the creative and design industries.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement non-completion in this route – which may relate to the difficulties of sourcing opportunities in specialisms that were a good match between learners' ambitions and placements. The preponderance of freelancers in this route, some of whom lacked the time to develop placement content and supervise the learners, may also have contributed to the high levels of non-completions.

Table 15: Placement completion

| | During Placement Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|---------------------|---|--|------------------------------|--|
| Creative and design | 54 | 56% | 43 | 44% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Placement outcomes

Placements had positive impacts on learners who described using the experience in CVs and job or UCAS applications. Learners were also able to build portfolios based on their placement experiences which demonstrated their capability to apply skills in a commercial setting. Some learners had been offered apprenticeships or jobs by the placement employers.

Learners spoke of the technical skills they had developed on placement. Technical skills developed in this route included software skills, digital marketing, 3D design and audio auditing. Although learners were often placed in technical areas that departed somewhat from their career ambitions, they valued the transferability of the skills they were developing. For example, a learner who intended to develop a career in video editing found that his placement experience of audio editing was relevant and developed his technical skills, even though the placement was not an exact match for his career goal.

Learners were usually able to see the advantages of doing the placements in terms of their longer-term goals. A learner on the music, broadcast and production pathway looking to work in event management was placed with a small booking agency. The work was computer-based – contacting DJs by email, sending invoices and confirmation emails, putting itineraries together. He described having learnt a lot, and how he had particularly improved his communication skills, and thought that as a result of the placement his CV looked a lot stronger. He also recognised the value of the experience to help inform what he wanted to do after college.

Overall learners in the survey indicated that they had quite a high degree of autonomy to decide the types of tasks they engaged in during placements although they enjoyed their tasks to the same degree as learners on other routes. Their responses also showed gains in respect of future career insight, ability to work under pressure, and confidence.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively challenging to source in Creative and Design because many local labour markets had few employers from the relevant specialisms. In addition the predominantly freelance employers lacked experience in offering work experience and often could not spare the time or resources to host a learner. The route also had a relatively weak rate of completion, possibly reflecting the difficulties of sourcing opportunities in niche specialisms. Providers succeeded in generating placements using innovative solutions such as client-commissioned projects. Employers were able to give learners realistic experiences in Creative and Design workplaces. Learners acquired technical skills as well as soft skills and business skills that were transferable to their area of interest and helped their career development. The lessons that providers learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Digital

Key points

- The nature of the digital industry made this route difficult to source. However, remote working, project working, opportunities with non-digital employers and higher level work to engage national employers were solutions that helped to generate placements.
- Digital employers often initially doubted that FE learners could benefit their business. Messages about FE learners' contributions to digital projects, new ways of working, and filling skills gaps were sometimes effective. Employers who did agree to offer placements were usually satisfied with the experience and were happy to continue offering placements in the future.
- Digital employers and learners generally found the predominant mixed model easy to manage. There is less evidence about the efficacy of the day and block models. Providers, employers and brokers stressed the need for flexibility in delivering the models.
- Learner preparation for this route could be improved by more industry-specific content, covering CVs, communication skills, the individual placement and emphasising the relevance of placements to learners' careers. This is likely to increase the success of placements.
- High quality and varied placement experiences were noted that developed technical and soft skills. To ensure learners undertake placements with sufficient technical content, improved communications between learners, employers, providers and brokers, as well as advice for employers on the role that learners can play in the workplace, are likely to benefit placement quality.

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The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different Industry Placements (IP) and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Digital route, which unites 3 occupational pathways²¹: data and digital business services; IT support and services; software and applications design and development.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 9 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 10 FE courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below.

²¹ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

Table 16: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|--|
| Block | Summer block (1) |
| Day Release | One provider planned to do 2-day release, but because of the delayed placement start, most learners experienced a 2-day release followed by a Summer block, as below (0) |
| Mixed | Spring block and 2-day release (5) Autumn Block and 1-day release (1) 1-day release with Summer block (1) 2-day release with Spring/Summer block (2) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 8 providers and 2 wave case study with 1 provider.
- Interviews with 7 employers engaged with 6 of the providers.
- Interviews with 7 learners involved with 4 of the providers.
- 7 learner survey responses covering 5 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 228 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 80 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total. This report focuses on exploring the experiences of sourcing and matching placements in this industry, drawing out the challenges encountered and providing insights into the potential solutions that were tested.

Table 17: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Digital | 228 | 80 | 35% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

In terms of the ease of sourcing placements in this route, the management information indicated it was considerably harder in this route than on average across the pilot. The main reasons for this were the lack of digital employers in some local labour markets, and digital employers' preference for graduate applicants.

During the pilot, providers were able to test solutions to sourcing challenges, set out in the section below.

Sourcing placements: challenges and solutions

Across the pilot, industries where there is a tradition of undertaking some form of work experience as part of careers entry routes were typically viewed as easier to source placements in. This was not the case with the Digital route which providers found difficult to deliver because of various barriers to sourcing suitable placements.

Generating local opportunities

A significant challenge in sourcing placements was the lack of digital employers in local labour markets, especially in rural areas. The lack of digital opportunities prompted providers and brokers to 'broaden their horizons', thinking laterally to source placements.

'We've been looking at it as a broad picture, in terms of looking at what they can do based on the different units that they're completing on the qualification.'

Provider work experience staff

They had some success in sourcing placements with non-digital organisations, such as charities or in schools', colleges' and hospitals' IT departments. Learners were offered roles in teaching computing skills, doing social media, web-design, IT support and software development. It was challenging, but important, to strike the right balance between achieving a placement while providing appropriate content.

Some brokers and providers expanded the geographic search area to locate digital employers further afield. This sometimes helped generate additional placements, but necessitated learners making longer journeys.

Overcoming barriers in computer games and animation

The lack of local digital opportunities was particularly acute for learners on computer games design and animation courses. A further barrier was that games, animation and visual effects employers often required staff to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and were unsure if those would be legally enforceable if completed by under-18s. Brokerage staff reported that animation studios asked to see learners' show reels or portfolios. It would therefore be helpful for providers to give employers advice about NDAs, and to assist learners in preparing evidence of their digital skills to show to employers.

Highlighting learners' contribution

Employers, providers and brokers noted that it was more usual for digital employers to hire graduates. Employers were more familiar with hosting graduate interns than FE learners on placements, whom they perceived to have lower social and technical skills. Digital employers often also had very specific skills requirements, such as a particular programming language, and providers noted that employers often doubted whether FE learners could make a useful contribution to their business, as they were unsure what skills they could offer and what tasks to give them.

Providers and employers indicated that advice on the role that learners could play in digital workplaces is useful. Some providers suggested that a national campaign was needed to persuade digital employers and employers' networks of the value of hosting FE learners.

Generating opportunities with small employers

Providers and brokers described the digital industry as dominated by small or micro employers, such as self-employed freelancers or start-ups. Small employers tended not to have employer liability insurance and sometimes found the placement paperwork onerous. They often worked out of their own home, creating safeguarding concerns. Others rented premises in enterprise centres and were reluctant to pay for an extra desk

or IT equipment. Some preferred the learners to use their own laptops, potentially excluding lower income learners without access to IT equipment.

Providers and brokers worked flexibly to accommodate small employers' needs. Some adopted alternative placements, such as remote working or project-based formats, illustrated in the case studies below.

The predominance of freelancers suggests it could also be helpful to communicate how industry placements can be delivered by micro employers with limited resources

An alternative format digital placement

A small digital employer that produces labour market information for the education sector was looking to develop a new programme. Their aim was to create a virtual reality experience to show school children around an employer's premises, without the pupils leaving the classroom. In negotiation with their local provider they agreed to take 4 learners on placement to build the virtual reality prototype. The employer hoped to use the prototype to persuade organisations such as the NHS or car manufacturers to commission their own version.

As the employer did not have desk space for the learners, the placement was set up so that the learners could work remotely from the provider's own virtual reality lab. The curriculum staff invested time at the start of the placement to organise the technical set up and to assist the learners as they got started on building the app.

The learners were supported and monitored through liaison with their tutor and through frequent employer visits. The provider's Promonitor system was used to flag any concerns.

The placement content involved the learners interviewing employees, making videos, and then building the programme using games technology. The learners already had appropriate technical skills and slotted into different roles in the project: for example, one did 3D modelling, another used games technology.

Curriculum staff noted strong growth in learners' soft skills. For example, they adopted reliable digital storage systems and communicated more effectively.

Going forward, the provider was confident that the virtual lab set-up would make future remote-based placements relatively easy to organise as the framework is now there.

Client-commissioned projects as digital placements

A rural provider was considering running its future digital placements as employer-commissioned projects to counteract the lack of digital employers in the local labour market. The provider envisaged inviting local employers to commission small groups of learners to produce a digital product or service, as the basis of a placement. Learners' technical skills would be supported by curriculum staff. This approach had already been used successfully in the provider's creative media production placements to create client-commissioned videos. Provider staff hoped that, going forward, adopting client-commissioned projects could incentivise employers from different industries to provide digital placements.

Generating opportunities with large employers

Sourcing digital opportunities with large employers also proved challenging, and few of the providers were successful in initiating placements with large or national employers. Some large employers were already involved in providing apprenticeships and were reluctant to amend their existing work experience infrastructure. As in other routes, brokerage staff reported that there were 'more hoops to jump through' to establish placements with large employers. However, as the case study below illustrates, persistence in engaging senior management and a strategic approach are likely to be the best approaches in generating future digital placements in large volumes.

Meeting a large employer's diversity targets

During the pilot a national media employer agreed to offer 6 digital placements in coding and software engineering, targeted at female learners, in order to address their diversity targets. The employer was initially reluctant to offer Industry Placements since it had already invested heavily in apprenticeships. They made a commitment to offer placements after sustained effort by the national brokerage organisation to engage with the employers' senior leaders. Although the numbers for the pilot were small, engaging such a large employer offered an important foothold for scaling up in the future, to include roles in other areas of the organisation.

Messages on involving employers

Providers and brokers succeeded in persuading employers to offer placements, by emphasising messages about learners having up-to-date skills and knowledge of the latest technology, to assist employers to work on projects such as coding for apps, or to help IT users. Publicising examples such as those below could help persuade digital employers of the benefits of offering placements to FE learners.

Extra capacity could motivate employer engagement

An employer that develops virtual reality apps took on placement learners to create new products that its 5 staff did not have time to work on. Two software and applications design and development learners were given augmented virtual reality products to develop. The employer saw the placements as an opportunity to achieve additional tasks and pursue new interests that they would otherwise not have had capacity to achieve.

Developing a talent pipeline

A medium-sized employer provides copying and printing hardware and software. Although the company has nearly 250 employees and several offices, it struggles to recruit younger staff. The main office is in a business park with poor transport links, which deters young people. The employer's engagement with industry placements was part of their long-term recruitment strategy. By taking on local FE learners, they hoped to develop the skills the company needs, to persuade them to work for them long term and to spread the word about their company and draw in further recruits among young people locally.

*'It appeals because you can take someone at a fairly raw stage in their development at 16 or 17 who maybe has an idea of what they want to do but it's largely unformed and unfinished, and bring them on board and give them the opportunity to look at what we do, but also hopefully influence and show to them what we can do and what we can offer. There is a lot of influence through word-of-mouth and if they have a good experience with us hopefully they will talk to fellow students when they go back into the college environment and it will engender real interest within that particular provider [...]
It's a way of getting an enthusiastic person on-board to help...'*

Employer

Employer and learner responses to the models

Most pilots delivered a mixed model for digital and the majority of the employers and learners interviewed had experienced this model. Consequently there were insufficient data to provide a definitive comparison of digital employers' and learners' responses to all three models. The mixed model was generally popular.

Learners found the mixed model suited them because the day release element combined well with their studies; many also had part-time jobs that day release made it easier to manage. The day release element of mixed models also worked well with digital freelancers' working arrangements, such as renting desk space on certain days of the week. In addition, small employers often doubted they had the capacity to supervise a learner on an extended block. However, as in other routes, digital learners and employers found a short block before a day release placement was helpful in settling learners into a routine, as illustrated in the case study below.

