

UNLOCKING TALENT: ENSURING T LEVELS DELIVER THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

FOREWORD

Across the UK, we have significant and long-standing skills gaps in a number of key sectors, with wide-ranging implications for the workforce, the economy and society as a whole.

One of the places that we see this impact most clearly is in engineering and manufacturing. A lack of required skills and accessible training can impact young people leaving education, local businesses and communities, and also the wider state of the economy as we compete in a global market. In a whole range of areas, from sustainability practices, to viable food production, to construction and home building, we simply don't have the skills we need to empower our workforce and meet the needs of British industry.

Across the UK, we have significant and long-standing skills gaps in a number of key sectors, with wide ranging implications for the workforce, the economy, and society as a whole. One of the places that we see this impact most clearly is in engineering and manufacturing. A lack of required skills and accessible training can impact young people leaving education; local businesses and communities; and also the wider state of the economy as we compete in a global market. In a whole range of areas, from sustainability practices, to viable food production, to construction and home building, we simply don't have the skills we need to empower our workforce and meet the needs of British industry.

As it stands, the UK is in desperate need of more technically skilled young people entering the workforce – and this isn't being provided by the traditional education and skills pathways. The pipeline to engineering and manufacturing careers is lacking, not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of diversity. We need to make these pathways as accessible as possible to young people of all backgrounds, to ensure that we are meeting the future skills needs of UK businesses.

Since their launch in 2020, T Levels have been a key pillar of the education and skills offering for post-16 learners, providing an innovative, industry-supported approach to skills training in a growing range of subject areas – including engineering and manufacturing. T Levels have involved and consulted employers from the very beginning, from the development of the qualifications to their delivery through local colleges and providers. Unlike previous qualifications, students also complete a significant industry placement, with on-the-job training in their field of study. When done right, this allows young T Level students to eventually be sent out into the job market armed with the skills that employers are searching for, with practical experience and having already built relationships with employers in their communities.

It is now two years since the first T Level students entered the classroom, and this summer, the first cohort received their qualifications. Much has been learned in this time, and it is excellent to see a comprehensive report such as this one outlining the successes of the first two years of delivery, as well as what we can learn for the future.

It is clear that, particularly for engineering and manufacturing, industry placements are key to ensuring that T Levels are a success. This requires good partnerships between employers and providers. From government to providers, all stakeholders involved in T Level delivery must continue working with the engineering industry to prioritise making industry placements viable, accessible and appealing. T Levels represent a transformative opportunity for technical education in the UK, and a comprehensive industry placement is key to that opportunity.

I welcome this report and its recommendations, and I hope that T Levels continue to provide students across the country with the best possible technical education, so that they can seize the wealth of opportunities available in the engineering and manufacturing sectors.

Christian Wakeford

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for T Levels

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The introduction of engineering and manufacturing T Levels from September 2022 marks one of the most significant changes for a generation to the technical qualifications available for young people entering the sector. The industry placement is a crucial aspect of the new qualification, and it is vital that industry, government and providers work together to ensure that there are sufficient placements available with employers in the engineering and manufacturing route for learners to succeed.

Employers of all sizes and across all regions of England, encompassing the broad range of engineering and manufacturing businesses, have given us their views on T Levels, explaining how they see the qualification, and the challenges and opportunities involved. Further education colleges – the main providers of T Levels – have also given us their views, highlighting how issues such as staffing and employer relationships could impact their ability to help learners find placements.

The first chapter of the report sets out the development of T Levels over recent years, explaining the context in which the policy has been designed and rolled out, and what the new qualification is intended to achieve. It sets out the scale of placements needed – as many as 43,500 by 2024/2025 – and what the government has implemented to date to assist employers. This includes: a £1,000 financial incentive for employers for each placement (ended summer 2022); flexibilities such as allowing a part of an industry placement to take place in a simulated environment or sharing the placement between two employers; an 'accelerated apprenticeship' option for progression into level 3 apprenticeships; funding for providers; and information, advice and guidance for employers.

The second chapter illustrates the opportunities for employers from engaging with T Levels, and the potential barriers they face to offering industry placements to learners. Engineering and manufacturing businesses across the country are keen to bring in the next generation of talent, and many see T Levels as a chance to develop a pipeline of future engineers and engage young people in industry for the first time as they enter the workplace. While awareness of T Levels among employers in the sector remains mixed, there is an openness to taking on industry placements. Enhancing employers' understanding of T Levels and what is expected of a business taking on an industry placement will therefore be a critical part of improving uptake.

While employers highlighted the opportunities that T Levels may bring to their business and the wider engineering and manufacturing sector, there also remain barriers to greater uptake and employers' ability to offer industry placements. When considering whether they would be able to offer industry placements, financial and resource barriers – not least the internal capacity to supervise T Level students in the workplace – are among those most frequently identified by employers. In addition, employers highlighted concerns around accessibility of placements in some areas of the country owing to transport constraints, and the safety and legal status of young learners in safety-critical industries. Although similar issues were raised by both large and small to medium-sized employers, the report explores how concerns differ dependent on the size of the company with the view to better target recommendations.

Employers want to know that through their involvement in T Levels, they can provide a meaningful placement for a young person and that there is a pathway to progression for that person into further training or employment. Lingering uncertainty over where T Levels sit in the landscape of technical qualifications and the options for moving into further training or skilled employment is another barrier to be overcome.

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There is more to be done to give a greater number of employers in manufacturing and engineering the confidence to offer industry placements. Our recommendations reflect the barriers and opportunities we explore throughout the report, and touch on the role of both government and industry in meeting the demand for placements over the coming years.

1. We ask government to urgently reinstate the £1,000 financial incentive per industry placement for small and medium-sized employers.
2. We ask that the Department for Education extend the number of hours that a placement can take place in a simulated work environment such as a training centre or skills hub.
3. We ask the Department for Education to explore how to replicate/expand the digital apprenticeship service to cover T Level placements.
4. We ask that the Department for Education work with business and sector groups to run a large-scale T Level awareness campaign targeted at employers.
5. We ask that the Department for Education work with the Department for Transport, the Department for Levelling Up and local authorities to address the transport barriers for young people highlighted in this report.
6. We ask that the Department for Education work with relevant partners in the engineering and manufacturing sector to make the most of existing T Level resources by tailoring them for engineering and manufacturing employers.
7. We ask the Department for Education and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to develop clear progression maps for both T Level students and employers.
8. We ask government to establish a T Level industry placement taskforce.
9. We ask that opportunities across government to promote T Level placements are used effectively.

INTRODUCTION

The UK has long-standing skills gaps in engineering and manufacturing. To compound the challenge, employers in these sectors struggle to attract underrepresented groups, leading to a lack of diversity within the workforce. This has serious implications for the UK economy and for society. From net zero to home building, sustainable food to health technology, the UK simply does not have the number or diversity of young people it needs coming through the education and skills pipeline into engineering and manufacturing careers.

Across UK manufacturing, more than one-third of vacancies are considered hard to fill, and research suggests that more than one-quarter of employers are not confident that they will have the skills they need in their business in the next 10 years.¹

Much has been written about how to solve these skills shortages, with many highlighting the important role that technical qualifications can play in solving the skills puzzle, particularly in STEM pathways. For many young people, taking a technical qualification is just the stepping stone they need, opening up new learning and career opportunities and helping them on a path to a good quality, secure job in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths).

Launched in 2020, T Levels are one of the central pillars of the government's education and skills offer to young people aged 16-18, alongside apprenticeships and A Levels. The T Level industry placement component offers a chance for young people to experience the workforce first hand, develop vital new skills and build a relationship with employers in their chosen field. However, there has been some concern that young people will struggle to access industry placements as part of their T Levels in the engineering and manufacturing sectors as challenges remain for employers and providers to offer and secure these placements.

