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T-level thematic review: final report

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Applies to England

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Background

T levels are 2-year post-GCSE (level 3) qualifications that combine theoretical learning with an industry placement of more than 315 hours. The TLTP is a level 2 one-year, 16-to-19 study programme that provides a route to T levels.

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out a thematic review following the launch of T levels and TLTPs in September 2020, to assess the early implementation of the new qualifications.

Executive summary

There remains considerable work to do to improve the quality and effectiveness of T-level courses and the TLTP, to make sure that they fulfil their potential and can be offered at scale.

T levels and the TLTP have been implemented with varying degrees of success. In the best providers, they have been adopted after extensive engagement with employers and as part of a well-considered curriculum planning process. Often, though, providers have introduced T levels and the TLTP because they are expecting that other, similar courses will not be eligible for public funding in the future, as proposed in the DfE's consultations on qualification reform.

Students' experiences on T-level courses and on the TLTP vary considerably. At their best, T levels provide an opportunity to combine high-quality study of theory with excellent development of practical skills. At worst, courses are not at all what students expected, and many students reported being misled and ill informed about their content and structure.

Initial assessment of students' abilities at the start of their T-level courses and on the TLTP is weak in most providers. Teachers do not assess effectively enough what students know or can do in relation to their chosen pathway. They do not identify gaps in students' knowledge and understanding precisely enough to inform curricular planning and make sure that students make secure progress. Where initial assessment is more comprehensive, teachers do not always use the information to plan and sequence the curriculum.

The physical resources used to support the teaching of T-level courses and the TLTP are good in most providers. Providers have used capital funding appropriately to invest in high-quality, up-to-date resources. Teaching resources, including specimen assessment and examination materials, are not of such good quality. The very limited resources available from awarding organisations to support the teaching and assessment of T levels are underdeveloped. Providers do not collaborate to share resources and best practice.

The practical aspects of courses are generally taught well. However, vocational teachers often struggle to teach theoretical content in sufficient depth or to set work that is appropriately challenging. The theoretical content of T-level courses is often more complex and demanding than that of similar courses. Many providers have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff who have the required experience and expertise.

Teachers expressed concern about the high volume of content in T-level courses. They are particularly concerned about the assessment requirements and the length of the industry placement, both of which limit the available teaching time. On some T-level courses, teachers and students are concerned about the amount of assessment and the appropriateness of assessment methods. On the health and science T level, the quantity and complexity of the science content make it particularly hard to teach everything in the time available.

Most students who remain on a T-level course achieve the qualification successfully. Around two thirds of respondents to our 2022 questionnaire told us that they felt well prepared for their next steps. However, many leave before the end of the course, and the number of students who progress to the second year of T-level courses is low in many providers. In at least one provider, no students progressed from the first year of the T-level course to the second year.

Students who complete T-level courses generally move on to employment, apprenticeships or higher-level study, including degree courses. In some cases, students who wanted to go to university are surprised and disappointed that T-level qualifications are not always accepted as a valid entry qualification.

The quality of industry placements varies considerably across individual providers and on different T-level courses. Finding suitable placements is a barrier to increasing the number of T-level places available in many providers. The number of suitable placements is often limited in any given area because of the specific employment sector where the placement is required and the length of time students are required to attend.

Often employers are poorly informed about the content and structure of T levels. In these cases, activities that students complete on industry placements are not well aligned with the T-level course content. In some instances, industry placements are not appropriate for the pathway that students are on. However, the best industry placements do provide a very beneficial opportunity for students to develop relevant knowledge and skills.

Staff in providers are concerned that the T-level 'brand' is not well known. They are concerned that parents and school staff do not understand T-level qualifications. They are also worried that the brand's reputation has been damaged by problems with T-level examinations in 2022 and delays in rolling out new T levels in craft and design, media, broadcast and production, hairdressing, barbering, hospitality and catering.