However, according to providers and brokers, some digital employers preferred learners to work on a block model when delivering dynamic projects in order to give the project their full attention and deliver results quickly. The few learners and employers interviewed who experienced the block model had mixed reactions. The manager of a start-up appreciated the block because it allowed a team of learners to work intensively writing code for a programming project. In contrast, a small creative agency found managing 2 learners doing a block was too time-consuming. Learners too were split between finding blocks stressful (because it clashed with part time work, their studies and other commitments) or manageable (because the block took place in the summer when most of the learners' coursework had finished..

A learner's experience of a mixed model placement

Ash was an FE learner who did his industry placement on the IT Support Desk of a legal firm, starting with an initial block of a week and then changing to 2 days a week²².

At first Ash job-shadowed to gain understanding of the systems and software. He then assumed responsibility for quick fixes and was slowly introduced to the more expensive and complex systems. By the end of the placement he was, he said, just another member of the team. Ash found the mixed model was good because being with the employer for 6 months helped him see how fast a business can change. However, he suggested that a longer initial block – 2 weeks rather than 1 week - would help learners with little prior work experience to acclimatise to the work routine.

Providers and brokers also emphasised the need for flexibility in the placement model in order to meet digital employers' needs and secure placements in this hard-to-source route. For example, some providers had to adjust their planned day release model by adding blocks at the end, to compensate for delayed placement start dates (caused by the difficulties in sourcing placements), or when learners' attendance was poor.

Learner preparation

Providers reported a high incidence of non-starting digital placements and interview data suggest that learner preparation might have had some influence on this. Several digital learners complained that their placements were 'sprung on them' and preparations were rushed. Some learners indicated that greater clarity about what the placement would involve and how it could benefit their studies and career would help them to prepare psychologically. Employers agreed that giving learners more contextual information could boost learner motivation and encourage them to start and complete the placements.

Given digital employers' qualms about FE learners' skills, it appears important for learners to clearly describe their abilities in their CVs. One provider commented that, even with the help of template CVs, digital learners' CVs routinely undersold their abilities, by not fully describing their programming and software skills and not demonstrating how their experience would translate into the workplace. This might indicate a need for industry-specific exemplar CVs to work from. According to the learners interviewed, learner preparation for digital learners rarely covered the individual placement. Given the varied nature of the digital roles sourced, it was suggested by a provider that it was not practicable to do this. However, to help reduce

²² Learner's name has been changed.

non-starting and non-completing placements, it appears important for learner preparation to include more tailored content, where possible.

Several providers and employers suggested that digital learners' social skills could also benefit from more targeted preparation. Good communications and networking skills were felt to be particularly important for freelance careers and for IT support. As recommended in the case study below, additional training in communication skills could help digital learners to work more effectively with clients, customers and colleagues.

A focus on soft skills as part of learner preparation

A tutor perceived that some digital learners have poor communication skills. To address this in the CDF year and beyond he has added 'a load of extra stuff on top' of the curriculum to prepare learners to meet employers' expectations.

This included tutorials about communicating their knowledge clearly via email and phone, and adjusting the level of technical detail when communicating with different audiences. The tutor concluded that the placements and their preparation involved taking the digital learners 'in a people direction', so that they became 'well-rounded and employable' individuals.

Placement experiences and content

As already described, digital has seen different delivery methods trialled, such as remote working, project-based work and client account-based placements. Placement experiences and content also varied. A key difficulty was for digital employers and providers to identify tasks that were meaningful for the learner and useful for the business. Some placements did this more successfully than others.

The accounts of providers, employers and learners show that some placements did give learners excellent learning opportunities. It appeared from the learner and employer interviews that the placements were often not a precise match to learners' chosen specialisms. However, as shown in the quote below, learners still reported that their skills had benefited – sometimes in ways that the learners had not predicted.

'[I] would recommend others do a placement because it helps develop your own skills as well as skills you haven't heard of before.'

Learner

Placement completions

The management information indicated that placement completions were a little above the average across the pilot in this route. While placements may have been challenging to source, it appeared that once they were sourced, learners and employers had sufficiently productive experiences for the placements to be fully completed.

Table 18: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|--------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Digital | 16 | 20% | 64 | 80% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Placement outcomes

Examples of technical skills developed during placements included website design, digital marketing, network maintenance, IT user support, hardware support, software testing and social media. Learners also acquired skills relevant to digital freelancing careers, such as communicating with clients about a project brief, project management, asset management and risk management. In common with learners in other routes, digital learners also improved in confidence and soft skills, such as improved communication. Their placement experiences gave learners an early and invaluable insight into the digital industry, helping them in their career decisions. Responses to the learner survey indicated that placements had been particularly important to learners developing the ability to work independently.

There were examples where opportunities were less stretching for learners and these could be attributed to the challenges of sourcing that constrained the time available to prepare and match learners to placements and to brief employers about learners capabilities. These issues should diminish over time as placements become the norm. As with other routes, small employers could find it challenging to dedicate time to supervising learners given other projects, but some of the solutions found for this route provide models for how this might be managed in future.

There is a need for clear and continuous communication between employer, learner and provider to create and sustain meaningful placement content. Advice on the role that learners could play in the workplace is useful to employers.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively challenging to source in this route and this had the effect of constraining the time available to prepare learners and employers and achieve appropriate matches. This is likely to have contributed to the challenging picture on placement completion. However, where placements worked well, employers were highly engaged and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used. Many learners had opportunities to develop and hone their technical skills – some of which exceeded practice in their employer. A range of creative approaches were brought forward by providers to make placements work in this industry. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Education and Childcare

Key points

- In general there is a tradition of undertaking work experience as part of vocational childcare courses and professional qualification structures. This meant that pilot providers had existing relationships with employers that they could draw on, making it relatively easy to source placements. In addition, some learners self-sourced, utilising their own industry contacts.
- Given the tradition of offering work placements, it was important for pilot staff to explain clearly to employers the different requirements of the Industry Placements, such as how to set targets and objectives, how to design content that reflects the curriculum, and how to undertake monitoring and evaluation.
- Messages about developing and moulding a talent pipeline and providing extra resources to supervise children in their care resonated well with these employers, who often struggled to recruit suitable staff.
- Most providers implemented variations of day release and mixed models and employers responded well to these. Day release was a familiar format for employers, learners and providers in this route and often suited employers' ways of working, but some employers responded well to the block model. Providers' experience was that flexibility in implementing the models was important to be responsive to employers' needs.
- The legal requirement for learners to obtain Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance before beginning placement sometimes delayed the starts. This suggests a need to timetable and streamline the DBS clearance processes.
- High quality and varied placement experiences were noted that developed technical and soft skills. Learners' positive responses are reflected in the high levels of completion and the low levels of non-completions.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of 'design dimensions' for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different Industry Placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Education and Childcare route, which covers a single pathway²³: Education.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 5 pilot providers offered placements for this route, across varied Level 2 and 3 courses. The models operated across the pilot courses are shown in Table 1 below. However, some variations to the models emerged where block placements proved less viable (see later).

²³ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

Table 19: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|---|
| Block | (None) |
| Day Release | 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Spring block and 2-day release (2) 1-day release from Autumn with Summer block (1) Short Autumn block followed by 1-day release (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers and project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 5 providers.
- Interviews with 14 employers engaged with 4 of the providers.
- Interviews with 2 learners involved with 2 of the providers.
- The examination of learning logs as part of provider visits, although no learner logs were directly examined during the compilation of the route report.
- 17 learner survey responses covering 4 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 149 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 133 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 20: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Education and Childcare | 149 | 133 | 89% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively straightforward to source for.

Sourcing placements

The Education and Childcare route covers early years' settings and these have a tradition of providing work experience. In addition, several childcare qualifications in this route require learners to carry out Industry Placements. As a consequence of this existing practice, providers already had strong employer networks and a plentiful supply of placements. In more economically prosperous areas, some providers found it challenging to provide enough learners to fill the opportunities that they or the national support organisation, had sourced. Confirming this, learners who responded to the survey indicated that provider staff had played a key role in setting up placements and agreeing start dates.

Providers believed that the national support organisation's additional assistance was best utilised in drawing in employers from outside providers' own networks. The predominant types of placements were nurseries and primary schools.

Given existing practice, employers expected to provide opportunities to develop future employees. They were also motivated to provide placements given current staff shortages and skills gaps in the industry. Some employers and providers described industry-wide difficulties in sourcing and retaining reliable staff with appropriate literacy skills and knowledge of child development.

A key challenge that providers highlighted was the need to communicate to employers the additional requirements of the placements. From the interviews, it appeared that employers would have welcomed more clarity about the purpose of the placements and

what would be required of them, particularly in regard to setting targets and objectives, designing content that matched the curriculum, and monitoring and evaluation.

Self-sourcing and its benefits

Self-sourcing was more common in this route than in some others (although not an approach that learners in the survey had engaged with). Learners in the interviews described how they had often already undertaken work experience during the first year of the qualification. They were therefore able to draw on their own links with local employers to source placements, as in the case study below. However, where feasible, providers encouraged learners to diversify by attending a contrasting placement with a different employer.

Self-sourcing by experienced learners

Juliet had already done a placement in year one of her childcare qualification²⁴. She thought that she *'already knew what I was doing'* when it came to sourcing an employer. Juliet did not have any help from her provider with CV or interview preparation, but she thought that this was OK because of her experience of sourcing a placement in year one.

She identified *'multiple'* childcare employers in her local area and emailed the ones that were closest to her. She selected a placement in a nursery within walking distance of her home, as having a short commute was her most important concern. Other learners on her course also self-sourced their placements. Going into the placement, Juliet felt *'quite confident'* since she expected it to be a similar experience to her year one placement.

Juliet was delighted with the placement content. She got involved with all aspects of nursery work, including planning, doing observations, playtime outside, helping with household tasks like washing up, assisting with snack and lunch times. The placement experience enabled Juliet to identify which age range she wanted to work with and confirmed to her that she definitely wanted to be in a nursery rather than a school setting. She found that in the classroom it was easy to *'disconnect'* from the practicalities of what she was learning. In contrast, doing the placement was *'practical, hands-on and in the moment'* and it allowed her to put her classroom learning into practice.

²⁴ Learner's name has been changed.

However, as noted and experienced by learners in the survey, other placements were sourced by the providers. The wider evaluation findings indicate that where providers supplement learners' sourcing efforts with provider-led sourcing, this can address the social equity and mobility criticisms made of self-sourcing.

Self-sourcing also means that providers extend beyond their own networks of employers. This intensifies pre-placement activity on due diligence since they are not updating earlier checks but starting from a blank sheet.

Messages on involving employers

As noted above, employers in this route were looking to address staff shortages and skills gaps. Effective messages to employers emphasised the development of a talent pipeline: giving employers the opportunity to 'trial' potential future recruits and to coach learners in the skills the employer needs. Providers noted that placements gave employers a useful opportunity for employers' staff to 'mentor' the learner. Employers also welcomed the concept of extra resources to supervise children in their care and the extra energy and enthusiasm that learners gave to colleagues and the children in their care.

While providers could build on employers' expectations, it was clear that employers and their staff were not always aware that the pilot was different from 'business as usual' placements, or that they understood the specific role of the industry pilot. As noted above, providers intended to increase information to employers on the nature of placements and their requirements in future.

Matching learners to placement

There were not always enough learners to justify a 'selection process' for Education and Childcare placements. Accordingly some employers said that they were not given the opportunity to interview placement learners although learners generally attended an induction meeting at the employer's premises. This was confirmed by learners in the survey. Most employers were content with this arrangement. Providers confirmed that they encouraged employers to meet with learners prior to the placement in order to clarify expectations in advance. While, overall, learners who responded to the survey were content with arrangements to source and match their placements, some indicated that they would have appreciated more support from their provider on agreeing to start the placement..

Employer and learner responses to the models

The mixed model predominated in this route: only 1 provider offered 2-day release and none opted for block only. This represents an adaptation of the established pattern in this industry, where work placements previously tended to be organised around day release. Providers were firmly of the view that day release was familiar to employers and preferable. Accommodating learners' maths and English re-sit sessions was another point in favour of day release, in providers' views.