In response to this, Make UK, EngineeringUK and the Association of Colleges have come together to get a better understanding of the awareness of T Levels amongst engineering and manufacturing employers, and the opportunities they can represent, as well as their capacity to deliver more of them going forward. We explore concerns around health and safety, student travel and engagement between employers and colleges, and make recommendations as to how these challenges could, and should, be addressed.

With the rollout of the engineering and manufacturing T Level from September 2022 and demand on industry placements rising over the coming years, it is vital that government works with education providers and employers now and into the future to resolve any outstanding issues regarding industry placements. Not doing so will not only jeopardise the educational and training options for many young people but it will also mean greater skills shortages in the future, at a time when we need a skilled workforce more than ever.

¹Make UK. '2030 Skills member survey', June 2022

METHODOLOGY

This report has been informed by the findings of a survey with employers as well as insights from a series of focus groups and one-to-one interviews conducted with employers and further education providers² throughout June and July 2022.

Online survey – The survey results referred to in this report are based on Make UK’s ‘2030 Skills’ survey, which received 145 responses³ and was in the field from 18 May to 24 June 2022. The survey was open to Make UK members across the UK⁴ and directed to HR Directors. The T Level section of the survey was also circulated to EngineeringUK’s corporate members. The survey asked a series of questions examining awareness and perceptions relating to T Levels and industry placements.

Larger employer focus groups⁵ – Survey respondents were also given the option of participating in focus groups to discuss the issues raised in the survey. This was facilitated via two online employer focus groups in July 2022. Representatives from eight manufacturing and engineering employers took part in total.

Small to medium-sized employer interviews⁶ – Three HR Managers or Managing Directors of businesses with fewer than 250 employees were interviewed in August 2022 with the intention of gaining their perspective on T Levels for their businesses and the sub-sectors of engineering and manufacturing in which they operate.

Education providers focus groups – In July 2022, 10 education providers took part in two focus groups to share their experience of T Level industry placements to date and capture any opportunities and barriers they perceive in the delivery of manufacturing and engineering T Levels going forward.

Themes arising from these focus groups and the survey were used to inform this report and policy recommendations (see pages 23-24 for more details). We have also included quotes from the focus groups and survey where relevant.

LIMITATIONS

Our survey findings reflect how employers in our sample responded and cannot be taken to be representative of all manufacturing and engineering employers across the country.

We were unable to draw statistically significant conclusions from the regional breakdown of the survey data as sample sizes were insufficient. However, we were able to draw out some broad observations from the focus groups and interviews concerning the geographical spread of industry placements, including for example some of the differences observed between urban and rural settings.

Employers taking part in our focus groups are more likely to be aware of and engaged in T Levels than the overall employer population concerned. Those employers invited to take part in focus groups were those who indicated in their survey response that they were happy to be contacted. Even then, some employers declined on the basis that their knowledge of T Levels was very limited or their organisation had no plans to offer T Level industry placements.

²Note: By ‘providers’ we mean further education institutions or organisations providing learning for T Level students. This includes colleges, sixth forms, specialist colleges and other providers.

³This includes the responses received from EngineeringUK corporate members.

⁴Note: out of a total of 145 survey responses, 12 were outside England.

⁵Large employers are defined as companies with more than 250 employees.

⁶Small to medium-sized employers are defined as companies with fewer than 250 employees.

THE T LEVEL STORY SO FAR

TIMELINE



THE SAINSBURY REVIEW (2016)

The policy origins of T Levels can be traced back to April 2016 when Lord Sainsbury set out proposals to overhaul the system of technical education for students aged 16 to 19. This was a defining moment for the skills landscape we see today and laid foundations for the introduction of T Levels. In setting out the case for reform, the [Sainsbury review report](#)⁷ stated that the UK's economy was being held back by a "long-term productivity problem" and that years of undertraining had led to "a chronic shortage of people with technician-level skills".



THE POST-16 SKILLS PLAN (2016)

The [Post-16 Skills Plan \(2016\)](#)⁸ formed the government's response to the Sainsbury Review. In this response the then Minister for Skills, Nick Boles, set out his vision for "building a dynamic, high-quality technical option, which is grounded in engagement with employers, fits soundly with the rest of the system and is responsive to the changing needs of the economy". The plan set out to streamline the skills system by addressing the problem of the "confusing" landscape of too many qualifications available to young people and creating a clearer line of sight between the qualification and chosen career.



FIRST 3 T LEVELS START (2020)

In September 2020, the government launched the first three T level subjects: design, surveying and planning for construction; digital production, design and development; and education and childcare. This marked an important milestone with the first students starting T Level courses despite the challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.



SKILLS FOR JOBS WHITE PAPER (2021)

In January 2021, the government published the long-awaited Skills White Paper – [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#).⁹ T Levels are mentioned throughout and the paper states that T Levels "will be the option of choice for the majority of 16- to 19-year-olds who want to progress into skilled employment or onto higher levels of technical education". The paper has a strong emphasis on developing an employer-led skills system. It highlights that around 300 employers were involved in setting content for T Levels, and "thousands more will be offering industry placements to young people". This White Paper formed the basis of the new [Skills and Post-16 Education Act](#), which received Royal Assent in April 2022.

⁷Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education', April 2016

⁸BEIS and DfE. 'Post-16 Skills Plan', July 2016

⁹DfE. 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth', January 2021



PM'S 'SKILLS, SKILLS, SKILLS' SPEECH (2021)

Although the 2019 Conservative manifesto did not include a mention of T Levels, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson underlined their importance in a number of speeches. Most noteworthy perhaps was his 'skills, skills, skills' [speech to party conference](#)¹⁰ in October 2021 where he said the country was moving towards a high wage, high skill, high productivity economy, with investment in 'skills, skills, skills' at the heart of their agenda.



ENGINEERING AND MANUFACTURING T LEVEL ROUTE STARTS (2022)

In September 2022, the new engineering and manufacturing route came online, opening up more T Level subjects for young people to access:

- Design and Development for Engineering and Manufacturing
- Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control
- Maintenance, Installation and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing

WHAT ARE T LEVELS?

T Levels are a two-year, technical qualification at Level 3. They have been designed in collaboration with employers to give young people the skills that industry needs. T Levels include a mixture of technical knowledge and practical skills. Every T Level student must undertake an industry placement of at least 45 days with one or two employer(s). Students completing T Levels are awarded UCAS tariff points in line with three A Levels, supporting progression to higher education in related technical areas if they choose.

T Levels are based on the same standards as apprenticeships and are approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). T Level programmes offer students a choice of 15 routes including finance, digital support services, health and childcare. STEM skills are central to a wide range of T Level routes, including digital design, science, construction and engineering and manufacturing.

T Levels are offered at colleges, sixth forms and other providers across England and they are being introduced gradually over a number of years. The first wave started in 2020 and included digital and construction. T Levels in engineering and manufacturing started in September 2022.

The Department for Education is looking to create a system where A Levels, T Levels and apprenticeships are the three main educational options for young people at age 16 in England. To help achieve this the government is in the process of removing funding for overlapping pathways, including many

BTECs, with proposals to defund some engineering-related courses from autumn 2023.

What are industry placements?

Every T Level includes an industry placement where an employer provides an opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate practical and technical skills required for the relevant occupation. These take a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days) but can last longer.

Employers can offer industry placements as a block, day release or a mix of these, and can discuss sharing part of the placement with one other employer if suitable. Providers are expected to work closely with employers – this includes support with planning and designing the industry placement.

How many industry placements are needed?

The government does not currently have targets for the number of T Level industry placements needed, nor are there any working assumptions published by the DfE about the expected volume of placements.¹¹ However, the government stated in the Spending Review that funding is available for 100,000 students to take up T Level places¹² by 2024/2025.

