



Department
for Education

T Level Transition Programme

Some lessons and findings from the first year

June 2022

Background

The Department for Education published **two research reports** on 26 May 2022 containing findings from the first year of the new T Level Transition Programme (academic year 2020 to 2021):

- **Qualitative research** conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), to understand **how providers prepared for and taught the programme** in the first year, **what they thought worked well** and **what was challenging**, and **what students thought** about the programme. The full report can be found [here](#) (see pages 8-12 for a summary of the findings).
- **Quantitative survey findings** from the Technical Education Learner Survey (TELS), carried out by NatCen Social Research and NFER, which sought to understand the **motivations, experiences and satisfaction levels** of the first cohorts of T Level Transition Programme and T Level students. The full report can be found [here](#) (see pages 7-9 for a summary of the findings).

Implementation of the T Level Transition Programme is being phased and early providers were encouraged to explore different approaches to supporting progression onto T Levels. This research has provided **valuable insights from both provider and student perspectives** that have informed the updated Framework for Delivery from September 2022. The reports contain a wealth of findings and examples of provider practice, which we think providers will also find useful to reflect on in designing and implementing their own T Level Transition Programmes.

This slide pack draws out some of the **main lessons and findings** from these two research reports. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive summary of all the findings, which providers can access via the reports themselves. Its purpose is to highlight some of the things that providers thought worked well, along with examples of their practice, and some of the main reflections students had on the programme.

What providers thought worked well: six lessons based on findings from the NFER report

- 1) Building close links between T Levels and T Level Transition Programmes
- 2) Deploying more extensive diagnostics than usual practice, in terms of time and scope, which assesses a range of skills
- 3) Using a smaller qualification, or non-qualification approach, and ensuring content and assessment are closely aligned to the T Level
- 4) Allowing more time for English and maths (E&M), close links between technical and E&M staff, and working with employers to create industry-relevant tasks where students apply their E&M skills
- 5) Using project-based work, particularly with employer involvement, to develop independence, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork skills
- 6) Using a variety of assessment methods to assess students' progress and prepare them for the T Level, including exam preparation

What providers thought worked well: six lessons based on findings from the NFER report (1)

1. Building close links between both staff and students participating in T Level Transition Programmes and T Levels *(see pages 22 and 38)*

Examples of practice included close working on curriculum design to ensure programme coherence and a clear line of sight between the two programmes, along with opportunities for students on both programmes to collaborate (for example, through projects, combined enrichment, work experience or tutorial activities). The TELS report also suggests, however, that the programme could do more to develop students' knowledge of T Levels in their chosen route (see slide 6).

2. Deploying more extensive diagnostics than usual practice, in terms of time and scope, which assesses a range of skills *(see pages 24 and 37-39 on the diagnostic component)*

Examples of diagnostics practice included: a six week diagnostics period at the start (compared to two weeks on other programmes) to gain a holistic understanding of students' starting points and needs, along with reviews during the year; exams and progress reviews every four weeks; employer-set tasks to assess employability skills; and the development of a skills matrix endorsed by employers, in which each element of the programme had skills attached to it.

3. Using a smaller qualification, or non-qualification approach, and ensuring content and assessment are closely aligned to the T Level *(see pages 25-28 and 39-41 on the technical component)*

These approaches allowed greater flexibility to deliver the other components, such as English and maths or pastoral support, which were often seen as the bigger barrier to progression. Providers who adopted a non-qualification approach felt this allowed them to spend more time developing students' personal and academic skills, tailor content to students' needs and the local context, and allowed for creative ways of delivering and assessing technical knowledge and skills in line with the T Level.

Further information on these areas can be found in the report on the pages indicated

What providers thought worked well: six lessons based on findings from the NFER report (2)

4. Allowing more time for English and maths (E&M), close links between technical and E&M staff, and working with employers to create industry-relevant tasks where students apply their E&M skills *(see pages 28 and 41-43 on the English and maths component)*

Examples included: allocating more hours to E&M than was usual for level 2 courses (six to nine hours a week for both); GCSE tutors and technical staff working together to map where E&M could be contextualised within the technical component of the programme; and involving employers in creating industry-relevant tasks and assessments where students can develop their E&M skills in a real-life context.

5. Using project-based work, particularly with employer involvement, to develop independence, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork skills *(see sections on the technical and work experience components for the use of projects)*

Project work was used for holistic assessment of students' abilities. Where employers were involved in setting projects, this allowed students to work on an industry-relevant scenario and develop the required technical and transferable skills, such as independence, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork, as well as gain useful feedback from employers.

6. Using a variety of assessment methods to assess students' progress and prepare them for the T Level, including exam preparation *(see section 5.3 on pages 46-47)*

Approaches used included individual and group assessments such as written assignments, individual/group projects and presentations (including employer-set projects); mini tests; practical skills assessments; internal exams; and the use of skills matrices or 'passports'.

What students thought of the programme: main findings

There was a **high level of satisfaction** with the programme, both overall (77% very or quite satisfied) and with different elements. A small proportion (7%) were dissatisfied.

Students were less satisfied with the **careers advice** provided (67% very or quite satisfied) and level of **employer contact** on the course (54% very or quite satisfied).

Only 54% said the programme developed their **knowledge of T Levels** in their chosen area.

Students were positive about developing **knowledge and practical skills needed in their chosen occupational area** (over 70% felt they had developed these a great deal or quite a bit) – although only 63% felt the same about developing **study skills** or **confidence**.

Whilst a minority (14%) found the programme very or extremely challenging (particularly those who were taught mostly or entirely online or with low prior attainment) over a quarter (28%) felt it was **not very or not at all challenging**.

Source: TELS research. See the T Level Transition Programme section on pages 22-40 for the full findings

Students enjoyed the content they had covered, particularly the technical component (and **practical sessions** where they put knowledge and skills into practice) and **individual project work**, where they could focus on an area they were particularly interested in.

Students suggested some **improvements** to content and assessment, saying they'd like:

- **Broader content** related to their chosen technical route
- More practical content and the opportunity for **work experience** (which not all students were able to complete due to Covid-19 restrictions)
- Increased **contact time** and tutor interaction
- **Assessment** periods spaced out over the year, with more clarity about expectations and with a range of assessment methods, such as presentations and practical assessments, alongside the written assignments

Source: NFER research. See section 6 of the report on pages 58-64 for the full findings on student perspectives

Provider quotes from the NFER research

“As long as you take away that we’ve been incredibly supported and how it’s been so refreshing to design something from scratch, which you very rarely get to do in FE...you design it from scratch, you get it endorsed by employers...It’s been a really good experience and I think it’s taught my team an awful lot about curriculum design and sequencing, which of course is high on the agenda on the new inspection framework...from every angle, it’s been an absolute delight to be a part of” (*FE College*)

“...having the freedom in terms of the design of this programme has probably been the most insightful and innovative thing we’ve come across in FE for a long time. It has certainly inspired my team to think differently about curriculum design and sequencing of learning” (*FE College*)