TLTP curriculums have generally improved since our first visits. The best TLTPs include a relevant technical or vocational qualification and a range of activities, including work placements, that prepare students to move on to an appropriate T-level pathway. On the most effective TLTPs, students benefit from valuable work-experience opportunities that are tailored to their development needs and the learning aims of their programmes. Such placements enhance the TLTP curriculum and are a positive and popular aspect of courses.

However, the least effective TLTPs are not fit for purpose. They do not include work experience and do not prepare students to move on to a T-level course. In cases where students are on work-experience placements, these are not sufficiently tailored, and students do not benefit from activities as much as they should. For some students, the TLTP results in no meaningful outcome after a year on the programme. Across all providers, few students on the TLTP move on to a T-level course.

Introduction

T levels and the TLTP were developed following publication of the Post-16 Skills

Plan and launched in 2020.

T levels are intended to be broadly equivalent in scale and workload to 3 A levels. Courses have been developed with employers and providers to make sure that the content meets industry needs and to prepare students for skilled employment, an apprenticeship or further/higher education in a related technical subject.

T-level routes have been introduced in waves. These are:

- wave 1 (2020/21):
  - education and early years
  - construction and the built environment
  - digital
- wave 2 (2021/22):
  - health and science
- wave 3 (2022/23):
  - business and administration
  - engineering and manufacturing
  - legal, finance and accounting

The TLTP is being phased in alongside the relevant T-level routes in each year and was first introduced in wave 1. It was developed to support students who are not yet ready to start a T-level course. The TLTP is not required to lead to a qualification, but some providers choose to include qualifications. In addition to studying technical content related to the T-level route, students are taught English, mathematics and digital skills. The programme also includes work experience, study skills and personal development activities. In September 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) published national technical content for the programme. Providers can teach this through existing qualifications and/or through approaches that are not based on qualifications.

In October 2022, we published an interim report (‘A review of the quality of T-level courses: interim report’). This presented high-level findings from visits to T-level and TLTP providers in the 2021/22 academic year. We did not carry out any thematic visits during 2020/21, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This summary report concludes the thematic review and includes findings from 2021/22 and from further visits in 2022/23. It also presents examples of good practice.

Methodology

Our review focused on T-level courses in construction, digital, education, and health and science, along with the TLTP.

In the spring term of 2021/22, inspectors carried out thematic visits to a sample of 24 providers of T-level courses and visits to 8 providers teaching the TLTP. In spring 2023, inspectors returned to providers for a second visit. We also carried out first visits to 10 providers that had started teaching the TLTP from September 2022.

Visits involved professional discussions with providers' staff, employers and students. Inspectors visited lessons and reviewed students' work. The visits were not inspections, and the provision was not graded.

Each year, we sent a questionnaire to providers and students to ask them about their experiences of the programmes.

The number of responses we received from those teaching or studying on the construction, digital, education, or health and science T levels were as follows:

- in 2020/21, 175 staff and 686 students [footnote 1]
- in 2021/22, 175 staff and 494 students [footnote 2]
- in 2022/23, 192 staff and 671 students [footnote 3]

The number of responses we received from those teaching or studying on the TLTP were:

- in 2020/21, 86 staff and 144 students
- in 2021/22, 39 staff and 31 students
- in 2022/23, 27 staff and 75 students

Main findings

Advice and guidance about T-level and TLTP courses

There is a clear link between high-quality information, advice and guidance and the proportion of students who remain on their courses. Students who had attended a

programme of guidance events that allowed them to talk to staff and experience ‘taster’ sessions had a thorough understanding of the course structure and content. They knew what would be expected of them on the course. These students were more likely to remain on their course.

Good practice example

Students on a digital T level were given comprehensive guidance before their course started. Most had completed a summer school in preparation for the course. This acted as a taster for them and a way of determining their suitability for the course. It ensured that students were on the right qualification and specialism to meet their needs. Students enjoyed the experience. It enabled them to develop relationships with their peers and teachers before their formal enrolment. Consequently, most students remained on their course, and attendance rates were high.