Employers' reactions to the models were more mixed. Some welcomed day release or the mixed model because it was familiar, as providers had predicted. They also highlighted that day release (either on its own or as part of a mixed model) provided an opportunity for reflection on the tasks the learner had completed in order to provide feedback and design future experiences.

In contrast, however, other employers would have preferred to have been offered a block model since they expected it to enable better preparation and resourcing of the placement, or a more realistic picture of physical, 'full-on' work that could enable the learner to decide if this was a career they really wanted. For example, the learner's mentor at a hospital-based placement suggested that a block model could provide a more rounded understanding of the job, enabling the learner to see a child's condition or health improve over time.

Challenges could be experienced during the blocks within mixed models, however, which providers believed stemmed from employers' lack of experience of this approach. One provider struggled to get employers to agree an initial 2-week block and instead negotiated a revised model, whereby some learners did the 2-day release model with enhanced learner preparation. Where employers also accommodated apprenticeships or students from other providers in their workforce, it might be necessary to confine the Industry Placements to specific days to fit in with rotas and scheduling.

As in other routes, it appears important for providers to deliver models that are flexible and responsive to the needs of individual employers.

Learner preparation

The long-standing tradition of work experience meant that information about the placements was already included in learners' course information. This meant that learners' expectations were set appropriately from the start of the pilot. In addition, some providers had briefed learners in the summer about what would be required of them on placement. As already noted, some learners had already undertaken work experience in year one of their course and were therefore relatively 'job-ready'.

Overall, learners appeared to feel well prepared. For example, those who took part in the survey indicated higher levels of satisfaction with preparation than were seen across the pilot. Their responses indicated that preparation had taken several forms, with previous relevant work experience central to feelings of being prepared. In addition, inputs from college staff, course content and information from employers had all been important factors.

DBS clearance

Providers generally reported a need to tailor learner preparation to specific industries, and requirements extended beyond those for traditional work experience. Education and Childcare learners are legally required to obtain a DBS check before beginning their placements. As this process can take up to 6 weeks, providers raised concerns that the DBS clearance processes delayed placement start times and made autumn start placements more difficult to organise. This suggests a need to timetable and streamline the DBS clearance processes in the future.

Placement experiences and content

The accounts of providers, employers and learners, as well as the learner log data, indicated that in many cases, the placements had provided useful learning opportunities. Childcare employers already used to hosting placements as part of childcare qualifications were readily able to involve the learners in routine nursery activities. Job roles could be easily broken down into smaller component parts, making it straightforward to involve learners in day-to-day activity.

Occasionally employers struggled to devise a suitable programme of activities for the placement. In a few cases, more cautious employers limited the learners' activities to shadowing and observing other staff. Providers indicated that in future more input would be given to help employers design placement content, including more detailed insights into the curriculum.

On placement, learners got involved in diverse activities including listening to children read, making displays and supervising outside play. Some employers also gave learners more responsible activities such as doing child observations and contributing to children's assessments.

An employer's experience

An independent nursery school had a systematic routine to rotate placement learners through each of the nursery rooms. They paired the learners with an experienced mentor in each area. The employer aimed to equip learners to be able to run each area independently by the end of the placement. They felt that the Industry Placement had a real impact on the learners gaining confidence, insight into the nursery practitioner role, and informing their future career plans. Even so, this employer would have liked more information about course content and its relationship to the placement, to enable them to better plan the placement content.

The responses of learners interviewed for this route were generally positive. Placements provided an opportunity to specialise which would help learners decide on their focus in the future, such as which age group they wished to work with. Learners responding to the survey indicated that they had been able to determine the activities they undertook during placements to a great extent, although they were less positive about the extent to which they enjoyed the tasks they undertook.

A teaching assistant experience

Emma was delighted when her provider sourced a placement in a primary school, working as an assistant to year one pupils²⁵. She hoped that the experience would enable her to get onto a teacher training course.

Emma described her placement duties as being equivalent to those of a standard teaching assistant. She was given '*a lot of responsibility*' in helping individual students with their reading and writing skills.

She really enjoyed the placement and felt it was very advantageous to her career ambitions. She developed her communication skills, patience and ability to be authoritative with children. Provider staff were pleased that she learnt to use appropriate language with the children.

Through the placement Emma gained insight into the realities of working with children and re-shaped her career goal from becoming a teacher to a role in behavioural support. Overall Emma felt that the placement helped to prepare her for employment and would recommend an Industry Placement to other learners.

²⁵ Learner's name has been changed.

The degree of detail on experiences and skills acquisitions captured in the learner logs available to the research was quite varied, as with other routes. Much of the work that learners reported in the logs was of a routine nature, such as setting up rooms, clearing away and cleaning. However, it also extended to building relationships with children and, to a much lesser degree, supporting child development. The latter was mentioned by employers as an important aspect of early years' educators' development.

Placement completions

The management information indicated high levels of completion compared to starts in this route, with relatively few non-completions.

Table 21: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Education and Childcare | 13 | 10% | 120 | 90% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

The overall evaluation findings suggest that high levels of completion are associated with the traditions of offering work experience in this industry, which have provided a platform to build on for Industry Placements.

Placement outcomes

Learners who responded to the survey indicated that placements generated opportunities that allowed them to develop technical skills relevant to their courses and future careers. As with learners on placement in other routes they also noted the development of soft skills and employability attributes. The learners interviewed reported that their placements had made them more confident, improved their communication and teamworking skills, and showed them how to work in a caring way. They identified valuable experiences that enabled them to apply their classroom knowledge and reinforced their determination to make a career in the industry.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively easily sourced in this route as there is a tradition of work experience in relevant qualifications. The route also showed strong levels of completion. Employers engaged well and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used.

The key challenge surrounded the getting the DBS check in place ahead of placements starting – a process that could take up to 6 weeks. Providers aimed to start this process earlier in future than had been possible in the pilot. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Engineering and Manufacturing

Key points

- The Engineering and Manufacturing placements were relatively difficult to source, although there was variation at the pathway level: automotive maintenance and repair was easier to source than electrical or aeronautic engineering.
- Providers attributed the sourcing difficulties to: the lack of relevant employers in some local labour markets; hazardous workplaces and equipment, including legal constraints on the machines that under 18s could use; employers' doubts about how FE learners could contribute to their business; and employers' confusion about how T level placements differed from apprenticeships and other initiatives.
- Providers aimed to overcome some of these issues through better expectation setting and communication prior to placements with employers and learners, and co-ordinating approaches to large employers with other providers.
- Brokerage staff could usefully provide more information to assist employers in designing placement tasks that align with curricula and help employers to design appropriate placement job descriptions. Giving the employers the opportunity to trial learners in short 'tester' blocks could also help address employers' concerns about the match of FE level skills to their industry.
- Employers were responsive to messages about acquiring valuable skills for their business, particularly SMEs with skills shortages. Some employers were also motivated by the chance to help a young person to progress.
- There was no clear preference for placement model. Providers and employers thought that flexibility in the models was important.
- Learners' decisions to take up a placement were influenced by the placement location and start times. More engineering and manufacturing learners had part-time jobs than in some other routes and it appears this sometimes deterred learners from doing a placement.
- Learner preparation was generally not route-specific and there was an appetite amongst engineering and manufacturing employers for more pre-placement work to boost learners' technical skills. Some also thought more preparation on employability attributes and soft skills would be beneficial.
- Technical skills development during placements was sometimes limited by legal restrictions on under 18s using certain machinery, and other factors. However, generally placements resulted in the development of interpersonal skills and greater knowledge of appropriate workplace behaviours and attitudes which were beneficial for learners' progression.

- Learners described high gains in motivation and confidence. Learners believed that their commercial awareness had increased.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of 'design dimensions' for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Engineering and Manufacturing route, which includes 3 occupational pathways²⁶: maintenance, installation and repair; engineering, design, development and control; and engineering, manufacturing and process.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 9 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 14 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. It is worth noting that in most providers, the intended model set out below was not always possible and in practice placements were shorter, with some adaptation of the model. Of the providers involved, 5 focused on the engineering, design, development and control pathway in the pilot, whereas the remainder offered additional courses in either the engineering, manufacturing and process, or the maintenance, installation and repair pathways. Only 1 provider included all 3 pathways in the pilot. As the table below shows, a mixed model involving a spring block followed by 2-days a week release or 2-days a week release followed by a spring block was the most common model to be tested in this route.

Table 22: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|--|
| Block | Spring/Summer block (2) |
| Day Release | 1-day release (1) 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Spring block and 2-day release (3) Autumn block and 1-day release (2) Autumn 1-day release with Spring/Summer blocks (2) 2-day release and Summer block (3) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

²⁶ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

- 3 wave case studies with 9 providers.
- Interviews with 4 employers engaged with 3 of the providers.
- Interviews with 4 learners involved with 2 of the providers.
- 17 learner survey responses covering 5 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 267 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 11 of these learners. The table below shows the target and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 23: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Engineering and manufacturing | 267 | 117 | 44% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively challenging to source for.

Sourcing placements

Across providers offering the Engineering and Manufacturing route, there were difficulties in sourcing placements. This was driven by regional differences in the availability of engineering firms and manufacturers in local labour markets, health and safety restrictions on the tasks that learners could undertake, as well as employers' uncertainty

about what a Level 2 or 3 learners could contribute to their business. There also appeared to be some confusion amongst employers regarding the role of T levels.

Some learners taking part in the survey indicated they had taken a lead role in sourcing their placements. However, learners responding in the survey generally indicated it was more common for provider staff and brokers to do this.

Pathway variations in ease of sourcing

Within this route, some pathways appeared to be more straightforward to source than others. For automotive maintenance and repair, there were examples of success in finding car mechanic placements at smaller garages, as well as with large employers. A provider indicated that visiting garages (rather than using telephone or email), although resource-intensive, was an effective means of establishing an initial informal contacts that helped to set up placements. The tradition of offering work experience and apprenticeships within the automotive maintenance and repair industry was a positive influence, as employers were used to supporting young people's entry to the workforce.

In contrast, however, providers and brokers reported that electrical engineering and aeronautic engineering placements were much more difficult to find because there were few employers from those industries in their local labour markets.

Hazardous workplaces and complex equipment

Employers' concerns about having under 18s on-site were another factor that appeared to contribute to the difficulties in sourcing placements. Providers reported that some engineering and manufacturing employers' workplaces were hazardous for young people. In addition, there were regulatory restrictions on the equipment that under 18s could operate. Even when there were no legal restrictions on the age for operating machinery, providers reported that employers often believed the need for extensive training over long periods meant it was not feasible for them to take on young people. Providers note that some employers reported that where learners were lacking in machine operating skills, they could make a valuable contribution through their theoretical and analytic knowledge.

Awareness of what FE learners could contribute

Providers also reported that engineering and manufacturing employers had relatively high expectations of young people's skills and sometimes doubted there would be an appropriate role for FE learners in their workplace. Providers perceived that this reduced employers' willingness to provide placements. Providers were able to give examples of employers that used placement 'recruitment' processes to get to know the learners and also where providers had been able to share information about the curriculum, so that

employers were better informed about skills levels and relevant areas of skill development.

Employers overwhelmed, confused by competing demands

Larger employers were reported to be handling a large volume of requests for work experience alongside placements, which acted as a barrier to their involvement. Additionally, apprenticeships are a well-established career entry route in this route. According to learners and providers, some employers were less aware of how T Level placements differed from apprenticeships, which contributed to their reluctance to offer placements. A pilot provider was taking steps to address the reluctance of large local employers, inundated by approaches from several providers, to engage with industry placements. In the future, they hoped to coordinate effort across local providers; this would involve nominating key account holders to each employer (from a provider in this new network) who would lead liaison and negotiation, and share the resultant placements amongst the participating providers.

Employers' confusion about industry placements made it difficult for learner to self-source

John²⁷ was studying a BTEC qualification in engineering. When he was first told about the industry placements, provider staff encouraged him to source his own placement. He contacted various local companies, but found he was getting '*passed from pillar to post*' by employers. He noticed that employers were unclear what an industry placement was and how it differed from apprenticeships. John didn't know how to answer the employers' questions about this and had not received any information from his provider to help him do so.

'Companies didn't really know what you wanted, what you wanted to do. Obviously it's a [industry] placement not an apprenticeship, so they didn't know what it was and whether they would be able to accommodate it.'

