

LOCAL AREAS PROGRAMME SUMMARY REPORT

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North East Local Enterprise Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

A robust technical education system is of critical importance both for a country's economy and for driving social justice. For individuals it offers well-designed pathways into skilled employment, and opportunities to upskill and reskill throughout their careers. For employers, it is a system they can shape to deliver the skills they need. Since 2016, government has significantly reformed technical education in England to help deliver these ambitions.

At the heart of the reforms are employer-developed standards, which describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are needed for an individual entering into an occupation. These standards are grouped together in fifteen technical education routes that bring together related occupations. The standards now inform the content of apprenticeships and taught qualifications – both T-levels and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) – thus ensuring that this education and training equips individuals for their careers. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education facilitates the work of employer groups to develop and maintain standards within each route, for apprenticeships and in the content for taught qualifications.

From 2017 to 2021 the Gatsby Foundation worked with five local areas to facilitate collaboration between providers, local/combined authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) who are building strong technical education pathways for their locality. The introduction of technical education routes and associated qualifications, aligned with the efforts of further education providers and local skills teams to ensure strong technical education pathways for individuals and to meet the skills needs of the local economy. The overarching purpose of the Local Areas Programme was to support preparations for implementing technical education reforms – in short, to become 'routes ready'. In doing so, the programme would contribute to coherent planning for technical education in the locality, and ensure clear pathways for individuals into, and through, technical and higher technical education.

This short report summarises the activity undertaken during the programme, drawing predominantly from local stakeholder feedback. The report concludes that the establishment of route networks has accelerated Further Education (FE) partnerships and influenced a collegial approach for delivering a co-ordinated strategy for technical education. The collaborative model adopted for T-levels has been highlighted by providers as a preferred model for progressing approaches to Higher Technical Education in local areas, and implementation of actions resulting from the Skills White Paper.

The Gatsby Foundation is grateful to all the partners who contributed their time to inform this report. We particularly wish to thank the following key stakeholders who each played pivotal roles in the Local Areas Programme:

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Kamal Choudhary	Dr Michele Lawty-Jones	Stephen Pye
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I. PROJECT ACTIVITY AND MANAGEMENT

The Local Areas Programme supported activity in five localities:

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
- Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership;
- Liverpool City Region;
- Sheffield City Region;
- West Midlands Combined Authority.

Technical education was referenced in skills strategies published in each of these areas, for example, noting priorities to support apprenticeships and/or T-levels, and plans to embed an increasingly holistic approach for technical education provision across the area.

Box 1: Strategic regional skills development

A Skills and Productivity Commission in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) highlighted the importance of progressing technical education and T-levels as a key deliverable. This was further developed through the Regional Skills Plan¹, led by the 2018 WMCA Skills Board, which highlighted T-levels as a priority area in order to:

- support the introduction of technical education routes, and ensure the successful roll-out of T-levels in the region with clear employer engagement and industry placement opportunities;
- work closely with early T-level providers to share practice and understand challenges;
- support the development of a strong transition year programme that prepares young people for further study on T-levels or into apprenticeships.

Fifty-one providers across the five areas were part of the first three waves of T-level delivery from 2020-21 to 2022-23, introducing seven T-level pathways and the Transition Programme. The majority of providers were Further Education colleges. The programme developed a model of support for those colleges delivering the first T-levels, primarily through the establishment of curriculum-focused 'route networks'. A culture of sharing good practice and lessons learnt was adopted, with invitations extended to providers who would be introducing T-levels in later phases. In each area a Project Manager was appointed by the local skills team². Funding was also provided to support collaborative activity, which was structured around five workstrands.

¹ www.wmca.org.uk/media/2252/regional-skills-plan.pdf (P. 16)

² This is different for each geographical area and refers to skills teams at the City Region, Combined Authority or Local Enterprise Partnership.

WORKSTRAND ONE: DATA ANALYSIS

This workstrand aimed to map Individualised Learner Record (ILR) completions to related occupations through the lens of technical education routes and analyse this data against labour market information about future job projections for an area. The work was intended as an addition to the existing sectoral analysis undertaken by local areas, and to introduce the structure of technical education routes and pathways. It was expected to contribute to discussions on labour market requirements in an area and the alignment of technical education provision to these needs. As a result it would highlight potential opportunities for growth, inform decisions on investment (e.g. in capital expenditure) and show how specialist provision can best be ensured.

WORKSTRAND TWO: PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

This workstrand aimed to establish teacher curriculum route networks for teachers to share understanding of technical education reforms; identify professional development needs for staff; plan locally-led activity to meet these needs (and utilise nationally funded support where appropriate); and share curriculum development planning. The route networks in each area were chosen for their alignment with local skills priority areas, although over time the focus shifted to include alignment with the roll-out of T-levels.

Route network starting points were:

- surveys of teachers' expertise for the outline content for T-levels;
- identifying continued professional development (CPD) needs and planning collaborative activity to address these;
- considering curriculum models for delivery.

WORKSTRAND THREE: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

This workstrand aimed to build on existing employer engagement and identify any additional links required to ensure that technical education in the local area meets employers' needs and thus gives students the best opportunity to enter skilled employment. Implementation focused on building employer engagement route networks; collectively engaging employers in planning for curriculum design and industry placement implementation; and the delivery of staff CPD across the network.

WORKSTRAND FOUR: CAREER GUIDANCE

This workstrand aimed to ensure that young people and their advisers were well informed about technical education opportunities in their area and understood the careers these pathways can lead to. An emphasis was placed on utilising existing resources for local careers strategy rather than duplicating effort.