As we think it is vital to understand the size of the challenge ahead in terms of [industry placements](#), we have tried here to provide an estimate of the number of engineering and

¹⁰Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. 'Keynote Speech – We're getting on with the job', Conservative Party Conference, 6 October 2021

¹¹Written Parliamentary Question. Tabled by Chi Onwurah MP on 13 July 2022, UIN 35939 (T-levels)

¹²HMT, 'Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021', October 2021

manufacturing placements needed to ensure that all young people taking up related T Level courses are able to access the placement they need to fulfil their course requirements.

We estimate there will need to be a minimum of 30,000, and up to 43,500 placements by 2024/2025 in the engineering and manufacturing sector alone, taking into account those likely to be displaced by the proposed defunding of equivalent vocational qualifications. The lower estimate is based on the number of students studying engineering and technology courses in 2021 that appear on the 'Provisional list of qualifications overlapping with T Levels in waves 1 and 2 – funding approval removed from 1 August 2024' (i.e. those that it is proposed will be defunded going forward).

The 43,500 figure is based on the list of T Levels available up to 2024, assuming that there are a similar number of students on each of the 23 courses and the number of 100,000 students, for which there is allocated funding,¹³

is reached. Looking at the distribution of the T Levels so far for which there is data on student numbers available, it seems a reasonable assumption that there will be a similar number of students on each course.

The list of T Level subjects we included in these calculations were:

- Building Services Engineering for Construction
- Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction
- Digital Business Services
- Digital Production, Design and Development
- Digital Support Services
- Onsite Construction
- Design and Development for Engineering and Manufacturing
- Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control
- Maintenance, Installation and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing
- Agriculture, Land Management and Production

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND FLEXIBILITIES TO DATE

To ensure that employers are able to offer industry placements and to help increase the number of employers coming on board, some measures have already been introduced by the government to allow for greater flexibility in the delivery of T Level industry placements.

The government has also invested in college facilities through capital funding.

An overview of government support and flexibilities to date is contained below.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS

£1,000 cash incentive
(closed July 2022)

In May 2021, DfE announced¹⁴ that employers would be able to claim a £1,000 “cash boost” for every T Level student they host between 27 May 2021 and July 2022. In June 2022, the Education Select Committee¹⁵ asked the then FE and HE Minister, Michelle Donelan MP, whether the incentive would be continued. The Minister said in response: “The future of that we will be announcing shortly.” “I can’t say any more at this stage, but it is important that we don’t price employers out of having T Level students.” No further announcements have been made at this stage.

FLEXIBILITIES

Industry placements
can be shared across
two employers

Having initially planned for industry placements to be completed with just one employer, learners now have the option to complete the 45-day placement between up to two employers. The government’s T Level guidance for employers¹⁶ states: “a placement can be split across 2 employers, where this is considered necessary for ‘breadth of content’ and/or is beneficial for students”.

¹³FE Week. ‘There is no T Level recruit target, DfE maintains’, 8 November 2021

¹⁴DfE. Press release ‘Cash boost for T Levels’, 27 May 2021

¹⁵House of Commons Education Select Committee. Accountability hearing. 15 July 2022

¹⁶HMG. ‘T Level Industry Placements Employer Guide’, July 2021

Use of simulated work environments during placements

After initially insisting that the whole time of a placement must be spent in a live site environment of an employer, learners are now able to complete part of their industry placement offsite at a training centre or skills hub (up to 105 hours). ‘Simulated placements’ are a favoured option for a number of employers, with businesses having previously indicated that this would give them greater confidence in having the capacity to take on T Level students and provide the correct supervision.

Student working pattern for industry placement is flexible – either day release or on block

Students can undertake their placements either on a day release basis (e.g. once a week) or in a block format for whole weeks at a time. The format of the placement is agreed between the provider and the employer.¹⁷

Temporary measures on blended placements and hours

In November 2021 DfE announced temporary measures¹⁸ to make placements more workable in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. These included blended placements (a mix of remote and in workplace) and in some circumstances minimum hours which reduced the requirements on placements hours overall. This relates only to the 2020 and 2021 cohort of students. As it stands, the measures come to an end in July 2023.

No longer a requirement for English and Maths GCSE

In a November 2021 speech, the then Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi MP, announced that T Levels will no longer have the exit requirements of English and Maths GCSE. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that some providers still require Maths and/or English GCSE for students taking T Levels.

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Guidance and advice for employers

In March 2022, the then Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Alex Burghart MP, set out the steps that DfE’s employer engagement teams were taking to explain the benefits of T Levels and of hosting industry placements to employers.¹⁹ The package of support and information includes access guidance, workshops and webinars, case studies, tailored advice, and hands-on support to help build employer confidence and capability in delivering industry placements. DfE has also developed a number of different delivery models to ensure placements can be delivered “by employers of different sizes, across all industries and locations”.

T Level Ambassador Network

The T Level Ambassador Network enables employers, including SMEs, to engage with others in their industries on T Levels and placements.²⁰ It hopes to build understanding and engagement in the business community. Its members are advocates for technical education.

¹⁷DfE. ‘Policy Paper – Introduction to T Levels’, Updated July 2022

¹⁸ESFA. ‘Temporary flexibilities for Wave 1 and Wave 2 industry placements’, November 2021

¹⁹Written Parliamentary Question. Tabled by Chi Onwurah MP on 28 February 2022, UIN 131173 (T-levels: Small Businesses)

²⁰DfE. ‘Becoming a T Level ambassador’ webpage. Updated May 2022

Online postcode search function for employers

Employers are able to connect with schools and colleges offering T Levels in their vicinity by entering their postcode into DfE’s online search facility. This also shows T Level subjects being offered in their area and email details for contacting colleges.

Advice and guidance for providers

Advice, guidance and resources are available to providers, including, for example, the T Level Professional Development (TLPD) delivered by the Education and Training Foundation. T Level professional development support such as ‘Industry Insights’ also gives providers the opportunity to engage in industry placements and industry-led workshops.

PROGRESSION INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

Accelerated apprenticeships for T Level graduates

The DfE and IfATE are allowing for ‘accelerated’ apprenticeship options at Level 3 in developing the new progression profiles for the engineering and manufacturing route, meaning that in some cases those holding T levels will be able to complete a Level 3 apprenticeship in a shorter period of time.

DfE has also made recent reforms to apprenticeship funding rules which will facilitate such ‘accelerated’ apprenticeships, reducing the apprenticeship training costs and duration (although keeping in place the minimum of 12 months for an apprenticeship) for employers where the learner has already covered a significant amount of the content of an apprenticeship during a previous qualification (including T Levels).²¹

FUNDING FOR PROVIDERS

Capital funding – facilities and equipment

The government continues to invest in the facilities and equipment needed to deliver T Level learning through the T Levels Capital Fund (TLCF). This funding has been made available in waves. Most recently (July 2022) the government announced²² that more than £74 million has been awarded to colleges to develop 86 T Level projects set to launch in September 2023, with many of those listed delivering engineering and manufacturing T Levels.

Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF)

In the initial rollout of the T Level programme, many providers have benefitted from financial support through the DfE’s Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) designed to help deliver industry placements. Some providers will have used some or all of their CDF allocations to ensure they have staff in place to manage the process of organising placements for T Level students, including engagement with and support for employers considering T Levels for the first time.

²¹ESFA. News Story ‘Making our apprenticeship system simpler for employers, training providers and apprentices’, 27 May 2022

²²DfE. ‘Guidance – T Levels capital fund: wave 4 – successful applications’, 19 July 2022

INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The start of engineering and manufacturing T Level pathways in September 2022 marked the beginning of an important chapter in the T Level story and the opening of new routes into STEM for young people. With this comes the opportunity for tens of thousands of students to benefit from industry placements across the country.