After struggling to find a placement, John's tutors advised him to visit the provider's work experience team who were able to source him a choice of industry placements.

²⁷ Name has been changed

Lessons for future sourcing

The evaluation findings suggest that ensuring that knowledgeable brokerage staff who can provide clear information to employers about learners' capabilities and the tasks that they could undertake safely on placement would minimise many of the sourcing challenges. A summary of course content would show employers how workplace activity aligns to the curriculum and can provide learning opportunities. Where providers assisted employers to break down job descriptions into smaller tasks that are more appropriate for Level 2 and 3 learners helped employers to feel more confident about what offering a placement entailed.

There is also a need to explain to employers how the aims and content of industry placements differ from those of apprenticeships, and to help employers in responding to the high volume of requests for industry experience as well as placements. This could potentially be overcome by more coordinated local efforts on employer engagement – for example through creating local provider networks who would nominate a lead contact for each employer and share the placements that are sourced across providers.

Allowing sufficient time to 'recruit' employers was important. While this applies across routes, the specific concerns among engineering and manufacturing employers mean a staged, slow approach to identifying and signing up employers could be particularly beneficial. The national support organisation also reported that the difficulties in sourcing sometimes meant that employers had to be identified from outside the local area.

A further suggestion from providers to address employers' reluctance to offer placements was to trial short 'tester' blocks which, if the employer judged them to be successful, could be extended into industry placements. Providers believed that this would reduce the initial risk to employers and allow learners to demonstrate how they would fit within the workplace.

Shorter placements

Providers had mixed views about whether the planned placement duration gave them enough flexibility to source sufficient placements or to accommodate their own timetabling requirements. A concern raised by a provider was how well the length of placement fitted with employer and learner needs. Another issue was to do with fitting the placements into existing courses where timetables had already been planned for the year, which as a feature of the pilot should be minimised by the roll out of the T Level programmes which will be designed to accommodate placements.

During the pilot, the above issues resulted in some engineering and manufacturing employers offering shorter placements (e.g. of 1 or 2 weeks) and using this period as a tester phase for the longer duration placement.

Messages on involving employers

Employers interviewed were motivated to take part in the pilot by the opportunity to acquire valuable skills for their business as well as the more altruistic motive of helping young people progress.

The most engaged employers were already involved in partnerships with their local colleges, wanted to help local young people and believed engineering and manufacturing skills should be taught practically as well as theoretically.

Employers of all sizes – but particularly SME engineering and manufacturing employers – were persuaded by messages about using the placements to tackle recruitment issues. As illustrated in the case study below, the specialist skills that they needed for their workforce were sometimes hard to attract from the local labour market. In addition, employers sometimes saw placements as a possible testing ground for future apprentices.

An employer's motivations to get involved

A small engineering business that makes navigation equipment discussed the difficulties of competing with larger employers in the area for skilled staff. They viewed the placements as an opportunity to provide young people with experience of working life in a smaller organisation. They considered that the placements would have a dual benefit: providing young people with insights into engineering and manufacturing, while also solving the employer's skills supply problems. The employer offered the placement as a combined 1-day per week and block model and found it helpful to have the learners on-site. The organisation intended to offer the young people employment when their courses are complete if possible.

Similarly, the owner/manager of a small garage was motivated by sharing their experience and knowledge with a young person while gaining staff capacity and supporting the development of a possible future recruit.

Employer and learner responses to the models

Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, as well as the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to say what worked in any route or pathway. However, it is possible to say why employers and learners believed a model worked in particular circumstances. As in other routes, in some contexts engineering and manufacturing employers preferred the day release or mixed models, in others a block was preferable; there was no one-size-fits-all model.

According to providers, some engineering and manufacturing employers were not receptive to a 1-day release as this did not allow learners sufficient time to fully understand the job and its requirements. Across the evaluation, this was a common experience in routes where learners were engaged in particularly complex tasks.

Other employers using a day release or mixed model thought this was more appropriate to employers' workflow and the learners' skills levels, with the further benefit that it allowed skills to develop over time. For instance, a local authority employer offering a 1-day per week placement considered that delivering the placement over a longer timeframe meant they could expose learners to a wide range of technical experiences.

Flexibility in models is essential

Generally, as across other routes, engineering and manufacturing employers valued flexibility to involve learners in day-to-day business activities rather than having to follow a specific programme of learning. Providers also stressed the need for flexibility in the model to meet different employers' needs and to accommodate critical points in the curriculum: *'it can't be one size fits all, we have to have that flexibility'*. As already mentioned, some providers took the view that the current industry placement duration was too long and the number of placement days should be reduced.

Location, start time, part-time jobs influence placement match

At interview, the providers and learners indicated that an accessible location and start time were important factors in making the placement feasible for learners. Those learners tended to consider whether or not they could attend by public transport when deciding if a placement was possible for them. Providers commented that shift patterns requiring early starts or late finishes created difficulties for learners. Learners who completed the survey also indicated that location and start time influenced their decision to do the placement, but this was equally true of learners in other routes. Some providers had been able to negotiate working hours to make them more suitable.

Across the evaluation, learners with existing part-time jobs were often seen to be more reluctant to undertake a placement. Within this route, a provider indicated that motor vehicle learners often already had part-time jobs and tended to be less willing to engage in placements. More generally, the learner survey data also suggested engineering and manufacturing learners had greater propensity to have a paid part-time job than in other routes. In some cases part-time jobs meant that less learner preparation was required as these learners were more 'job ready'. Providers also supported the option of being able to repurpose existing part-time paid jobs into industry placements, where these mapped to learners' field of study.

Learner preparation

Employers, learners and providers gave examples of the range of learner preparation activities. Providers generally did not offer route-specific preparation for engineering and manufacturing learners and the interview findings suggest that more specific preparation would be welcomed.

For example, a provider described situations where learners were introduced to particular aspects of engineering for the first time while on placement – for example, using a new Computer-Aided Design (CAD) package. The employers fed back that they would prefer it if learners had at least a basic introduction to CAD in the classroom as part of their placement preparation. Providers responded flexibly by deciding to change the order of some curriculum elements to better accommodate these needs.

Employers offering engineering and manufacturing placements had mixed views about learners' readiness for the placement. Some expressed satisfaction with the preparation learners had had, while others indicated that providers could have done more to prepare and support learners to have better workplace attitudes and behaviours.

In contrast, learners responding to the survey believed they were very well prepared for their placements. Their feelings of preparedness stemmed from information given by their employers, which was far more important to these learners than those in other routes. Other factors that played a role in helping learners feel well prepared including prior, relevant work experience, preparation from providers and course content.

Placement experiences and content

Where placements were sustained, providers reported that the extent to which learners had opportunities to develop technical skills varied.

In some cases, providers described some placements where there was a lack of hands-on tasks due to concerns about young people using specific equipment, as in the case study below. This resulted in work shadowing rather than practical opportunities to develop technical skills. As the case study shows, some learners made the best of the situation, while others were frustrated by the limited activities on offer.

A learner's experience of placement

Jamal²⁸ was in his first year of a BTEC qualification in engineering and undertook a placement with a small, local employer that produces low volume specialist components for the oil, gas, automotive and utilities sectors. The amount and level of work varied from week to week but Jamal felt that the placement allowed him to gain insights into an engineering workplace.

Jamal was interested to see both how employees work together within the business and how an engineering firm functions. He had the opportunity to see how products were manufactured from start to finish and the various roles involved in the process, such as machine operatives, programmers and inspectors. This helped him to start thinking through future career options.

Towards the end of the placement, Jamal was wondering about pursuing a career in a similar workplace in the future, although he was also keen to explore and gain experience of other types of engineering, such as aeronautical.

Jamal felt he had made limited gains in his technical skills and these were related to the computer programming for the machines that the business uses. He indicated that being under 18 restricted the machines he was allowed to use and limited the types of work he could participate in, which he found frustrating. However, he had been involved in some machine operations, such as grinding burrs from metal and checked the machinery measurements and other maintenance tasks. He also described how he had been able to observe the application of various engineering processes and link theory and practice.

In contrast, other providers gave examples of highly-motivated engineering and manufacturing employers putting in time to understand the learner and curriculum and giving them tasks to develop technical skills.

An employer's experience

A small engineering company hosted 2 learners on the pilot. They are a company that is keen to develop the skills of young people and have employed apprentices in the past and are keen to develop their own talent pipeline.

²⁸ Name has been changed

The company is small, learners were able to therefore contribute in a meaningful way to live projects.

‘what I thought about was as myself going through college, what would I have liked to experience? I wish I had this same approach of being able to get your hands on everything.’

The supervisors at the employer spoke often to the learners about what they were learning in the classroom. The tasks the young people were given were chosen to fit in with what the young people were studying, but also matched the business needs.

Engineering and manufacturing learners taking part in the survey indicated that they had been able to negotiate some of the activities they undertook during placement. Those who did so showed higher levels of enjoyment of placement activities than was the average across the pilot.

Placement completions

The management information indicated comparatively high levels of placement non-completion in this route, possibly relating to some learners’ frustrations, with placement content, as already described.

Table 24: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Engineering and manufacturing | 71 | 61% | 47 | 40% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Providers reported that engineering had a high level of non-completions (as well as learners not placed – see earlier), because placement experiences and content did not meet learner expectations. With a longer lead-in time when T Levels are rolled out, providers may be able to spend longer setting realistic expectations with employers and learners. Other reasons provided for placements to end prior to completion included attendance and behavioural issues and learners needing to undertake part-time work. These were useful issues for a pilot to identify but did not directly relate to the pilot itself.

Reducing non-completion

Employers and providers considered that where a mini-application process had taken place – and interviews, application forms or CVs had been undertaken, this helped to support completion because all parties were more informed about what the placement entailed. Employer experiences of the level of support offered by providers during placements appeared to vary, with some satisfied but others stating that more communication and greater support to align the placement to course requirements and to manage learner attendance and behaviour, would be helpful.

Placement outcomes

Providers thought that, even where placements' content was restricted by health and safety considerations, they still benefited learners' non-technical skills such as interpersonal and communication skills, self-confidence and understanding workplace behaviours and attitudes.

'For a lot of engineering students, for example, what they found was that their confidence had grown, not necessarily their technical ability, not their engineering knowledge, but actually the personal and social skills.'

Where there were greater opportunities for technical skills development, the examples that providers and learners cited included:

- For automotive maintenance, installation and repair: checking clutches, carrying out services, changing filters (air, pollen and oil), safety checks on tyres, assisting with cam belt replacements and repairs, removing sub-frames, taking alternators on and off, changing brake pads and checking electrics.
- For aeronautical engineering: learning to review and assess plans for aeroplanes to assess viability.
- For engineering, design, development and control: application of CAD packages, moving from basic theoretical knowledge to producing drawings of actual engineering design schemes.
- For engineering, manufacturing and process: learning to remove burr from pieces of metal, checking measurements of drilling and checking machines had enough coolant.

A learner makes a positive contribution to the bottom line

A small consultancy offering advice on aeronautical engineering and construction projects, offered a placement to a learner on an engineering course. The director of the business hoped to provide the learner with a real insight into the engineering industry and a positive experience of the world of work. He had a positive experience of the brokerage process, with clear communications from the local provider about what the placement entailed and a health and safety check. The placement took place via a series of 2-week blocks and the learner worked on 'live projects' alongside the director. This typically involved looking at plans of aeroplanes to assess their viability. The employer reported that on one of these projects, early in the placement, the learner spotted an issue that prevented a large number of faulty aeroplanes being manufactured. He felt this was a really positive indication of the technical skills that the young person was already developing. Overall, the employer felt the learner had a positive impact on the business and was making a good contribution. He would be happy to host another placement in future.

Learners taking part in the survey strongly agreed that they had acquired skills relevant to their course and subject area. However, while they had gained skills relevant to future careers, they agreed less strongly about this than learners on other routes, perhaps reflecting the limitations described on placement content. That said, engineering and manufacturing learners showed high gains in motivation, confidence, interpersonal skills and in their positive attitude towards work. Soft skills such as working as part of a team, and working independently, time management, problem solving and working under pressure also improved. Learners strongly agreed that their commercial awareness had increased.