Information, advice and guidance are not as comprehensive in all providers. Leaders in many further education settings are concerned about parents’ and staff’s lack of understanding of T-level qualifications in some schools. They told us that school teachers do not know enough about T levels to inform pupils about the courses as a qualification option after GCSEs. Not enough staff in schools understand that T levels are a route to higher education as well as to an apprenticeship or to employment.

We found students on T-level courses who had not been told what to expect and were not well prepared for their qualification. Some believed that they were misled about the components and learning activities in the T-level course and had expected to complete more practical activity than was included in the course.

Many students on the health and science T level were surprised at the complexity of the science content and the academic nature of the course. Many students told inspectors that they had not been well advised about or adequately prepared for the demands of the course. Several students told us that other similar courses they had intended to enrol on were discontinued at short notice, and the T level was the only option available to them. One student told us, ‘They wouldn’t run the BTEC course, which is what I applied for, and I was put into T levels. I wasn’t even given any warning.’

Most providers set the entry criteria for T levels as 5 GCSEs at grade 4 or above. These entry requirements, similar to those set for A levels, resulted in very few

students being required to re-sit either English or mathematics GCSEs. In 2022, a few providers had raised the entry requirements for T-level courses to include a grade 5 in English or mathematics. These higher entry requirements resulted in fewer students being enrolled on T levels. The smaller group sizes limited the occupational specialisms providers could offer.

Almost all providers visited had recruited well on TLTPs. Many students were enrolled on TLTPs by default because of their GCSE results. In a few providers, the TLTP was the only course at level 2 on which students could enrol. In many cases, students who were enrolled on a TLTP did not necessarily want to move on to a T level and did not understand what a T level was. The TLTP did not meet their needs, and they were not studying the subject they intended.

Staff in providers were concerned that the T-level 'brand' was not well known. They were also worried that problems with examinations in 2022 and the delay in rolling out new T levels, originally due in September 2023, had damaged the brand's reputation. Some students on TLTPs were intending to move on to these new T-level courses but are now unable to do so.

Initial assessment

Initial assessment of students' abilities at the start of their T-level courses and on the TLTP is weak in most providers. Often teachers do not assess what students already know or can do in relation to the specific T-level pathway or TLTP on which they have enrolled.

Gaps in students' knowledge and skills are not comprehensively identified at the beginning of their courses. For example, many students on the digital T level have not been assessed to identify their level of knowledge or skill in using technology applications. As a result, some students are not able to contribute effectively on their industry placements, and employers are disappointed with the students' skill level.

Even in providers where initial assessment is more effective, too often staff do not use the results of testing to help them plan and sequence the curriculum. For example, they do not use the results of initial assessments in English and mathematics to identify gaps in students' knowledge and understanding so that teachers can focus on those specific topics.

In the few providers where initial assessment is highly effective, teachers fully assess students' existing knowledge and skills in relation to the T-level or TLTP content. They use this information to plan a curriculum that fills any gaps in

knowledge and helps students to develop the required skills.

Good practice example

On a TLTP in construction, teachers analysed students' starting points. This showed that many had arrived without the information technology (IT) skills they needed. As a result, IT was added to the curriculum for all students so that they could learn how to use spreadsheets, word processing software and computer-aided design packages. These students were well prepared for work experience and could relate the tasks they completed at work to the technical content of the TLTP. These students were also well prepared to move on to a T-level course.

Implementing T levels and the TLTP

Many providers have worked closely with employers and other stakeholders to introduce T levels and the TLTP to their course offer.

Providers offering the digital T level often work closely with employers to design their curriculum content. This ensures that much-needed skills in business, programming, networking and security are developed as part of their curriculum.

Providers of the health and science T level told inspectors about the shortage of nurses in their local area, and how the T-level pathway was being introduced to provide a route to this profession for interested students. However, leaders expressed concerns about other workforce shortages in this sector, especially in social care and social work, where the existing T level does not help interested students to develop the skills they need.

On construction courses, providers have worked with stakeholders to understand the likely employment needs of the sector in the future. Almost all providers in the sample have worked with large construction companies to secure industry placements.