The scale of placements needed has been the backdrop to our research with employers and education providers. We wanted to gain a better understanding of opportunities and challenges involved in developing and delivering T Level industry placements. Through our online survey, focus groups and

interviews we also wanted to explore what steps can be taken to build on the existing measures introduced by the government – thereby helping to enable a rich and diverse supply of engineering and manufacturing placements both now and in the future.

OPPORTUNITIES

Building the talent pipeline

A range of positive aspects to T Level placements were evident as part of our research findings. Engineering and manufacturing employers who had started to offer T Level industry placements were positive about the potential benefits for their business and the opportunity to develop their talent pipeline for the future.

“I can see that from a recruitment perspective, it’s potentially a great way to introduce young people to the industry.”

Small to medium-sized employer

Even those employers who had not yet taken the next step towards offering engineering and manufacturing placements broadly supported the concept of T Level industry placements, despite some concerns about the practical or financial barriers. There was a sense that T Levels provided a significant opportunity to think about recruitment of young people who could develop a career within the firm (or in the

sector more broadly), especially where they may otherwise find it difficult to attract new and young talent into the business. T Levels were also seen by some employers as a useful stepping stone for young people who could then progress within the organisation via other pathways such as apprenticeships or degrees.

Wider benefits – community and sector

Some employers – in particular larger employers – suggested that there might be a broader benefit to the business in terms of local reputation, wider commercial goals, or fulfilling Environmental, Social and Governance Impact (ESG) or social value requirements in tendering for contracts, where they could demonstrate career development opportunities for young people and engagement with the local community, e.g. via local colleges.

“We would consider T Levels as part of our supply chain...commitments on innovation, competition and skills.”

Large engineering employer

Others also indicated that they may consider providing placements for the good of their sector, even if they believed there would be no or little direct benefit to their business from offering the placement. Some suggested that although they may not be able to retain a T Level student if they did not believe there was the right occupational pathway available in their own business, there would however be a benefit for the sector as a whole, helping to bring more talented young people into industry and providing them with experience of the workplace.

“It would be worth it to get young people into the sector, even if there’s no direct benefit to the employer.”

Small to medium-sized employer

Benefits for learners

It was encouraging to see education providers taking part in our research talking enthusiastically about the direct benefits for young people and the learning T Level students had gained so far on industry placements in subjects such as science, construction and digital. The opportunity for young people to experience the workplace and meet with employers through their industry placement was seen as a tangible benefit and something that could boost student employability. Both

providers and employers spoke about the important role an industry placement can play in helping to contextualise the qualification, therefore ensuring students have a better understanding of how their T Level curriculum learning can be applied in the real world of work.

Local collaboration

Education providers taking part in our research were actively engaged in seeking to secure T Level employers partnerships in their local areas. While this had some challenges, which we explore later in this report, it was evident that in reaching out to local businesses to initiate conversations about T Levels, providers were raising awareness about T Levels locally, and several colleges reported opening ‘new doors’ with engineering and manufacturing employers locally as a result. We heard examples of providers hosting open days, taster sessions and working collaboratively across their organisation to help engage with employers.

“We have small firms who are really keen...and the nice thing about large employers is that there are enough people to engage with...it’s about the relationship with the employer.”

FE college T Level lead

CHALLENGES

Our research brought to the fore that only

ONLY ONE IN TEN (9%)

employers in our survey currently hosts

ONE OR MORE STUDENTS

on a T Level placement, and only an additional 12% are planning to in the coming year.

The research has also identified a number of issues that need to be addressed in order for more employers to come on board with industry placements.

There are seven key themes that emerged across both our online survey and our qualitative research with employers and education providers.

These themes are:

- 1) Employer awareness and knowledge of T Levels and industry placements
- 2) Capacity and time constraints
- 3) Financial constraints
- 4) Geographical distance/access to placements
- 5) Safety-critical industries
- 6) Uncertainty about progression routes – understanding T levels in the skills eco-system
- 7) Engagement between employers and providers locally

1. EMPLOYER AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF T LEVELS AND INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS

Our research findings suggest that further action is needed to ensure more employers are aware of T Levels and understand what they entail. For example, while nearly three-quarters (72%) of employers surveyed said that they have heard of T Levels, only 28% of employers surveyed told us that they had both heard of them **and** understand what they involve. 28% also told us that they have not heard of them at all. In previous research carried out in 2019, nearly two-thirds (65%) had not heard of T Levels at all, while 28% had heard of them but were not sure what they involved.²³

In approaching employers to take part in our focus groups, a significant number of particularly small to medium-sized employers declined on the grounds that they did not know enough about T Levels to comment or that their company had decided not to engage with T Levels at this stage in the rollout.

Employer awareness of information and support on offer

In addition to this limited awareness and understanding of T Levels, the survey results show that many measures in the current government support and information package, introduced to support employers to offer T Level industry placements, are not widely used or even heard of. In fact, 52% of respondents had never heard of the financial support available for offering placements. 57% of respondents also said that they had not heard of the tailored advice and hands-on direct support available, with 52% saying the same about webinars, guides and case studies, and 63% about shared placements.

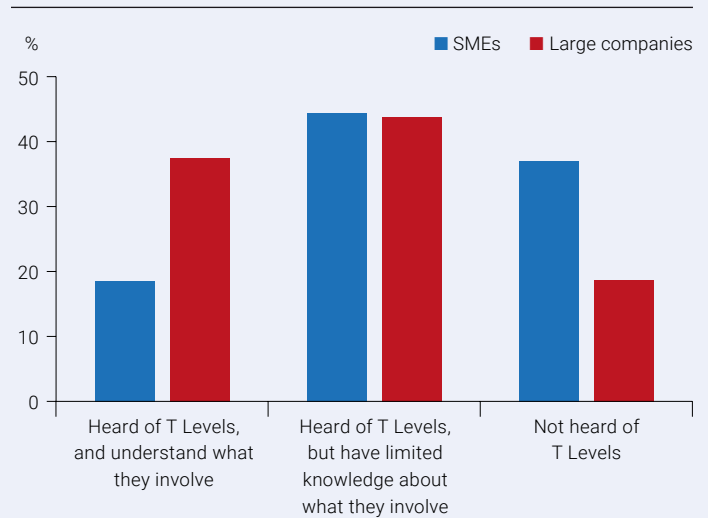
When asked which additional steps could be taken to enable their company to offer T Level industry placements (or more placements) going forward, 26% selected the following option from a list: more practical guides, videos and case studies specific to manufacturing and engineering. These findings suggest that there is real potential to build upon these existing DfE resources, tools and networks, both to expand awareness of T Levels overall and to extend the range of tailored

support and information for engineering and manufacturing employers.

Lack of clarity about expectations

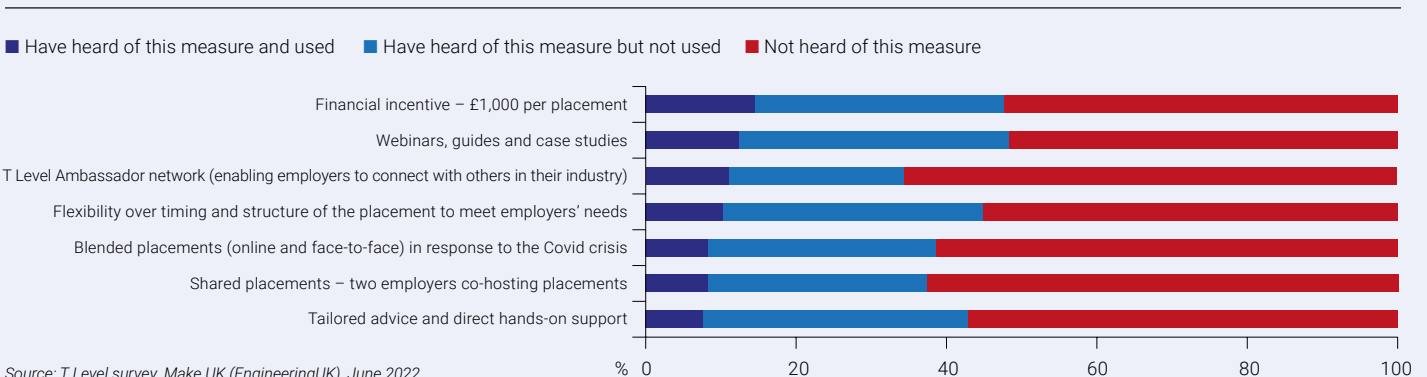
Both the employer and provider focus groups touched on the challenge of making a placement ‘meaningful’, and on doubts over what would have to be achieved by the learner and the employer for the placement to be considered effective and successful. While significant work has been done by the government and assessment providers through the sector trailblazers on the level of technical competence expected to be achieved, some employers remain unclear on what is expected of them. In our survey, almost one-third of employers (32%) said that a lack of knowledge about what was expected was a barrier to them offering any placements or more placements.