Concluding thoughts

The experience of sourcing placements in this route varied considerably by pathway and the availability of work at a suitable level. Where employers used complex technologies some of their work was not suitable for under 18s. However, exposure to the workplace remained valuable if employers could shape it to align with curriculum and provide a learning experience for individuals. The route also showed relatively challenging levels of completion in part because of the difficulties of configuring work at a level for FE learners and in part due to factors not associated with the pilot or placements. Where placements worked well, employers were highly engaged and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used. The lessons providers learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Hair and Beauty

Key points

- This route was straightforward to source owing to the tradition of employers hosting placements in the hair and beauty industry, although sourcing for niche specialisms could be more challenging.
- Sourcing was often conducted face-to-face and the most successful brokerage messages appealed to employers' need for an extra resources, supporting their recruitment of staff and apprentices. Providers noted that it was important to clearly differentiate placements from apprenticeships. Going forward, although micro businesses are common, national brokerage staff suggested that hotels and spas could offer larger scale sourcing opportunities.
- Theatrical and media make-up placements were harder to source than mainstream hair and beauty placements. Although there were successes in placing individual learners in placements such as theatres, brokers often relied on related opportunities such as beauty counters; which worked well when learners were able to be 'hands on'.
- It was relatively common for learners to self-source or to convert existing part-time jobs into placements. Although learners generally had prior work experience, some would have liked more support from their provider to help them to identify an employer and set up the placement.
- The mixed model was tested in this route and employers and learners liked the day release element over an extended period since it allowed learners to acquire and practice new skills. There were also seasonal preferences from employers for some additional support over the Christmas period and 'wedding season'.
- Learner preparation for this route generally did not include industry-specific content. Some employers had qualms about learners' job-readiness and communication skills, suggesting that extra preparation to cover soft skills in the industry context, such as communicating with salon customers, could be useful.
- There were tangible impacts for employers who could take on extra customers and learners who could develop technical skills and forge a route to employment. Learners' satisfaction with placement outcomes is reflected in the relatively high levels of placement completion in this route.

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- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Hair and Beauty route, which covers 1 occupational pathway²⁹: hair, beauty and aesthetics.

²⁹ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 5 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 14 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. As the table below shows, a mixed model involving a spring block followed by 2 days a week release was the most common model to be tested in this route.

Table 25: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|--|
| Block | None |
| Day Release | None |
| Mixed | Spring block and 1-day release (1) Spring block and 2-day release (2) Autumn block and 1-day release (1) 1-day release with Summer block (1) 2-day release with Spring block and 2-day release (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 5 providers.
- 5 employer interviews, engaged with 1 of the providers.
- Interviews with 8 learners involved with 6 of the providers.
- 26 learner survey responses covering 2 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in

which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route set targets to broker placements for 199 learners. In practice, they were able to place 106. The table below shows the target and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 26: Targets and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Hair and beauty | 199 | 106 | 53% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

These data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively straightforward although not entirely easy to source for. The evidence indicated some differences between being able to source placements for a well-established course such as hairdressing and more difficulty for niche courses such as theatrical hair and make-up. Additionally, some employers reported to the brokerage staff that they already had other learners on work experience and could not host industry placement learners as well.

Sourcing placements

Employer size and placement roles

Most of the employers engaged with the pilot in this route were micro businesses employing between 1 and 10 staff. In larger cities, there were more small (11-50 employees) and large (250+ staff) employers available than in more rural areas. The types of roles being sourced included (junior) therapist, hairdresser/junior stylist, nail technician, trainee beautician and hair/beauty assistant. Brokerage staff usually made contact with salon owners and managers.

Tradition of work experience

Across the pilot, placements in industries with a tradition of providing work experience were viewed as easier to source. Employers in the hair and beauty industry were familiar with offering work experience and this provided a platform to build on for sourcing

industry placements. During the interviews, learners said that they had expected to go on some form of placement/work experience and so the request from their provider to find the placement was not unfamiliar to them.

Employers need additional information

However, providers noted that they had to carefully explain the purpose of the industry placements to employers to establish the difference from previous experiences. In doing so they emphasised the intention that learners should gain opportunities to acquire and practice technical skills as part of hands-on experience. Providers also noted, however, that the prevalence of employers hosting learners on other work experience types could negatively impact on their willingness to additionally host additional industry placement learners. Again, here the solution was to provide information about the potential benefits of placements. In future, providers believed this issue would recede as placements became part of accepted practice.

Theatrical and media challenging to source

Theatrical and media make-up learners were much harder to place than those on mainstream hair and beauty courses. Employers in this niche industry are often freelancers who, as a broker from the national brokerage support organisation observed, cannot see the benefit of an industry placement and typically do not have employer liability insurance. Even when placements for theatrical and media make-up were sourced, it was difficult to guarantee placement timing and duration due to the short term contracts typically secured in the industry - often covering a single day for make-up work. Nonetheless, the research came across an example of a learner being successfully placed in the make-up department of a theatre, which closely matched the learner's ambitions.

'It's a great opportunity and is one of the biggest musicals in London, so I can't really be complaining about it.'

Learner

The employer has also spoken about the success of this placement:

'She has worked hard, watching the team and developing the technical skills she has learnt. During her time, she has learnt complex wig postiche set and dress and was always working hard to improve.'

Employer

Sourcing solutions

Brokerage staff sourcing placements on the Hair and Beauty route found that a face-to-face approach worked well. For example, a trip around a shopping centre generated 8 hair and beauty placements. Going forward, national brokerage staff suggested that hotels and spas could offer larger scale sourcing opportunities.

To counter the difficulty of securing theatrical and media make-up with freelance make-up artists, the national broker sourced placements with a national pharmacy chain, which agreed to host learners on their make-up counters. Brokerage staff also secured placements in department store beauty counters.

Learners also sourced their own placements by identifying potentially relevant local employers and making applications directly; this was a little more prevalent in this route than in some others. This was confirmed by learners answering the survey who indicated that in many cases they had played a key role in sourcing. In the interviews, learners said they were comfortable with self-sourcing as this expectation had been set in course information. In contrast, a provider had some concerns that younger, less confident learners were less likely to take the initiative to call employers than older, more confident learners. This may explain why some learners reported in the survey that they would have liked more support to identify an employer and set up the placement. To address this, providers proposed leading more intensive support during the preparation phase to ensure learners are equipped to make these contacts, and to monitor their sourcing activity.

There were some learners who converted existing part-time jobs in the industry into placements, as reported in the survey and in the interviews. In some cases the employer, learner and provider were able to work together to agree how to incorporate the additional industry placement requirements.

Messages on involving employers

Employers described how they were looking for an opportunity to use the placement as a recruitment route, either for employment or for an apprenticeship. A salon owner hoped to see the learner develop their role as part of the team, enabling the employer to determine whether they would make a good employee. The extended placement would allow them to better assess the learner's employability and technical skills over time. Brokerage staff also described employers as being disposed to messages about learners being able to provide extra support particularly during busy periods, such as Christmas and the spring to summer wedding season.

A provider was hoping, given the prevalence of apprenticeships in the hair and beauty industry, that a message about covering apprentice off-the-job training days using day

release placement learners might be a successful approach. This has yet to be fully tested.

Selection preferences

None of the employers interviewed for this route had been involved in selecting their placement learner. Learners in the survey showed no greater propensity to be involved in selection processes than the average across the pilot. However, several employers said they had wanted assurance that they had 'the best' learner for their needs; they could gain this assurance either by the provider informing them or by interviewing learners. It was important for some employers to be able to gauge learners' motivation prior to the start of the placement.

Employer and learner responses to the models

Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, as well as the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to say what worked in any route or pathway, although it is possible to say why employers and learners believed a model worked in particular circumstances. The differences in employer preferences in respect of model suggested a one-size-fits-all approach would not work in any route or pathway, although in the pilot many were prepared to accommodate the model put forward by providers. Generally, the evaluation findings suggested that employers preferred models that fitted in with demand in their business cycle or supported the completion of tasks during the time available.

As seen in Table 1 above, a mixed model was used by the providers for hair and beauty. Pilot findings suggested that providers liked this approach, combining immersive blocks with longer periods of 1 or 2-day release, because they perceived it to offer the benefits of both day and block models respectively.

All of the employers interviewed for this route were working with the same provider and described a mixed model based on a short (2-week) initial block followed by 1-day a week release. Some employers reported that they would have preferred more frequent attendance, but that the length of placement meant that the learners were able to develop skills over time to '*learn a lot more and improve*'. The case study below describes how one employer had a preference for placement days to fall either side of the days learners were in the classroom, to better embed the learners' skills.

A common working pattern in hair salons is for a closure day during the week (frequently Mondays) which tied providers to attempting to secure placements on the other days and made full week blocks unsuitable for many employers.

An employer's perspective on the placement model

The manager of a beauty salon was approached by a local provider to host an industry placement learner. The salon has been involved in 2-week work experience in the past and the new type of placement appealed because of the longer duration which they expected to be beneficial for developing confidence over time, allowing the learner to settle in and develop gradually.

The placement model they were offered by the college was 1-day a week. The employer thought that a 2-day a week model would be more beneficial to get a better idea of the different days at the salon. The manager also described how they would prefer the placement days to fall either side of the learner's college days so that they could review what they learnt in the classroom in the workplace. This would also help to connect what was being learnt at college to the salon, which the employer thought did not always match at the moment.

The employer believed that placements are more beneficial than work experience, since they give staff the opportunity to get to know the learner and for the learner to demonstrate their ability. Over the length of the placement the learner made good progress, developed technical skills on simple treatments and was able to demonstrate that she had learnt 'best practice' whilst on the placement.

'Such a delight to have in the salon. If I could have another [student] like her again this year then I would be happy.'

The learners interviewed as part of this route represented the mixed block and day release model and 1- and 2-day release models. The learners expressed their preference for the day release element of the model as it fitted well around their other course and personal commitments including part-time jobs.

Seasonal preferences

There are also peak 'seasons' when hair and beauty salons are busier – Christmas, and from spring when weddings become more commonplace. With this in mind, employers reported that they would like the placement learners to be ready to support those busy times by starting their placements before the peak seasons. Providers also acknowledged this and hoped that future policy would allow learners to be placed during the holiday periods:

'For example Christmas holiday and New Year - learners could get amazing experience of how busy a salon can be, yet if they cannot complete placement during holidays, this prevents them from doing so.'

Provider

Selection

Across the pilot, providers noted that some employers opted to be 'selective' and expected learners to apply for placements, usually via informal interviews. Some providers noted that employers in hair and beauty were less concerned about this than those in more 'selective' routes such as engineering and manufacturing.

Learner preparation

As noted in the main evaluation report, providers and employers believed it was necessary to tailor learner preparation to particular industries. The way in which this tailoring could be achieved varied between industries.

Almost all of the learners interviewed had previously undertaken short-term work experience at their provider while completing their Level 2 qualifications and/or expected that they would have to complete a placement as part of their Level 3 course. To that extent, learners were perhaps more job-ready than learners in some other routes.

Some of the learners were unable to describe specific preparation for their placement; others could remember receiving information about contact names and locations but little else about what they might be doing. Others remembered participating in a 6 week pilot-specific preparation programme. Of the sessions they engaged with, they found the one focused on CVs most helpful as they would be able to use what was learnt in the future. The learner survey findings indicated that hair and beauty learners had developed CVs to the same degree as seen in other routes.

Learners taking part in the survey indicated that they felt well prepared for their placement. This sense of preparedness had resulted from prior relevant work (to a much greater extent than on average seen across the pilot). While preparation led by provider staff and employers, as well as personal networks, were important, these contributed to preparation in this route at broadly the same level as on average across the pilot.

While learners often had prior work experience, some employer feedback suggested that the 'soft' skills of the pilot learners were not well developed. An example mentioned was a learner needing a member of staff to help them talk to customers during long

treatments. This suggests that help with customer communications could be a useful part of future placement preparation.