Good practice example

On the construction T level, several providers secured high-quality industry

placements before recruiting students. These providers made sure that the placement would provide the necessary opportunities for students. Providers also worked closely with the employers and workplace supervisors to understand their future skills needs and involved them in recruitment to T-level courses, as well as in their curriculum design and teaching.

On the education pathway, leaders told us of shortages of early years practitioners in the local area, and the need to provide well-qualified young people to work in the sector or move into teaching. Many providers that were offering this T level commented that the course has significant similarities to qualifications that they have offered previously.

Many providers are introducing T levels and the TLTP because they are expecting that other, similar courses will not be eligible for public funding in the future, as proposed in the DfE's consultations on qualification reform.

Curriculum design and content

On most T-level courses, curriculum planning and sequencing are limited by a rigid focus on teaching towards learning outcomes. Teachers lack the detailed subject knowledge and confidence to plan a more bespoke curriculum, with better sequencing of topics to develop students' knowledge and skills in a more logical and contextualised way. Teachers told us that the high volume of content in T levels limits their ability to adapt and contextualise the curriculum.

Employers are generally not well informed about the content of T-level courses. Many providers plan to set up advisory boards with employers or have recently done so. However, these are yet to have any widespread impact on T-level curriculums. In the few instances where these arrangements have been established for longer, the curriculums are designed and sequenced more effectively to contextualise learning and make sure that students develop the knowledge and skills they need to make progress.

Good practice examples

Staff from a hospital ran a skills week on key topics that students needed to know in order to work in a hospital. These included risk assessments,

infection control, understanding tissue viability and how to calibrate equipment.

In a few cases, employers in the digital sector had influenced curriculum content. They helped with teaching to make sure that students learned about topics such as user experience, chat boxes and client relationship management systems.

In another provider, employers routinely contributed to designing the curriculum and teaching across the construction courses. A useful employer group had been set up, members of which met frequently to discuss and challenge the provider's staff about what they teach. Employers acted as guest speakers in areas such as surveying. Students benefited from these strong relationships with employers.

Respondents to our staff questionnaire recognised the importance of involving employers in T-level courses. At least half the respondents agreed with the statement 'We could work more closely with employers to develop a curriculum which is relevant, current and ambitious.'

The curriculums of TLTPs have generally improved since our first visits. Many providers that did not offer a qualification as part of the TLTP previously now do so. Examples of these qualifications include a level-2 award in digital and IT skills, a level-2 award in childcare and a level-2 award in construction and the built environment.

Good practice examples

In one provider where no students had moved on to a health and science T level from a TLTP course, staff worked with students on the T-level course to identify any subject areas where they struggled to understand and make progress. This helped staff revise the TLTP course to better prepare students for the T-level course. Leaders of T levels worked closely with

curriculum leads for the TLTP to incorporate and sequence the teaching of key subjects such as public health, anatomy and physiology.

In another provider, the health TLTP curriculum had been thoughtfully designed and adapted. Staff on T-level courses had identified skills that students needed in order to make progress and achieve. Teachers made sure that these were included in the TLTP curriculum. They devised projects that developed students' research skills, team-working skills and data analysis skills, to prepare them for the rigour of T-level courses.

In most providers, teachers on TLTP courses successfully combined supporting students to gain qualifications with teaching them the technical content. However, in a small number of providers, planning and teaching the chosen qualification had negatively affected the structure of the TLTP. This was because teachers struggled to combine the requirements of the qualification with the technical outcome requirements.

Industry placements and work experience

Most T-level students enjoy their industry placements and gain valuable insights into what it is really like to work in the sectors they are studying. In the best placements, students gain new knowledge and skills that benefit their learning and development. They grow in confidence and develop essential skills for work, such as team-working, problem-solving and communication skills.

Good practice examples

In one particularly effective construction provider, employers were involved in interviewing all students before they enrolled on the T level. This ensured that students had a placement from the outset with an employer who could meet their needs and support their construction career aspirations.

> In a health setting, an NHS trust had created a useful guide for staff in the hospital so that they were aware of what they could expect students to do at various points during their placement.