Chart 2: Companies’ knowledge and understanding of T levels



Source: T Level survey, Make UK (EngineeringUK), June 2022

Chart 1: Awareness of current government interventions to support take-up of T Levels



Source: T Level survey, Make UK (EngineeringUK), June 2022

²³MAKE UK. ‘T Levels: Make or break for manufacturers?’, April 2019

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMES AND LARGE EMPLOYERS – OBSERVATIONS

Our survey found that awareness of T Levels was lower among SMEs:

- 63% of SMEs have heard of T Levels, but only 19% say they understand what they involve. 37% have not heard of T Levels
- 83% of large employers have heard of T Levels, with 39% understanding what they involve. 17% have not heard of them at all

Similarly, knowledge of support and information on offer to employers to provide T Level placements was lower among SMEs responding to the survey than larger employers:

- 64% of SMEs had not heard of the £1,000 financial support, compared to 38% of larger companies
- 67% of SMEs had not heard of tailored advice and support, compared to 45% of larger companies
- 69% of SMEs had not heard of the possibility of shared placements, compared to 48% of larger employers

The offer of T Level placements to students was also different, with larger employers more likely to be hosting a student(s) or planning to. One in ten (9%) of all businesses taking part in our survey currently hosts one or more students on a T Level placement, and an additional 12% are planning to in the coming year. This falls to 2% and 7% respectively for SMEs. SMEs are also more unsure (16% compared to 6% of large employers), and more likely to not consider it for the future (16% vs. 8%).

2. CAPACITY AND TIME CONSTRAINTS

Employer capacity challenges

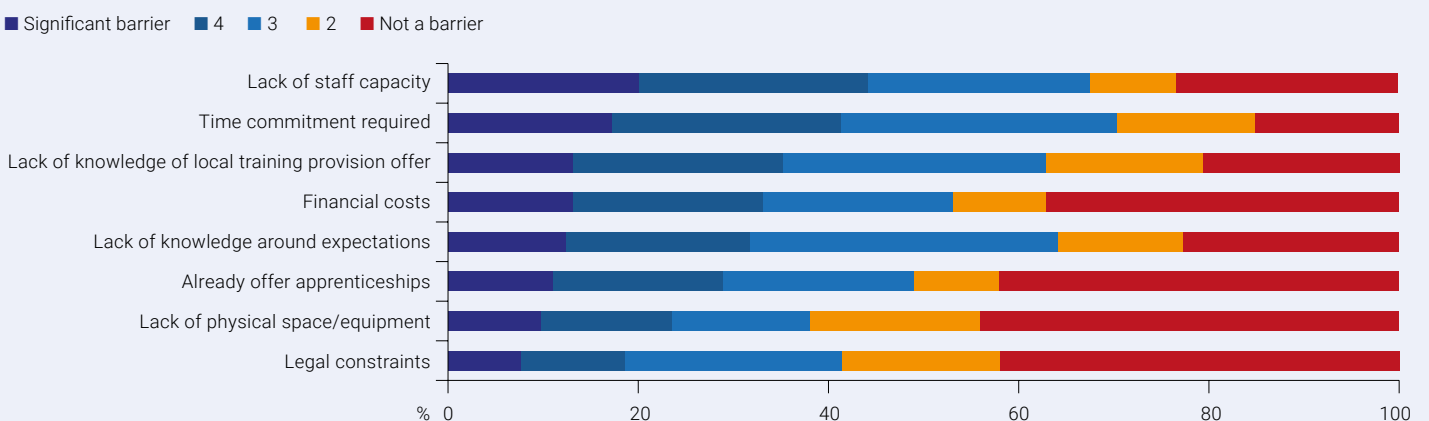
Both our survey and our focus groups identified capacity and time constraints as key barriers for employers in the context of T Level industry placements. Indeed, a lack of staff capacity was cited as the main barrier to delivering T Level industry placements, with 44% of engineering and manufacturing businesses saying so. Time commitments (41%) was found to be the second most significant barrier for employers.

Sector-specific issues

Manufacturing and engineering employers taking part in our focus groups also spoke repeatedly about the

capacity implications of hosting T Level students. In particular, they were keen to emphasise the challenges in supporting a T Level student aged between 16 and 18 with the necessary level of supervision, mentoring and development required within engineering and manufacturing settings. For example, in sectors such as offshore wind and nuclear, references were made to the specific health and safety considerations when supervising under 18s on site. Employers also wanted to underline the differences when considering the safety and safeguarding needs of a 16- or 17-year-old on industry placement when compared to older students such as a 19-year-old employed under contract (for example, as part of an apprenticeship scheme).

Chart 3: Barriers to delivering industry placements



Source: T Level survey, Make UK (EngineeringUK), June 2022

Existing flexibilities around how industry placements can be scheduled and organised are key to ensuring placements can be implemented in a way that works for each employer. For example, this can enable each business to agree an approach with the provider that meets the required placement hours whilst also taking into account the specific capacity demands on the business at different times.

The opportunity for the structure of an industry placement to mirror changes in demand or different shift patterns is a key way in which the policy is intended to allow employers to make the placement work in the best way possible for them.

Balancing T Levels alongside existing training commitments

In our focus groups, employers spoke about their organisation's ongoing commitment to a range of skills pathways, including balancing existing requests to host learners through school work-experience schemes, apprenticeships, traineeships and degree routes. Whilst some employers felt T Levels could slot into this over time, many of the employers we spoke to during our focus groups and interviews cited the challenges involved in persuading a business of the value of investing time and resources in a new and, what they perceived to be, an unfamiliar route.

Three in 10 employers (29%) taking part in our survey told us that the fact they already offered apprenticeships was a barrier to them being able to offer T Level industry placements. For large employers it was more than one-third (34%). This reflects some of the comments made by employers in qualitative research. For example, in our interviews with smaller employers, some highlighted concerns about the potential impact that resourcing a T Level student on placement would have on their investment (both time and money) in existing apprentices. There was a sense from some larger employers too that engagement in T Levels would to some degree risk diverting attention away from apprenticeships and there was not enough capacity to do both effectively. Other employers felt that over time it would be possible to balance the two streams of learners effectively, but again the differences in age group and safety considerations for 16-year-olds when compared to 18-year-old apprentice employed by the company was a consideration.

We did, however, note a real willingness on the part of employers to try to overcome some of the capacity hurdles and support as many young people as they could.

Provider capacity

Non-teaching staff

The need to secure T Level placements clearly has resourcing implications for colleges, sixth forms and other education providers across England, for both teaching staff and other non-teaching teams engaged in employer outreach. This was reflected during our focus group discussions with providers. Those in our provider focus groups were responsible for building relationships with local employers and sourcing T Level industry placements for students.