Placement experiences and content

The accounts of providers, employers and learners indicated that in many cases, the placements had provided useful learning opportunities. Employers described the varied tasks that learners undertook on placement, including: beauty treatments – such as waxing, manicures, pedicures and facials; general housekeeping; as well as meeting and greeting customers. The employers interviewed were keen for the learners to develop technical skills but wanted them to learn these at college and then shadow professionals before treating customers. This derived from concerns for the safe application of treatments as well as employers' reputational standing with customers. National brokerage staff noted that this could occasionally restrict learners to doing more low-level tasks rather than activities that stretched them technically.

Learners interviewed for this route were variously studying theatrical and media make-up, hairdressing, nail technology qualifications, and beauty therapy courses so their placements tasks were as varied. Learners reported styling wigs - as in the case study below - and working to a more advanced level than on their course, practising additional skills such as barbering and microdermabrasion.

An example of placement content

Terri³⁰ was taking a Level 3 theatrical and special effects make-up course and undertook a placement at a West End theatre. There was no selection process but before the placement started she was given information about the time and location of the placement as well as an overview of the task she would be doing.

The placement was 2 days a week, 11am to 3pm and her role was to help with the preparatory work for the evening performance. She chose a wig to work on and style, receiving advice and support from staff about how she should approach the task. She had a supervisor who gave feedback on her work and how she could improve.

Terri had never worked with wigs before and although at the placement she has access to the same equipment as on her course, the skills she needed to use were more advanced.

She really enjoyed the placement and felt that the experience she had gained would be excellent for her CV. Her work at the theatre helped to build her skills and enabled her to get some contacts in the industry. Terri hoped to be able to get a job at the end of the placement, either at the theatre or in another theatre.

'I am definitely learning something that I don't get at college.'

Learners taking part in the survey indicated there had been extensive opportunities to tailor the placements towards skills areas they were interested in and it appeared that this had led to high levels of enjoyment of the activities they undertook while on placement.

At interview, learners talked about the difference between working in their college salons where they were practising on volunteer members of the public, and interacting with paying customers in salons during their placements. A learner described how customers at the provider-based training salon had different expectations than customers in the salon where she was placed. Another described dealing with a customer complaint:

'It's proper real-world, it's their money [the employer's] and it would be my money too.'

Learner

³⁰ Name has been changed.

Employers noted the development of social skills too: *'That's something which you have to be in the atmosphere to learn it'*.

Employers with a history of hosting work experience learners or hiring school/college-leavers were adept at finding clearly defined entry-level activities for learners and experienced at supervising their work. However, an employer who was disappointed in the calibre of the learner would have liked the provider to have worked more closely with them to address their concerns about the learner's performance.

Some employers in the hair and beauty route supported their placement learners to attend additional training to develop their skills and knowledge. It is common in the industry for manufacturers of new products to put on training courses to help understand how they can be used; employers offered course places to learners.

Theatrical and media make-up

As discussed above, providers and learners found it difficult to source relevant placements for the theatrical and media make-up pathway. The use of alternative settings, including beauty retail (make-up brand counters within shops and department stores) to gain experience rather than theatrical ones was common. In these settings, providers hoped that learners could assist customers on decisions about make-up and also apply make-up for them to test. However, providers expected trade-offs in respect of the technical skills that could be developed and honed; for example, the use of prosthetics is not part of beauty retail. Initially, providers had concerns about the balance between generalised and technical skill development. Despite this, curriculum leads said that feedback had been generally positive from both learners and employers, and also noted a clear improvement in technical skills in the classroom. In contrast, 2 learners who had this type of placement were disappointed with the lack of technical tasks they were able to do as the placements mostly focussed on customer service and most of their time was spent observing rather than practising skills and tasks. This indicated a role for greater advice to employers about learners' curriculum and capability prior to placement commencement.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement completion in this route.

Table 27: Placement completions

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|-----------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Hair and beauty | 17 | 16% | 89 | 84% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Where there were issues with non-completion, this could cause frustration for employers. For example, an employer described how they managed their workload taking into account the additional support that the placement learner would bring, and therefore were disappointed at having to cancel appointments when the learner failed to attend. Providers hoped that better preparation and matching, as well as improved curriculum scheduling as T Levels roll-out, would resolve issues such as these.

Placement outcomes

Learners spoke of getting quicker at technical tasks due to practice in the workplace, refining skills they had started to learn on their course or being able to use more up-to-date equipment than that offered by their provider. For instance, a learner who had secured a placement in theatrical make-up noted with some pleasure that the skills they were learning with the employer were more advanced than those they had been applying on their course to date. They were working with wigs for the first time, while previously they had only worked on natural hair. Other learners undertaking placements in hair and beauty also emphasised the opportunities they had gained to work with new products and technologies. The effect of this had been to make them more confident in their technical tasks.

Learners in the survey indicated they had gained and practiced skills relevant to their courses, future careers and subject fields, although their responses showed that they were slightly less likely to agree strongly with these statements than those in other routes. A similar picture emerged in respect of soft skills and employability attributes which may have reflected the difficulties of sourcing placements closely matched to aspirations in some cases. There was an indication amongst these learners that improvements to the activities they were able to complete as part of their placements might have increased their ratings of the skills and attributes gained.

Providers talked positively about the technical skill development of learners on the hairdressing pathway. At a provider, hairdressing staff argued that course specifications

lagged behind industry practice and learners found out about recent changes on placement. Where learners did not experience new practices themselves, peer learning in college enabled them to share knowledge of these changes. At another provider, hairdressing curriculum staff commented on the development of technical skills among learners, which external quality assessors had commended. Working in a commercial environment had enhanced skills in areas such as providing customer consultations.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively easily sourced in this route and self-sourcing could work well. The key sourcing challenges related to niche specialisms although thinking laterally about how learners could practice relevant technical skills in non-specialist environments went a long way in providing a solution to this challenge. The route also showed high levels of completion. Employers engaged well, were often experienced at supporting work experience and apprenticeships and were knowledgeable about how to support learners on placement and provide integration with classroom-based inputs. As such they sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used. The lessons providers learned about sourcing particularly will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Health and Science

Key points

- Sourcing placements in the Health and Science route was considered to be challenging.
- The size of organisations in this route varies considerably with implications for sourcing:
 - NHS health employers are large which can make it difficult to find the right person to speak to when sourcing health placements. However, employers are receptive to having placements and there is some tradition of work experience in this pathway to build on.
 - Science employers are more diverse and relevant placements were sourced from, for example, pharmacies, laboratories and manufacturing. The industry typically demands graduate-level skills, hence advice on how to deploy FE level skills can be valuable to these employers.
- Where employers are less experienced in offering placements to FE learners it was helpful to support them with advice on course content, potential health and safety and insurance concerns, confidentiality of patient/client data and patient/client safeguarding.
- Employers can be persuaded by messages about growing the whole talent pipeline and raising awareness amongst young people of different industry roles available.
- Ideally placement models and timings would be matched to the employers' business cycle, although employers could accommodate a range of models. Day release models can be more suitable in health settings, while block and mixed models can have advantages in science settings undertaking complex and long running tasks. Timings were also a concern, with health employers welcoming autumn start placements in order to prepare learners ahead of the winter rush.
- Tailoring learner preparation is valuable particularly for health and care placements, where learners may need to be taught how to understand and support patient needs and to set expectations for what learners will encounter in the industry placement. Offering manual handling skills development and safeguarding training as part of preparation was sometimes valuable.
- Many placements offered opportunities to learn, develop and hone skills and this was reflected in the fact that about three quarters of learners who started a placement went on to complete it. The way in which this could be achieved

depended on the business cycle. For example, a laboratory might involve the learner in a single long-running experiment throughout the placement.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of ‘design dimensions’ for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Health and Science route, which unites 3 occupational pathways³¹ which are in scope for T Level delivery: health, science and healthcare science. The pilot focused on health and science pathways. Originally the pilot included Sports Science in this route, however the Institute for Apprenticeship’s consultation (2018) led to this being defined as an apprenticeship-only pathway. For this reason, we do not provide case studies and qualitative information about Sports Science are not included in this report.

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 9 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 11 courses. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. To aid interpretation of the table, it is worth noting that 1 of the providers used an ‘off-set’ model which involved having half the cohort commence placement in autumn and the other half from spring. Of the providers involved, 2 offered a course each in health and science, whereas the remainder operated in either health or science only. As the table below shows, a mixed model involving a spring block followed by 2 days a week release was the most common model to be tested in this route.

Table 28: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|--------------|---|
| Block | Spring/Summer block (1) |
| Day Release | 2-day release (1) |
| Mixed | Spring block and 2-day release (7) Autumn block and 2-day release (1) Autumn 2-day release with Spring/Summer blocks (1) 1-day release with Summer block (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

³¹ Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

- 3 wave case studies with 8 providers and 2 wave case study with 1 provider.
- Interviews with 9 employers engaged with 8 of the providers.
- Interviews with 16 learners involved with 6 of the providers.
- 13 learning logs drawn from 2 providers.
- 30 learner survey responses covering 9 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 397 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 200 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 29: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Health and science | 397 | 200 | 50% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

The data suggested that this route was, overall, relatively straightforward to source for although slightly more challenging than the average across the pilot.

Sourcing placements

Overall, and compared to the experience in the other routes, sourcing placements in the health and science was considered to be quite challenging, although the challenges most

affected scientific and some health roles. Providers discussed how the industry pathways within the health and science route were quite varied in terms of their employer composition (range and size) with implications for the ease of sourcing placements. This is intuitive since the 2 pathways that were focused on cover the NHS (health pathway), and laboratories (science pathway).

Across the pilot, industries where there is a tradition of undertaking some form of work experience as part of career entry routes were typically viewed as easier to source placements in. This could be applied to some health occupations (for example, nurse training includes the expectation that learners will spend significant periods of time in the workplace). In contrast, science was considered a harder pathway to source for, since there is no tradition of offering work experience and career entry is typically at the graduate level.

In the health pathway, medical-affiliated and mental health placements were found to be difficult to source, partly due to health and safety and insurance concerns associated with having under 18s on site, and partly due to demand for placements from higher education learners. Allied health roles could also prove challenging with providers being heavily reliant upon their networks and resources. The size of NHS organisations could make sourcing more challenging in terms of identifying the right person to speak to. The national broker organisation suggested that NHS managers preferred to source work experience candidates from their existing local networks.

Science placements were often challenging to source and required some lateral thinking; again, health and safety concerns could limit access to some work settings. While the national support and brokerage organisation and some providers had sourced some placements in science laboratories, other placements could be found in unexpected firms, such as a paint manufacturing company. Schools were a useful source of science placements, while pharmacies also generated plentiful science placements. However, the national support organisation reported that some science learners turned down pharmacy placements as being insufficiently relevant to their career ambitions.

Sourcing solutions

Providers and employers indicated that advice on the role that learners could play in the workplace was useful, and employers appreciated providers putting forward ideas and solutions to help make the placement more feasible. Similarly, employers and providers agreed that a summary of course content was helpful in up-selling FE level skills to employers. There were benefits to those leading sourcing and brokerage being knowledgeable about the potential health and safety and insurance difficulties to ensure that these issues were covered proactively in discussions with employers. Confidentiality of patient/client data and safeguarding patients/clients were also concerns for some health employers that could be usefully covered during employer engagement.

'I think it is quite a good idea to know what they're actually doing [at college] because you can help them with certain areas if they're... I can't think of an example really, but if activities were something they were studying then you could make sure that they were involved in that particular thing, and you could give them evidence and experience in whatever area that they were studying at the time.'

Health employer

Messages on involving employers

Within health and science pathways, 'sales' messages about using the placements to grow the whole talent pipeline could be effective. For example, an employer positioned learners in trainee health care assistant roles, with the aspiration that they would wish to progress to health care assistant roles. In a rural area, a health employer wanted to build a local labour supply, and saw the placements as a useful strand of activity towards this. Similarly, where employers operated apprenticeship schemes, they could see a role for work placements in generating a new pipeline route to their apprenticeship programmes.

Another message believed to be useful was the opportunity to promote the industry to young people to increase their aspirations to work in a relevant occupation (sometimes this could be motivated by skill shortages). The opportunity to broaden young people's insight into industries could also motivate some employers to provide placements. Some employers simply wished to provide opportunities for young people to gain insight into their line of work, particularly those in applied science where the technical workings of laboratories would be new to young people.