Providers were able to source placements for the education T level by using settings that had previously taken vocational students on other courses. However, leaders and managers were finding it more difficult to secure placements on other T-level courses. They told us that this was a significant barrier to increasing student numbers. In 2021/22, this was associated with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has continued to be a concern, even after the pandemic.

Providers of the digital T level had trouble setting up placements that included web design, programming and coding. In addition, many employers in this sector operate remote working arrangements, which are a further barrier to finding suitable placements.

On health courses, there was often competition for placements from other providers, including universities. Leaders told us that they continued to prioritise the development of relationships with employers to make sure that there were enough placements for students.

In many cases, students experienced delays in starting their placements. A few students had to arrange their own placements and were having limited success at the time of the inspectors' visits. In health placements, a few employers only provided limited activities for students to complete. Students described spending a lot of time 'standing about and watching'.

A few students told us that they lacked confidence that the activities on their placements would enable them to develop the knowledge and skills required by their course. For example, students who completed placements in care homes did not have the opportunity to experience clinical settings. There was a marked difference between the quality of various health and science placements offered around the country. In construction, some placements involved considerable travel, and students did not have the means to get to them.

Work experience for students on the TLTP was often poor. Many providers did not give TLTP students the same priority as T-level students when finding placements. Too often, students on the TLTP had to arrange their own work experience, and

many were unsuccessful or did not even try. Students on education TLTPs were much more likely to complete work experience than students on other TLTPs.

On the best work experience placements, students are set clear objectives and participate in tasks that help them meet their objectives. The progress they make is reviewed frequently. However, more typically, supervisors in work experience providers are often not clear about what students are expected to achieve or gain from the placement.

Teachers' experience, training and recruitment

Most teachers are experienced in their vocational subjects, and many have completed teacher training qualifications. Most have participated in external training to support the teaching of T-level courses. Teachers who are subject experts and have industry experience link the theoretical content of courses to real-life experience and examples very effectively.

Managers help staff to find appropriate training. For example, some providers work with university partnerships to help develop teachers' specialist subject knowledge. Many teachers on the digital T level benefit from training to make sure that they have up-to-date knowledge of programming languages, networking and project management.

In construction, teachers attend training on topics such as modern surveying methods and air source technologies. In health and science, teachers benefit from training in topics such as phlebotomy and tube feeding. In education, many teachers gain experience in nurseries.

In a minority of providers, staff were teaching in subjects in which they were not vocational experts. Where this was the case, plans were usually in place for the teacher to do industry shadowing much later in the year. However, this did not benefit students in the current year.

Many providers still struggle to recruit and retain appropriately qualified and experienced staff. It is relatively easy to recruit and retain teachers with early years education experience for the education T level. It is more difficult to recruit and retain staff to teach on construction and digital qualifications.

Teaching quality

Teachers use their vocational experience and expertise well to teach the practical aspects of T-level courses and the TLTP. Almost all respondents to our staff questionnaire agreed that teachers had strong subject knowledge in the courses they were teaching. Students value lessons in which they learn new knowledge that teachers make directly relevant to the workplace.

Good practice example

On a health TLTP, teachers taught students to support people with dementia to take part in fun and engaging conversations and a variety of activities, including arts and crafts, board games and quizzes, at the college 'memory café'. Teachers used their expertise to make learning directly applicable to workplace scenarios. Employers praised students for bringing new ideas to the workplace when they completed a placement.

The quality of teaching of the theoretical content varies considerably across T-level courses and TLTPs. Experienced vocational teachers still struggle to teach some T-level content in sufficient depth. In a few cases, the tasks they set for students are too simple. Teachers do not always have the required level of technical expertise or are not as experienced at teaching theoretical content. Providers do not collaborate to share resources and best practice, especially in relation to teaching the theoretical aspects of courses.

Teachers generally give students helpful and constructive feedback on their work. They use a range of effective methods to help students improve their work when they make errors, or when the work is not of a high enough standard. However, in some providers, on both the T level and the TLTP, teachers' feedback is unhelpful and includes generic or vague instructions on what the student needs to do to improve. Across all courses, at least half the students who responded to our questionnaires agreed with the statement 'I would like to receive better feedback to help me to improve my work.'