We observed that while some education providers had teams in place dedicated to securing T Level placements and coordinating ongoing relations with employers, provision appeared to be patchy and many providers were reliant on adding T Level placement outreach to an existing role as an extra responsibility.

Recent research by the Association of Colleges has highlighted the scale of the staffing challenges to providers, reporting the "worst staffing crisis in two decades" in the sector. This includes 1,853 provider vacancies in support areas.²⁴

In the initial rollout of the T Level programme, education providers have been able to access financial support through the DfE's Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) designed to help deliver industry placements. Some providers in our focus groups reported using some or all of their CDF allocations to ensure they have staff in place to manage the process of organising placements for all T Level students.

Teaching staff

The pressures on non-teaching capacity are also set against a backdrop of concern about further education teaching shortages in subjects such engineering and manufacturing. The size and scope of T Levels will mean that there is increasing pressure on the teaching workforce across education providers as the route goes live. For example, some of the individual occupational specialisms within the engineering and manufacturing route require up to 1,360 guided learning hours.²⁵

²⁴Association of Colleges. 'Worst staffing crisis in two decades in England's colleges', 4 March 2022

²⁵City & Guilds. T Level Technical Qualification in Design and Development for Engineering and Manufacturing

The AoC’s work on staffing shortages notes the challenges facing providers in recruiting teaching staff:²⁶

- A total of more than 6,000 vacancies across FE colleges in England
- Engineering, construction, science and maths among the priority subjects with high levels of persistent vacancies
- Additional pressures on existing staff created by long-term vacancies across the workforce

The government included proposals on addressing shortages in the FE teaching workforce in its Skills for Jobs White Paper in 2021, including the creation of a Workforce Industry Exchange Programme to bring people with recent, direct experience of industry into the classroom. Alongside this there is the Taking Teaching Further campaign (run by ETF and funded by the DfE). Evidence shows us, however, that there remains a critical challenge in ensuring there are enough teaching staff to deliver the classroom-based course content that will constitute 80% of the T Level.

Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in this area – as well as frontline teaching staff – will be a crucial part of securing enough placements over the coming months and years.

3. FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Throughout our research, financial constraints were found to be a key barrier for employers when considering T Level industry placements. In addition, we observed during our focus groups that comments on financial issues were often closely aligned to points relating to staff capacity and time, particularly when speaking about supervision. Other financial constraints reported by employers included transport costs for students getting to placements, which we touch on later in this report. Kit, equipment and PPE for students taking part in placements

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMES AND LARGE EMPLOYERS – OBSERVATIONS

While all the potential barriers listed on our survey were selected by small and large businesses alike, we did see some differences in the main concerns:

For SMEs, the top three barriers are the time commitment (48%), a lack of staff capacity (44%), and the financial cost (38%).

For large businesses, the top three barriers are a lack of staff capacity (44%), a lack of knowledge around expectations (34%), and that they already offer apprenticeships (34%).

The largest differences between the barriers experienced by SMEs and large organisations were the time commitment (15%) followed by the financial cost (12%).

was mentioned by some employers taking place in our focus groups, and 10% of employers surveyed responded that “lack of space or equipment” was a significant barrier.

When we asked employers in our survey, “What additional steps could be taken to enable your company to offer T Level industry placements (or more placements)?” the most popular answer was continuing the financial incentive beyond summer 2022, with 57% of employers supporting this statement.

Chart 4: Potential measures to enable better adoption of T Level industry placements



Source: T Level survey, Make UK (EngineeringUK), June 2022

²⁶Association of Colleges. ‘Worst staffing crisis in two decades in England’s colleges’, 4 March 2022

Of all the government initiatives to support take-up of industry placements, the £1,000 financial incentive for employers was also the most recognised, although more

than half of employers surveyed remained unaware of it (see section 1 of this chapter).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMES AND LARGE EMPLOYERS – OBSERVATIONS

Through our survey with employers, we noted that a larger proportion of SMEs compared to larger companies responding to our survey want the £1,000 financial incentive for taking on a T Level student in an industry placement to continue (60% of SMEs vs. 52% of large businesses).

Despite the financial cost of industry placements being one of the top barriers for SMEs:

- Only 7% of SMEs had both heard of the £1,000 incentive and used it
- 28% of SMEs had heard of the measure but not used it
- 64% of SMEs had never heard of the measure

4. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCE/ACCESS TO PLACEMENTS

In both the employer and the provider focus groups participants told us about the challenges involved when students had to travel long distances to attend a placement, or where public transport services were infrequent or unreliable. Many highlighted the fact that engineering and manufacturing sites were often in more rural locations owing to the nature of the work being carried out or the site footprint required. Examples reported included nuclear power plants, offshore wind and large vehicle manufacturing sites where learners may not live near the workplace and/or the provider.

Given the age of T Level learners (16- to 18-year-olds), time and safety considerations were a concern. Many employers and providers highlighted the difficulties in expecting young people to undertake long commutes each day to and from industry placements, with either a difficult and lengthy public transport journey or in some cases no viable public transport route available at all.

“The location of colleges and location of work placement providers is an issue – would young people practically be able to travel to both?”

Small to medium-sized engineering employer

Some employers and providers also spoke to us about the potential impact the geographical barriers could have on social mobility in the context of T Levels. For example, if employers only selected students close to their site(s), then in some cases this would mean not having any students from inner cities taking part. It was felt that this in turn would have an impact on the diversity within those T Level courses. Other participants in focus groups commented on the wider inequality issues posed when only those students with parents able to take them by car are able to take part in placements.

Some employers and providers have chosen to use the government’s financial incentive payments to contribute to T Level students’ travel and subsistence costs to enable them to attend the workplace. In other instances, employers used the government financial incentive to contribute towards the costs of minibus provision for student travel.

For many of the employers we spoke to, simulated placements were seen as part of the solution and one means of ensuring that more students can take part in an industry placement (at either a training centre or a skills hub). Although this is unlikely to remove transport/distance barriers for all young people, it can in some cases enable students to take part in an industry placement closer to home, removing the need to attend on site for their whole placement.

5. SAFETY-CRITICAL INDUSTRIES

A prominent concern in connection to the ability to carry out meaningful tasks as part of a placement is the age of learners in safety-critical industries within engineering, such as nuclear and aerospace. Employer focus groups and interviews highlighted concerns over the feasibility of providing sufficient workplace experience for those under the age of 18 where health and safety rules and/or issues around insurance coverage might prevent this age group from undertaking certain tasks on the shop floor.

19% of employers surveyed indicated that “legal constraints” would be a barrier to taking on placements. Although this may not appear to be a particularly high number, it is worth keeping in mind that a high proportion of employers expressed concern about staff capacity and time constraints. From conversations during the focus groups meetings, we found this to be at least partially linked to safety-critical concerns, with employers keenly aware of the need to provide learners with adequate supervision and mentoring during their time in the workplace.

“Age can be overcome to a degree with us because we take students on work experience... but it does limit the meaningfulness of the tasks because it has to be very low risk.”

Large engineering employer

For some employers, whilst safety-critical issues were a concern, they were nevertheless keen to give young people the opportunity to benefit from industry placements and an introduction to careers in the sector. Some also noted that in many cases it would be possible to involve learners in day-to-day tasks, thus enabling them to get involved and learn, helping them to develop their own experience and understanding.

“We’d also recognise that those learners could be a help and productive, giving a fresh approach – this also happens with apprenticeships. They can be a bit naïve but will ask helpful questions and provide an extra pair of hands.”