Employer and learner responses to the models

As noted above, the mixed block and day release model predominated in this route. However, the employers interviewed were spread across the placement models and broadly similar numbers experienced blocks, day release or mixed models. Similarly learners interviewed were spread across the 3 different models.

Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, as well as the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to say what worked in any route or pathway, although it is possible to say why employers and learners believed a model worked in particular circumstances. Generally, the evaluation findings suggested that employers preferred models that fitted in with demand in their business cycle or supported the completion of tasks during the time available, or on specific days or in specific seasons.

These findings held true in the health and science route. For example, health settings welcomed additional support during the busy winter period and therefore preferred autumn start models in order to prepare learners ahead of the busy season. University-located science laboratories could struggle to provide block experiences outside of university term time.

There was evidence to suggest that block models would work well in some health settings. This was thought to allow learners to see patients' end-to-end experience with the health service. It also allowed them an immersive experience where they would experience the range of tasks undertaken by relevant staff, as well as to understand how staff roles interacted.

Similarly there was evidence that an opening block followed by day release could be valued by some employers since it afforded the opportunity to lead an intensive induction and mobilisation phase, followed by a regular pattern of work. Learners could also see the benefits of an intensive start to their placement. This model worked well where tasks could be completed in a day or across the course of 2 back-to-back days, and would be repeated in future weeks. This included care and sports science settings, although employers in this industry were also content with other models.

'It's quite good to know that you've got somebody on a particular day on a regular basis. It's quite good for, if we're doing activities and we can arrange larger activities if we've got an extra pair of hands. So it is quite good for our planning really.'

Health employer

Science employers experienced mixed block and day release models. This tended to work reasonably well. However, if tasks needed more time than was available to the placement in the day release aspects of the placement this could lead to a discontinuity in the experience of learners, and also placed challenges on employers to find a resource model that enabled placement learners to gain experience but also for tasks to be completed to timetable.

The differences in employer preferences in respect of model suggested a one-size-fits-all approach would not work in any route or pathway. In the pilot many were prepared to accommodate the model put forward by providers, although they might comment on its suitability. The experiences reported here identify some considerations for brokering placements in these industries.

Learners in some cases indicated that they could see the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches although views were not particularly route related. A learner involved in a 1-day release placement across the academic year understood that this allowed them to get an insight into different types of activities required by the occupation,

whereas blocks could be used to focus on a single project or set of tasks, such as laboratory experiments.

Learner preparation

As noted in the main evaluation report, providers and employers believed it was necessary to tailor learner preparation to particular industries. The way in which this tailoring could be achieved varied between industries. For example, in the health pathway which also involves care settings, good practice emerged in respect of inviting employers onto campus to assist in learner preparation. This could involve role-playing responses to real-life situations that were likely to occur during placements. This meant that employers could set expectations for what learners would experience in the workplace and the implications, for example, of caring for people with dementia. As a result, learners who received this tailored preparation understood much more about the behaviours and issues they might encounter while on placement. Where learners did not receive tailored preparation, anxieties could result when they saw situations in the work place that they did not fully understand.

In addition to involving employers – which can be valuable in industries with safeguarding concerns – providers also considered adapting curriculum coverage of particular skills in order that this could be included in learner preparation. This included, for example, manual handling skills in the health pathway. Preparing learners to work with vulnerable people was also of interest to health employers.

The other industries in this route did not identify particular skills or themes for learner preparation.

Learners from this route who responded to the survey indicated that they felt well prepared for their placements. It was less likely than in other routes that this stemmed from previous relevant work experience or information given by employers, and more likely to result from knowing someone who had performed a similar role, previous non-relevant work experience, provider-led preparation activities, course content and information from family and friends.

Placement experiences and content

The accounts of providers, employers and learners, as well as the learner log data, indicated that in many cases, the placements had provided some useful learning opportunities and learners could demonstrate skills that were either gained or honed as part of placement experiences.

In particular, learners in the health pathway believed they had benefited in respect of understanding the professionalism required in the workplace. This had resulted from shadowing staff and understanding appropriate behaviours as well as how to communicate information to be clear and accessible.

Some learners in science had contributed to lab-based experiments. While those on day release models could not always see the full experimental process, they still had opportunities to work with kit and equipment and to understand the demands of work in this industry. Notably, a learner in such a setting who was involved in a cancer research project will have their name included on a published research paper.

Learners who took part in the survey indicated there had been opportunities to tailor their placements to their interests although to about the same degree seen across the pilot. However, their responses indicated high levels of enjoyment of the activities they had engaged in.

Placement completions

The management information indicated reasonably high levels of placement completion in this route, although just below the average for the pilot.

Table 30: Placement completions

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|--------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Health and science | 56 | 28% | 144 | 72% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Placement outcomes

According to the learner survey data, learners perceived their placements to deliver skills relevant to courses, future careers and subject areas to a great extent. Placements led to increased motivation to do well at college as well as improved confidence. Soft skills such as communication and interpersonal skills and professional attitudes were developed as were employability skills such as team working, working independently, time management, problem solving, working under pressure and commercial awareness. Knowledge was gained of the world of work in relevant industries. The case studies below show examples of the types of learning acquired during the placements.

Science placements at a world class university lab

The national brokerage organisation engaged a university science laboratory, who agreed to provide placements for 2 learners from 2 different providers. Previously the employer had supervised placements for Nuffield scholarship learners, a highly competitive scheme for high achievers, often from public schools. The employer was motivated to take part in the pilot to provide opportunities to less advantaged young people.

The learners started their placements in January. The placements required careful planning to match tasks to learners' time and capabilities. While there was insufficient time to allow a focus on an end-to-end project, the employer planned the learners' time around the types of techniques they could try. There were plenty of opportunities to repeat techniques and thereby hone the learning. He was confident that by the end of the placement, the learners would be productive.

The placement was run on the mixed model: a 2-week opening block followed by 2-day release, which worked well. The block was essential for the immersive induction experience to ensure learners were comfortable in the work environment and understood their duties and responsibilities. The block also enabled them to be involved in experiments across a few days. Balancing that, 2 days a week worked well as it meant that staff had 3 days each week when they did not have to supervise the learners and focus on their own work.

The employer was surprised that the learners required more supervision than he originally hoped, and delegated their supervision to PhD and Post-Doc researchers who reported that accommodating the training needs of placement learners required a significant amount of time.

However, the employer reported that the learners were enthusiastic, and that they grew in confidence and broadened their knowledge, gradually learning and understanding their tasks. Their colleagues appreciated their friendliness and the fact that the 2 learners worked together well despite being from different providers.

While this employer would offer placements in future (and more in number) he would opt for a 2-year cycle (1 year on, 1 year off) to ensure staff have sufficient time to develop and advance their own research. In future, he would seek to involve other research groups in his department and rotate the learners around these. He concluded that the placements required the organisation to be generous with its time, but were sufficiently rewarding for this to be worthwhile.

Pharmacy placements were more mixed – some learners became side-lined into retail aspects of the businesses because the safety and insurance implications of their involvement in technical tasks such as dispensing were viewed as insurmountable. Some pharmacies were able to allow learners to dispense under supervision. A pharmacy in a hospital setting, described below, appeared to provide a more varied experience to learners, compared with community pharmacies.

The perspective of a pharmacy employer

A clinical pharmacist leads a pharmacy department within an NHS trust in London. The department is made up of 90 staff at various skill levels, from assistants who start once they completed their A-levels to university-qualified pharmacists.

The employer's motivation to be involved in the pilot was to offer the learner an insight into the various roles available within pharmacy, as the previous focus during work experience has tended to be on pharmacists and not the associated roles. For instance, technician and assistant jobs are also available, as are entry-level jobs for A-level completers who can work towards another qualification at work.

The employer was pleased with the brokerage approach: the provider supplied lots of information on what was expected of the placement, as well as what the employer should expect from the learner. The provider visited the department more than once, which the employer said contributed to their satisfaction of the brokerage.

Offering the placement was resource-intensive for the employer: it was not possible to allow the learner to hone scientific-related technical skills independently in the placement, due to confidentiality issues and the highly skilled nature of the work, so it was necessary for staff members to observe all work carried out by the learner. However, the learner did get to see how scientific knowledge is applied in the workplace, and was supported by a mentor who was an experienced technician. Having a junior member of staff who could answer the learner's questions helped the learner to settle in and develop in line with their aspirations. Throughout the placement the learner demonstrated that they were a fast learner and keen to learn.

The employer is willing to take on other industry placement learners in the future and wants to encourage other departments in their Trust to do so.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively challenging to source in this route in part due to the large size of health employers – which made it difficult to reach the right employer contact, and in part due to the expectation for graduate level skills. Nonetheless, this route also showed good levels of placement completion. Employers engaged well and sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used.

The key challenge surrounded sourcing and providers aimed in future to provide employers with better information about course content and the level of technical skills they could expect of FE learners. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.

Legal, Finance and Accounting

Key points

- A tradition of placements for higher education students in this route – particularly in the legal pathway – as well as concerns about data security, made it challenging to source for. With little experience to draw on, a culture-shift will be required by employers to work with learners at this level.
- Larger non-specialist employers with ‘in-house’ legal, finance and accounting departments may provide additional future sourcing opportunities. Small legal, financial and accounting employers may require additional support to help identify suitable placement activities.
- Employers may be responsive to messages about identifying future recruits and developing a skills pipeline as reasons to offer placements. Messages about contributing to young people’s labour market opportunities and to raising aspirations to enter the industry may also be motivating.
- The diverse types of employer in this route meant that brokers needed to adapt placement models flexibly to meet individual employers’ needs and circumstances. Some employers and providers responded positively to the mixed model they experienced during the pilot, others found it more difficult to accommodate. Small employers found it difficult to generate enough work over an extended period.
- Opportunities for technical skills development were hampered by data security constraints, but there were indications of positive outcomes in relation to improved behavioural and communication skills.
- Going forward, improved learner preparation and matching, a marketing campaign to help build employers’ support for industry placements and summaries of course content could help employers to understand the relevance of FE skills and increase their engagement with industry placements.

Introduction

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme is a response to government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. The new T Level programmes will help learners enrolled on full-time college-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, in part through new 45-60 day structured industry placements embedded in their programme of study. In 2017, working with a contractor, the Department for Education (DfE) led a consultation to develop a set of ‘design dimensions’

for the pilot organisations to test, and subsequently commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- Model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release.
- Preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation.
- Monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The 21 providers were able to select the model that they wished to test, although they were allocated either to the national support pilot group or the local solutions pilot group – with the former group receiving support with sourcing, project management and/or learner preparation from a nationally-appointed support organisation. As providers were able to select the model they would test, not all models were tested in all routes and pathways.

The evaluation was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The key aims were to: assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and provide evidence on implementation, highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out from 2020.

In addition to the evaluation synthesis report, which brings together the full programme of research, a report for each of the technical routes has been developed. The aim of these latter reports is to provide insights into the specific experiences of delivering placements within relevant industries. As such, within these routes reports there is a focus on sharing lessons and effective practice that emerged during the pilot phase. This will help providers involved in introducing placements in these routes in future to gain the benefits of the insights arising from the pilot phase of operation.

This report covers the Legal, Finance and Accounting route, which includes 3 occupational pathways – legal, finance and accounting³².

Coverage of the pilot and research in this route

In total, 3 pilot providers offered placements for this route and between them offered placements in 5 courses. All 3 providers offered the legal pathway with 2 providers also offering an additional pathway in either accounting or finance. The models they operated in the courses they put forward for the pilot are shown in Table 1 below. As the table

³² Routes and pathways are under review by the Department and there may be some changes prior to the launch of T Levels

below shows, all providers offered a mixed model. A spring block followed by 2-day a week release was the most common model to be tested in this route.

Table 31: Models offered in pilot

| Model | Variations and number of courses involved |
|-------|--|
| Mixed | Spring block and 2-day release (4) Autumn block and 1-day release (1) |

Source: Pilot MI

The evaluation was undertaken for the most part using qualitative methods: multi-wave case studies with all 21 providers, and interviews with young people, employers, project managers and brokers in the national support organisation, as well as analysis of a small number of learning logs that students completed as part of their placement. Alongside this, all learners were invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of their placement. Finally, pilot management and financial information was analysed. The data focused on for this route report were as follows:

- 3 wave case studies with 3 providers.
- Interviews with 4 employers engaged with 1 of the providers.
- 12 learner survey responses covering 5 providers – as the number of learners responding to the survey is relatively small, the data are used qualitatively.
- Relevant extracts from the longitudinal interviews with staff in the national support organisation.