On the TLTP, teaching in some providers does not help students to develop the skills they need to achieve the required technical outcomes of the course. Where this is the case, teachers rely too much on simple activities such as students making posters or leaflets. They do not focus enough on teaching content that students commit to their long-term memory and that prepares them for higher-level study.

The most effective teaching on TLTPs develops students' English and mathematics, and the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will enable them to learn and make progress. Teaching was least effective in providers that had recruited new teachers with little or no teaching experience or where teachers did not have the required technical experience and expertise in the subject they were being asked to teach.

In a few providers where staff absence or turnover are very high, teaching is much weaker, and the sequence of topics disjointed. Students on these courses make slow progress and are demotivated. On a few courses with low student numbers, classes for first- and second-year students are grouped together. In these cases, often, teaching is ineffective and students, particularly in their second year, make slow progress.

Students in the second year of their courses often saw an improvement in the quality of teaching they experienced. Teachers have increased in confidence and have a better understanding of what they need to teach and how best to teach the complex knowledge required.

Staff generally support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Teachers and learning support staff provide a learning environment that is inclusive and allows students with SEND or an education, health and care (EHC) plan to make progress in line with their peers.

The proportion of students with SEND or an EHC plan was much higher on TLTPs than on T-level courses. Students are supported to make progress in gaining the vocational knowledge and skills required to achieve the technical outcomes of the TLTP and for any qualification included. However, staff do not always provide effective support to make sure that students develop the behaviours required for a work placement and to move on to a T level.

Assessment

Assessment and examinations continue to be a cause for concern for many T-level students. In some cases, students are confused about the way they are assessed and how grading works. Some students are given incorrect information about the nature of the external assessment on courses.

In some providers, teachers use too narrow a range of assessment methods to adequately prepare students for completing assignments, tests or examinations. On these courses, students do not sufficiently understand the progress they are making and are not confident to complete projects set by their employer or sit examinations.

This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case on health and science T-level courses.

Students and teachers are concerned about the amount of external assessment on T-level courses. This can have a significant impact on the teaching of the curriculum, particularly if students must re-sit tests. It can result in the administration of assessment driving curriculum planning and limiting teaching time.

Students' experience of T-level examinations is poor, particularly in health and science. For example, examinations contained topics that had not been included in the specification and, hence, had not been taught. Students also struggled because the examinations included types of questions that had not been in the specimen papers or previous examinations and were therefore unfamiliar to them.

Students and teachers feel let down by awarding organisations because the availability and quality of specimen examination questions are extremely limited. Students' comments about examinations in response to questionnaires were overwhelmingly negative. One student told us, 'The original set of exams took all of our joy out of everything and really shook our faith in the course.' Another said that examinations 'left teachers and students distressed and full of anxiety about this year's exams. We lost about half of our learners after the summer exams.' A senior manager said, 'The mistakes made by the exam board were a detriment to our progression of students. Students lost faith in the T levels, and it's been difficult to promote the T level because of the national press surrounding this.'

A range of actions have been taken to address concerns about the examinations in 2022, but the 2023 visits were carried out before the examination season.

Resources

Most providers have high-quality physical resources to support T levels and the TLTP. They have used capital funding effectively to invest in industry-standard resources. In our questionnaire, almost all respondents told us they had access to the tools, equipment and resources they needed.

In construction, for example, students have access to industry-relevant software, technical equipment and tools. In the best examples, these are the same as those that they use with employers on industry placements.

Students on digital T-level courses benefit from access to high-quality information technology equipment. In a few providers, students have their own network so they

can complete relevant tasks that they could not carry out if they were connected to the college or school network.

In health and science, most providers have set up simulated wards or clinical assessment rooms. However, in some cases students have little opportunity to use these because teachers do not know how to use them or because there is not enough teaching time available.

On the education T-level, providers have created early years and primary school classrooms. A few providers have also created sensory rooms. Teachers use these resources well to help students to practise applying the theories of cognitive and social development.