Small to medium-sized engineering employer



6. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT PROGRESSION ROUTES – UNDERSTANDING T LEVELS IN THE SKILLS ECO-SYSTEM

Our focus groups found that whilst most manufacturing and engineering employers had heard of T Levels, few were clear about where they sit in the full range of options available for young people, how T Levels could knit together with other qualifications, or what the different progression routes are. Some employers in our research were concerned and not clear about whether a T Level student could follow a seamless path with them from T Level into a Level 3 or Level 4 apprenticeship, for example, including how that would work in practice and what account would be taken of prior learning. We also observed a lack of clarity by some employers about the wider skills system and whether for example UTCs or IoTs could offer T Levels in partnership with other providers and employers. Some employers in our focus groups also talked about the challenges involved in persuading colleagues and senior leaders of the value of offering T Level industry placements because of a lack of confidence in the feasible progression routes post T Level.

**“It’s very difficult to know where it fits in
– what does a T Level offer us that an
apprenticeship wouldn’t?”**

Small to medium-sized engineering employer

In the survey, 39% of respondents said, “clearer integration between T Levels with other routes following completion, such as apprenticeships” could enable them to offer T Level

industry placements/more placements. The work being done by IfATE and DfE on mapping progression is relevant here and a welcome step in helping employers, providers and learners on the engineering and manufacturing route, enabling businesses in the sector to understand clearly how the various T Level course options with engineering and manufacturing skills relate to different qualifications (including apprenticeship standards). Raising awareness about ‘accelerated’ apprenticeship options at Level 3, and the government’s changes to the funding rules for apprenticeships in this context will be important to the success of industry placements going forward. Government should also listen to potential concerns in relation to this and ensure that the process is robust.

A small number of employers in our focus groups also felt some level of uncertainty about whether higher education providers were going to be accepting T Level credits as part of UCAS applications for engineering and manufacturing higher technical qualifications and/or degree courses. Clarity about this and information on the wide range of higher education institutions accepting T Levels for engineering and manufacturing would give both employers and education providers the knowledge and confidence they need about the full range of progression pathways open to students once they complete their T Level.

With the first T Levels recently receiving their results, there is a great opportunity to showcase real examples of pathways by students including further and higher education in subjects such as digital and construction.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LARGER EMPLOYERS AND SMES – OBSERVATIONS

We asked employers, “What additional steps could be taken to enable your company to offer T Level industry placements (or more placements) going forward?”

- 45% of large employers selected the answer “clearer integration between T Levels with other routes following completion, such as apprenticeships”. 35% of SMEs selected this response.

7. ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND PROVIDERS LOCALLY

Engagement between employers and providers locally is an important part of the success of T Level industry placements because without close working, industry placements simply will not get off the ground. While the process of linking up between providers and employers on T Levels brought benefits, it also had its challenges, and this was evident across all our focus groups. Below is an overview of the kinds of issues facing both employers and

providers in their efforts to connect and work collaboratively on industry placements:

- Difficulties pinning down the right person to speak to within both the employer organisation and the provider body
- Some employers feeling somewhat “bombarded” with requests to offer placements, from different providers in their area

- Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, including who does what on project design, student interviews, risk assessment, pastoral care and project appraisal
- Competition for industry placements (i.e. several providers pursuing the same employers in an area)
- Challenges with employers agreeing to placements but then dropping out at the last minute
- Engaging with the sheer volume of placements needed, particularly in areas with a limited number of employers in engineering and manufacturing sectors

Making connections

Education providers spoke during focus groups about the importance of establishing the right relationships with employers early on, not only to ensure a good understanding of expectations in relation to a potential placement, but also more broadly to act as a clear point of contact for employers. Whilst many providers in our focus groups had long-established links with STEM employers in their area and historic collaborations owing to existing apprenticeship schemes, some did not and were establishing contacts from scratch, using very limited resources. The differences were quite stark within the focus groups, with some larger providers having teams dedicated to employer engagement and ongoing coordination for industry placements, and others relying more on goodwill from one or two staff within their wider curriculum teams.

Need for more effective ‘match-making’ support

The reality presented by several providers effectively competing to secure industry placements at once was illustrated by some of the employers in our focus groups. They spoke about not wanting to go with the first provider that reached out to them but also not having the time or information to navigate the further education system locally. 35% of employers in our survey also said that a lack of knowledge of local training provision offer was a barrier to them being able to offer industry placements/more placements. Other employers also revealed that they felt at times put off or somewhat overwhelmed by the volume of approaches they had received from providers and wondered if there was a more effective way to ‘match-make’ locally. In our employer survey, “Having a named manufacturing

“There could be an opportunity to connect schools and employers directly, creating a pool that we can then tap into.”

FE college

and engineering lead in my local area” was employers’ second most popular measure (behind financial incentive), with more than half (52%) selecting this option. Within this context, there could be an enhanced role for local agencies and forums such as Local Skills Panels, Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and Combined Authorities, working together with the T Level Ambassador network in helping to join the dots, thereby enabling stronger links between engineering and manufacturing employers and providers offering T Levels in their area.

Working collaboratively to develop industry placements

As touched on earlier, nearly one-third of employers (32%) in our survey said that a lack of knowledge around expectations (in relation to T Level industry placements) was a barrier to them offering placements/more placements. We noted through our qualitative research too a general lack of understanding among employers about who is responsible for what in terms of setting up the placement and what would be expected of the employer versus the provider. This included a lack of clarity about who led on developing the student placement project content and measurement of outcomes of the placement, as well as wider aspects such as safeguarding issues, student transport and ongoing pastoral care.

Employers reported cases of not being adequately involved in the ‘employer-set’ project within the industry placement. Others had concerns that assessment (including the decision on whether the student passed their industry placement project) was determined by the education provider, despite the employer being closest to the placement and therefore better equipped to assess the performance of the T Level student during their placement activity in the workplace.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMES AND LARGE EMPLOYERS – OBSERVATIONS

- Lack of knowledge of local training provision offer was a barrier for 33% of large employers. For SMEs the figure was higher at 37%
- Lack of knowledge around expectations was as a barrier for 34% of large employers and 30% of SMEs

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

With much of the government's skills agenda as well as the future of young people and the health of businesses hinging on the success of T Levels, we would like to see the government rise to the challenge of making a success of T Levels and their industry placements.

Without a sustained supply of good quality engineering, technology and manufacturing industry placements we risk narrowing pathways and possibly collapsing the supply of young people coming into engineering, technology and manufacturing at a time when we need them most.

The scale of the challenge and the sheer volume of placements needed requires urgent action. For engineering and manufacturing T Levels to be a success, tens of thousands of additional employers – large and small – need to hear more about them, come on board and realise their benefits, both for young people in their local communities and as a means of addressing ongoing skills gaps in the sector.

The good news is that some of the building blocks of employer support and guidance are in place, and we welcome the steps already taken by the Department for Education.

However, our research suggests that the existing package should go further, particularly in developing tailored resources that reflect the unique needs and working practices within the engineering and manufacturing sector.