The research being largely qualitative in approach has some implications. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights into practice, however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of findings. Moreover, the scale of research work in each of the routes has varied according to early decisions on which models and pathways would be tested in which providers, differing volumes of placements being delivered and variable learner and employer willingness to take part. For this reason, findings are informative rather than definitive on the experiences within each of the routes.

Planned and achieved industry placements

Providers involved in this route had recruited 106 learners to relevant courses. In practice, they were able to place 31 of these learners. The table below shows the learners in scope (i.e. on the selected courses) and the number placed compared to the pilot total.

Table 32: Learners in scope and numbers placed

| | N. learners on courses | N. learners starting placements | Learners on course starting placements |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Legal, finance and accounting | 106 | 31 | 29% |
| Pilot total | 2,628 | 1,551 | 59% |

Source: Pilot MI

Sourcing placements

Across the pilot, industries where there is a tradition of undertaking some form of work experience as part of careers entry routes were typically viewed as easier to source placements in. This was generally not the case with legal, finance and accounting employers, and brokers and providers encountered several structural and attitudinal barriers to their sourcing efforts.

Legal employers in particular had expectations of young people's skills that appeared to reduce their enthusiasm to embark on a placement. The small number of providers offering the legal pathway reported that, while employers in this route had previously offered work experience in a 2-week block, it was a struggle to engage them with the concept of hosting a learner for 40+ days: *'we're finding that employers in law are quite difficult to obtain and it doesn't take a lot to frighten them off'*. For example, if they had a negative experience with a learner on work experience in the past, they were reluctant to take part in the pilot.

According to providers, legal employers also perceived that Level 2 and 3 learners were not yet at the appropriate level of competency to contribute to their business. Instead, law firms wanted learners with high grades and previous experience, and typically preferred graduates. As a result, the placements market for legal learners was, brokers believed, saturated by graduates and was hard to break into for the pilot. Even where employers were willing to offer placements to Level 3 learners, there was reported to be a preference for learners with at least 5 GCSE grades A* - C, meaning some pilot learners were not able to participate because they were still retaking these qualifications. Other concerns that legal employers raised were the legal implications of hiring someone for a long period without pay and the travel costs.

Finance and accounting employers did not highlight the above issues to the same degree, and were sometimes able to draw on prior experience of working with 16 to 19 year olds. A provider within the accounting pathway had several years' experience of offering an accounting course with an industry placement element. They noted that

placements were easily sourced through existing contacts; curriculum leads indicated the task would be far harder without those pre-established relationships.

Employers in all pathways had concerns about allowing learners access to confidential materials because of data protection issues. Clear solutions had not arisen to these challenges by the final round of research but providers were taking forward their learning into the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF). Some were hoping that, by providing clarifications on the types of skills technical learners had and the types of work they were able to perform, they would find the means of identifying more appropriate placement opportunities. Linked to this concern, national brokerage staff noted that employers often needed to allow extra staff resource in order to check and proofread learners' written work.

Providers discussed how the industry pathways were quite varied in terms of their employer composition (range and size) with implications for the ease of sourcing placements. Where placements had been successfully sourced, providers considered that larger firms provide a better experience than small local firms. In larger firms there is a greater availability of work at a suitable level than smaller firms where learners on placement have lacked appropriate tasks to work on and resources to provide support are limited. However, in larger firms, there were often numerous stakeholders to persuade of the benefits of offering placements, which should be considered when planning employer sourcing and engagement strategies, as in the case study below.

A placement champion within a large firm

A placement coordinator at a large law firm explained that even though she herself was persuaded of the benefits of taking on learners, '*she fought quite hard*' to convince colleagues in HR and other departments and to overcome their concerns about data security and offering an unpaid placement to young people. This indicates there may be merit in considering what support key contacts might benefit from to help them be effective champions of placements within their organisations.

Lessons for future sourcing

Following their pilot experiences, providers sourcing placements for this route were considering widening their horizons and approaching larger non-specialist employers with 'in-house' legal, finance and accounting departments; this was influenced by the lessons shared by the national brokerage organisation which had already tested this approach during the pilot.

Providers believed that employers (particularly in the legal pathway) perceived lack of knowledge of the 16-19 phase meant that the T Levels will require a sizeable marketing

campaign to help build employers' support for industry placements. Employers and providers also agreed that a summary of course content would be helpful in up-selling FE level skills to employers.

Making the match

While the employers did not appear more likely than others to require a selection process, it appeared from the learner survey findings that they and providers had agreed it was important to have pre-placement opportunities to engage with learners. Learners responding to the survey had a higher propensity than average to report developing a CV, attending an interview with their employer and agreeing their own start dates. Nevertheless, several employers reported at interview that a more rigorous matching process would have been desirable.

Messages on involving employers

Several employers hoped that, in the future, these longer term placements would address skills gaps in their industry or help areas of the business with high staff turnover. For example, a manager in a large legal firm pointed out the scarcity of good candidates for paralegal positions. Small employers were also motivated by gaining extra staffing resource. Some employers also hoped that providing placements would boost their industry's professional reputation amongst prospective future staff.

Many employers also had altruistic reasons for taking part, wishing to make a positive contribution to their industry or to society by giving a young person an opportunity. Some employers emphasised that their motivation to help the learner was congruent with their wider organisational ethos. For instance, a legal firm thought the pilot chimed well with its own meritocratic approach.

Provider, employer and learner responses to the models

Unlike some other routes, legal, finance and accounting employers were only offered the mixed model in the pilot. As with other routes, providers and brokers noted the need to flex this model to satisfy the needs of employers – and to meet providers' timetabling requirements.

For example, a provider reported that different employers had requested different approaches; with this in mind they had adapted the intended spring block with 2-day release model in various ways.

Sometimes providers themselves found versions of the mixed model easier or more difficult. For example, a provider who offered a spring block with 2-day release model

found it difficult to accommodate, since it entailed delaying mock exams, which in turn made it hard to meet other curriculum requirements. Providers recognised that starting either blocks or day release at the beginning of the autumn term was likely to be challenging due to relatively high numbers of learners withdrawing from courses compared to other times during the academic year.

Employer responses to the spring block with 2-day release model varied. For the large legal employer in the case study below, the placements were a natural step-up from the short work experience they had previously offered, and this mixed model worked well.

An employer's progression from work experience to placement

An international legal firm with a tradition of offering short (1 to 2-week) work experience to 16-18 year olds took on 3 learners from its local college. The learners were doing a course awarded by the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives, which the employer recognised as '*a very appropriate course for us*'. For this employer, the industry placements were a '*natural progression*' from the previous, shorter placements offered. The placement coordinator was keen to participate as she considers placements to be an effective way to identify future employees.

The spring block and 2-day release model has been easy for the employer to accommodate. During the block component of the placement, learners receive an induction, are trained on key systems and helped to settle in. The subsequent 2-day release generally works well, and the employer considers that having 2 consecutive days offers continuity. The employer also feels that the overall length of the placement allows exposure to a wider range of tasks and time for skills to develop. Although learners cannot be granted full access to systems, which limits the extent of technical work they can undertake, the employer reported benefits for learners and the employer. For learners, these are primarily in relation to improved workplace behaviours and attitudes, and for employers, in relation to identifying new recruits.

A provider of a Level 3 legal secretarial course was critical of the mixed model. About half the learners undertook a placement, which was fewer than when a shorter 2-week placement model was used. Providers commented on the challenges these learners faced in combining the block and day release model with employment. With 5 days of course-related work, learners either had to give up their paid work or needed to work 7 days a week to be able to participate and avoid loss of income.

Another example of an employer that found the mixed model challenging was a micro legal firm with 2 employees which concluded that a shorter single block placement would

have been more appropriate as there was not enough work for the learner to do over an extended period of time.

In a few instances, providers found that the pilot experience damaged previously positive relationships with employers who were frustrated with the required model and length of placement. However, in the case of the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) courses, providers reported these were easier to accommodate using the spring block with 2-day release model. This was due to the flexible, modular design of the course, which meant the curriculum could easily be organised around block placements.

Learner preparation

Providers generally did not undertake any route-specific preparation with learners. Where learner preparation activities were undertaken, these focused on developing learners' understanding of the behaviour and attendance expected at work.

Employers that provided legal, finance and accounting placements had mixed views about learner readiness for the placement. Some expressed satisfaction with the preparation learners had received, but others indicated that providers could have done more to prepare and support learners to have better workplaces attitudes and behaviours.

Learners who took part in the survey felt prepared, although to a slightly lesser extent than the average across the pilot. What had prepared them most was information from friends and family; however, other factors noted included preparation activities led by providers, their course content, and information from employers.

Placement experiences and content

At a broad level, provider staff considered the placement experience was useful and beneficial for learners. Common activities that learners undertook included: processing expenses, opening new files, photocopying, archiving, printing, scanning, booking meetings and venues, creating letters, typing, customer services, proof reading, using MS Office, legal documents filing, answering the phone and photocopying. These tasks, although not technical in nature, were considered by providers and employers to offer a good introduction to the workplace and helped to develop behavioural skills.

Learners in the survey indicated that they had limited opportunities to tailor placement activities to their interests, but even so they had enjoyed the activities they completed. These learners saw the relevance of the placement to their courses, future careers and subject fields. As such, placements served to increase motivation to do well at college, and learners' confidence. Soft skill gains included interpersonal skills and positive attitudes towards employment, while employability skills gains included improvements to

team working, independent working, time management, knowledge of the world of work, problem solving, and working under pressure as well as commercial awareness.

Placement completions

The management information indicated relatively high levels of placement non-completion in this route.

Table 33: Placement completion

| | Non-completions | Non-completions as a proportion of starts | Placement completions | Completions as a proportion of starts |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Legal, finance and accounting | 14 | 45% | 17 | 55% |
| Total | 372 | 24% | 1,186 | 76% |

Source: Pilot MI

Providers agreed with this and reported that this tended to be due to the quality of the placement. There were examples of learners being expected to undertake tasks entirely unrelated to their courses (such as tidying and cleaning the office) who were left feeling dissatisfied. Providers also mentioned that financial disadvantage and the often unpaid nature of placements and/or transport issues were factors contributing to placements not being sustained. There were also examples of placements ending early because there was not enough work for learners to do or due to poor learner attendance.

Learners from this route in the survey seemed more likely to identify improvements that could be made to placements. Their ideas centred on changing the attendance model, increasing preparation and improving the activities that they could complete.

Challenges and solutions for technical skills development

Consequently, there were concerns among providers that technical skills were not being adequately developed in this route. It was reported that larger employers such as regional, national or international law firms were able to provide a higher quality experience than smaller businesses, which typically had fewer resources to support a high calibre placement. A potential solution that one provider mentioned was providing employers with more information about course requirements to help secure a wider range of technical experiences during the placement.

Some suggested solutions to improving industry placements in this route were offered by one legal employer with experience in offering work experience. She suggested that

employers could visit their local provider to teach the legal learners a 2-day course about being ready for an office environment, because from her experience the pilot learner was not sufficiently mature or ready to enter the workplace. The employer also recommended making the matching process more rigorous, to include a thorough interview. She thought that the provider could send the employer an overview of the character of the learner they were sending, to help facilitate a better match and ensure she could set appropriate tasks.

Concluding thoughts

Placements were relatively challenging to source in this route as graduate entry is far more common. The route also showed a relatively weak rate of completion. Where they could be engaged employers sought to provide a range of experiences in order that learners gained insights into the industry as well as how technical skills are used.

The key challenge surrounded finding suitable opportunities for learners. Providers planned to diversify sourcing to include larger non-specialist employers with 'in-house' legal, finance and accounting departments. They also planned to intensify learner preparation as well as to increase their focus on achieving a good match. The lessons they learned will be taken forward into the CDF years and full roll-out of the T Level programmes.



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