On TLTPs, students often study in well-resourced practical classrooms, workshops and studios, which enable them to practise the skills they need to be successful. For example, at one provider, health and science students were able to practise clinical skills in a mock 6-bed ward; others accessed a realistic operating theatre set up.

Other resources to support the teaching and assessment of T levels and the TLTP were more limited. Teachers said that paper-based or written teaching resources were difficult to find. Many had to spend significant amounts of time looking for or developing resources to use. Teachers believed strongly that awarding organisations could and should provide more help with resources to support the teaching of T-level courses.

Destinations of students at the end of their programmes

Most T-level students who remained on their course for the 2 years achieved their qualifications. However, at many providers, the numbers of students on the second year of T-level courses are much lower than the numbers on the first year. At a few providers, no students moved on to the second year because of their poor experience in the first year.

Many students who completed T-level courses have moved on to university to study a degree of their choice. However, some students were unable to go to their preferred university because it did not accept T levels as a valid entry qualification. One student on a health and science T level said, ‘I was planning on going to university or doing a degree-level apprenticeship; however, after applying to some universities, discovering they do not like the combination of courses I have taken and

therefore will not accept me was a bit of a setback.'

Another student on the second year of a digital T level told us, 'I was initially planning to go to university and was told by my college that it should be no issue going to university after doing the T level. But of all the universities I applied for, I only got one offer, with the reasons for rejection being that I went with the T level and not traditional A levels.'

A few students on construction and digital T-level courses went on to an apprenticeship with their industry placement employer.

In our 2022/23 annual questionnaire, we asked second-year students how well prepared they felt for their next steps. Around two thirds of all students who responded told us they felt well prepared. Students on education T-level courses were the most positive, and students on digital T-level courses the least positive. Less than half the students on digital T-level courses who responded felt well prepared for their next steps.

In most providers, the number of students moving from a TLTP to a T-level course is low. In some providers, no TLTP students moved on from their course to a T level. In our 2022/23 questionnaire, only 20% of students who were on a TLTP responded that they intended to move on to a T level. Although just over half the TLTP students told us they felt prepared for their next steps, 1 in 5 did not. Less than half the students thought that their work experience had prepared them well.

Recommendations

The DfE should:

- substantially raise public awareness and understanding of T levels
- promote T levels to employers and employer representative bodies to encourage them to provide more high-quality placements
- make sure that the volume and complexity of content in T-level courses are appropriate for the level of qualification
- make sure that the amount and methods of assessment are appropriate and comparable to those of similar qualifications at the same level
- make sure that awarding organisations provide better resources to support the teaching and assessment of T levels

- carefully consider the implications and impact of the planned withdrawal of funding for other similar courses to ensure that students are not disadvantaged
- encourage all universities to accept T levels as a valid entry qualification and state whether a particular T level is required as the entry requirement for a specific course
- clarify the purpose of the TLTP and make sure that these courses help prepare students for their next steps, including for T levels

Providers should:

- work more closely and collaboratively with employers to make sure that industry placements and work experience opportunities are better tailored to the learning and development aims of courses
- make sure that students receive accurate information about T-level courses and the TLTP so they can make informed choices before they enrol
- make sure that teachers are trained in the most effective methods for teaching the theoretical content of T levels
- assess students' starting points and use this information to support them in developing the knowledge and skills they need to move on to their next steps
- set the curriculum and teaching to match students' starting points
- make sure that students on the TLTP benefit from high-quality work experience that is appropriate for the learning aims of their course
- collaborate with other providers to share resources and best practice to further improve the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum, teaching and assessment of T-level courses and the TLTP

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1. Staff could manage or teach across multiple programmes. Of the 686 students, 116 were on a construction programme, 244 were on digital, and 326 were on education. Health and science was not yet available in 2020/21. ↩
2. Of the 494 students, 68 were on a construction programme, 114 were on digital, 141 were on education and 171 were on health and science. ↩

3. Of the 671 students, 144 were on a construction programme, 175 were on digital, 205 were on education and 147 were on health and science. ↩

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