Make UK and EngineeringUK, as well as the wider sector, look forward to working with government to help implement these recommendations and to raising awareness and improving knowledge of T Levels, and the role and importance of industry placements in this qualification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>1</p>	<p>We ask government to urgently reinstate the £1,000 financial incentive per industry placement for small to medium-sized employers.</p>	<p>Staff capacity and time commitment were the main barriers for all sizes of businesses responding to our survey to deliver T Level industry placements.</p> <p>Although only 7% of SME employers reported using the financial incentive (offered until July 2022), it is important to remember that only 36% had heard of the financial incentive being offered. Continuing the incentive was selected by 60% of SMEs as the top step government could take to enable businesses to offer placements and help address capacity and time commitment issues.</p> <p>We therefore ask that government reinstate the £1,000 financial incentive for SMEs and continue the conversation about financial support and how to best address internal capacity issues with businesses of all sizes. For larger companies, we would suggest, for example, looking at whether there are ways to use unspent levy funds to support T Level placements.²⁷</p> <p>We also ask that any financial support put in place is widely advertised and easily accessible, particularly for SMEs.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>We ask that the Department for Education extend the number of hours that a placement can take place in a simulated work environment such as a training centre or skills hub.</p>	<p>Focus groups highlighted a number of engineering sectors, such as the energy sector, where simulated industry placements were seen as providing a more meaningful experience to the young person than an onsite placement owing to the safety-critical nature of the work.</p> <p>Industry placements are intended to reflect the real world of work, but there should be scope for up to half of an industry placement to be completed in a training centre where there is significant concern over an employer’s ability to offer meaningful work experience in safety-critical environments, such as energy and rail – doing so is likely to enable employers to offer more placements.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>We ask the Department for Education to explore how to replicate/expand the digital apprenticeship service to cover T Level placements.</p>	<p>Employers and colleges in our focus groups highlighted the challenges that they experience trying to find the most effective way to collaborate with regard to placements as well as the local/regional competition for placements amongst colleges.</p> <p>To ensure that all T Level students have a meaningful placement that will prepare them for the future, regardless of what college they attend, we recommend that the government replicates or expands what is already available to employers, providers and learners through the Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS).</p> <p>This would enable employers and providers to connect more easily.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>We ask that the Department for Education work with business and sector groups to run a large-scale T Level awareness campaign targeted at employers.</p>	<p>While most employers surveyed said that they had heard of T Levels, only 28% told us they understood what they actually involved. Furthermore, 28% of respondents had not heard of T Levels at all, with smaller rather than larger employers much less aware of T Levels (63% versus 83%) and what they involve.</p> <p>It is therefore imperative that government works with employer and sector representative bodies as well as colleges to raise awareness of T Levels and the detailed workings of them, including the resources and support on offer. Keeping in mind that many more thousands of placements will be required by mid-2023, speed is of the essence.</p> <p>This employer awareness campaign would build and complement ‘Get the Jump Skills for Life’ promotional activity but have a specific focus on increasing employer awareness of T Levels and what they entail.</p>

²⁷According to the most recent figures, £3.3 billion in unspent apprenticeship levy funds were returned to the Treasury in the last three years. A portion of unspent levy funds could be ringfenced for investment in a wider range of skills training, including T Levels. Separately to this report, Make UK has recommended that the government formally ringfence a portion of unspent levy funds as an Employer Training Fund to support with costs associated with other forms of work-based training, including T Levels.

5	<p>We ask that the Department for Education work with the Department for Transport, the Department for Levelling Up and local authorities to address the transport barriers for young people highlighted in this report.</p>	<p>Getting young people to and from an industry placement was raised as an issue throughout the focus groups, particularly in more rural areas. Issues highlighted were costs and the complexity of getting to a workplace. We heard that in some cases colleges were covering these costs and in other cases employers tried to provide solutions. To ensure that all young people can access an industry placement even where an employer or college is unable to cover costs or transport options are limited, departments across government and local as well as national authorities must work together to address these issues and provide more help.</p>
6	<p>We ask that the Department for Education work with relevant partners in the engineering and manufacturing sector to make the most of existing T Level resources by tailoring them for engineering and manufacturing employers.</p>	<p>Supporting the awareness-raising campaign, we suggest that a suite of tailored resources is created aimed at specifically engineering and manufacturing employers. Government should (continue to) work with and support organisations such as the Royal Academy of Engineering who are in the process of developing such resources. Such resources must be easily accessible via a one-stop-shop.</p> <p>This suite of resources for engineering and manufacturing employers should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A larger bank of case studies and videos specific to engineering and manufacturing - Q&A on progression routes into engineering and manufacturing including links to apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships and degrees - Safety-critical guidance for engineering and manufacturing placements with real-life examples and where to go for further advice - Example risk assessments/checklists specific to the sector, taking into account specific health and safety requirements - Template agreements – e.g., between providers and employers - Information on how to apply for financial support - A clear overview of who does what and the role of the provider - Signposting existing tools such as the postcode searcher - A T Level placement helpline - Explain what the phrase ‘meaningful work’ means in practice and outline how this can cover a broad range of activities
7	<p>We ask the Department for Education and Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to develop clear progression maps for both T Level students and employers.</p>	<p>Employers told us that having a clear understanding of how a T Level fits within the wider skills and training landscape, and the options for further training or employment following completion, is vital. They are particularly keen to understand how T Levels link into apprenticeships and what having a T Level means in terms of Level 3 apprenticeships and their duration and funding.</p> <p>IfATE’s work on T Level progression profiles should be supplemented by progression case studies as the first wave of T Levels is completed and the subsequent destinations of learners become clear. We suggest that this should be refreshed annually.</p>
8	<p>We ask government to establish a T Level industry placement taskforce.</p>	<p>A high-level cross-departmental taskforce co-chaired by DfE and BEIS Ministers would ensure that the issue is given the priority it merits within the new government – with the taskforce helping to drive forward and direct activity on industry placements across key departments. We would expect engineering and manufacturing employers to be invited to attend the taskforce, and young people, providers and local authorities to have a seat around the table.</p> <p>We would envisage the taskforce to develop and implement solutions at pace, pilot new approaches and also map and monitor the number of T Level placements across the country (in collaboration with the Unit for Future Skills), including engineering and manufacturing ones, helping to identify possible cold spots early on.</p>
9	<p>We ask that opportunities across government to promote T Level placements are used effectively.</p>	<p>Government has a number of levers it can pull that could help kickstart a greater awareness of T Levels and their benefits to employers and ensure more industry placements come online. For example, T Level placements could be embedded into major projects in transport or infrastructure. Government could and should work collaboratively with local authorities to ensure T Levels are embedded into their local and regional economic skills plans.</p>

ANNEX A – T LEVEL ROLLOUT

September 2020

The first T Level courses started in these subject areas:

- Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction
- Digital Production, Design and Development
- Education and Childcare

September 2021

T Level courses started in these subject areas:

- Building Services Engineering for Construction
- Digital Business Services
- Digital Support and Services
- Health
- Healthcare Science
- Onsite Construction
- Science

September 2022

T Level courses started in these subject areas:

- Accounting
- Design and Development for Engineering and Manufacturing
- Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control
- Finance
- Maintenance, Installation and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing
- Management and Administration

September 2023

T Level courses will start in these subject areas:

- Animal Care and Management
- Agriculture, Land Management and Production
- Catering
- Craft and Design
- Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics
- Legal Services
- Media, Broadcast and Production

Source: DfE. 'Policy paper – Introduction of T Levels', updated 7 June 2022



Make UK is backing manufacturing – helping our sector to engineer a digital, global and green future. From the First Industrial Revolution to the emergence of the Fourth, the manufacturing sector has been the UK's economic engine and the world's workshop. The 20,000 manufacturers we represent have created the new technologies of today and are designing the innovations of tomorrow. By investing in their people, they continue to compete on a global stage, providing the solutions to the world's biggest challenges. Together, manufacturing is changing, adapting and transforming to meet the future needs of the UK economy. A forward-thinking, bold and versatile sector, manufacturers are engineering their own future.

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EngineeringUK is a not-for-profit organisation that works in partnership with the engineering community to inspire tomorrow's engineers. We bring engineering careers inspiration and resources together through [Tomorrow's Engineers](#) and manage [The Code](#), which drives change at scale to increase the number and diversity of young people choosing academic and vocational pathways into engineering. We lead the engagement programmes: [The Big Bang Robotics Challenge](#) and [Energy Quest](#) and help schools bring STEM to life through real-world engineering via [Neon](#). We base everything we do on evidence and share our insight widely.

www.engineeringuk.com

For more information, please contact:

Jamie Cater
Senior Policy Manager (Employment)
Make UK
JCater@makeuk.org

Verity Davidge
Policy Director
vdavidge@makeuk.org

For more information, please contact:

Beatrice Barleon
Head of Policy & Public Affairs
EngineeringUK
07734 768242

Northern & Shell Building, 5th Floor
10 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6EN



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