Project Managers worked with local career guidance professionals to:

- identify the messaging needed for different audiences and the appropriate timeline;
- align the sharing of these messages with the wider career guidance activity of the local skills team and providers;
- support as required the training needs for local career guidance professionals, including those working as part of provider teams.

WORKSTRAND FIVE: DISSEMINATION

This workstrand aimed to share and reflect on progress and challenges across the local areas and beyond the programme. Project Managers themselves met regularly, and with providers to share insight at regional and national events and contribute to dissemination materials (see Improving Technical Education microsite³).

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Having credible Project Managers who were regarded as neutral, objective convenors and curators was pivotal to the success of cultivating strategic partnerships and consolidating operational collaboration. The Project Managers quickly established themselves as impartial change makers working on behalf of their local area and technical education providers.

A strong understanding of FE, including the strategic drivers and policy developments, together with knowledge of internal governance, staffing structures and planning cycles, was integral to the rapid building of relationships with appropriate leads across the FE community, and for framing T-levels within their operational delivery and strategic planning.

Each Local Area Project Team invested in building relationships with key stakeholders across institutions and networks. Because of this the individual teams were regarded as more influential in engaging stakeholders with the project than the regional organisation they represented.

³ <https://www.improvingtechnicaleducation.org.uk/>

Box 2: Typical responsibilities of the Project Manager

- Build strong relationships with, and be steered by, college leadership through regular attendance at the Principals' Forum.
- Raise the profile of T-levels across their organisation and governance structures, recognising the local economic importance and benefits of supporting T-level delivery and the existing available employer reach.
- Act as a conduit for national stakeholders such as Gatsby Foundation, Education and Training Foundation and Department for Education (DfE) to provide two-way feedback and drive change when deemed appropriate.
- Communicate the range of support available for providers preparing to introduce T-levels, including collaborative professional development and additional funding.
- Attend network events and forums to outline the importance of T-levels for the local economic agenda, including myth-busting with, for example, careers community networks, schools, HR Business Leads and employer groups.
- Support collaborative working for curriculum leads and teaching staff by facilitating regular provider route network meetings. Support includes administration, such as arranging meeting agendas and providing secretariat, and engaging external guest speakers such as employers, awarding bodies, universities and other organisations well placed to respond to specific workforce development requests.

Exemplar:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA): The GMCA Project Manager was initially part of the Work and Skills Directorate, which has responsibility for leading on careers agendas. As GMCA's technical education agenda broadened, line management was established across the workstreams for both apprenticeships and classroom-based technical education. The Project Manager's ability to liaise between departments within a college, such as the T-level curriculum teams and the apprenticeship delivery leads, also leveraged benefits for both the provider network and the Combined Authority.

2. BUILDING ON COLLABORATION

Providing dedicated Project Manager roles provided the capacity to meet with college leadership and to collaborate with curriculum leads across the provider network. This enabled them to gain deep insight into college delivery, and to improve their understanding of, and connections with, the broader technical education agenda in their locality, such as apprenticeship policy and higher technical education planning. This knowledge and understanding was seen as instrumental in building further local collaboration with senior leaders, curriculum managers and teachers, business development teams and career leaders.

Reflections from programme participants included:

- The strategic engagement of college Principalship teams was crucial both for cross-college collaboration and for engagement with individual institutions.
- Launch events with national credible keynote speakers attracted interest and provided attendees with links for follow-up engagement.
- There was great value in early collaboration across all providers and stakeholders regardless of T-level delivery start dates; this provided an opportunity for all partners to benefit from the early lessons learnt for their own strategic planning.
- It was important to invest time in discussing the broad framework for technical education reforms that T-levels sit within, and the benefits this offered to local economic, skills and employability agendas.
- Local areas benefited from engaging external ambassadors who were nationally, and locally recognised industry leads, to introduce and promote the benefits of T-levels.
- Championing the value of T-levels in addressing local economic needs and developing future workforce pipelines proved highly effective in creating a united approach to successful implementation across an area, transcending provider boundaries and demonstrating a more seamless, consistent provider response to employer demand.

Exemplars:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA): Following the introduction of the first three T-levels the Project Manager delivered a T-level Conference aimed at Principalship teams and Heads of Departments from across all the FE Colleges in the area. The conference highlighted the benefits and added value of T-levels for institutions' strategic plans. Sessions included national keynote speakers, colleges already established as T-level leads, and T-level Employer Ambassadors. The conference reinforced the importance of T-levels as an element of national technical education reform.

Sheffield City Region: A multi-agency conference to launch and promote the role of T-levels to a wide range of T-level stakeholders had been planned for January 2021. There were over 200 confirmed attendees from the region's LEPs; the Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance (CEIAG) communities; FE Colleges and

employers. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the project team delivered a series of virtual sessions, which included promotion of the T-level project, and the value to stakeholders of engaging. This was followed by sessions tailored to the audience, for example, information on individual route ways and industrial placements was offered to providers and employers, whereas careers practitioners heard first-hand about entry requirements and progression opportunities. This provided the project team with details of attendees interested in supporting the planning and delivery of T-levels who would later engage in operational planning discussions.

Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): A virtual careers event took place with attendees from the Careers & Enterprise Company, Jobcentre Plus, FE Colleges and Future for Skills Careers Providers. The event was delivered in two parts: (i) to showcase and promote T-levels and provide an overview of the benefits to both individuals and employers, including question and answer sessions; (ii) aimed at local authority areas and focused on a more detailed description of T-levels, looking at occupational maps, the T-level offers at a local provider level and the progression pathways, including higher education.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA): The vehicle for achieving project buy-in from the outset was to secure attendance at the now, Colleges West Midlands Group, which consists of the Principals from 21 FE colleges. There was a strong foundation to build on with the colleges history of collaboration as part of the FE Skills and Productivity Group. Colleges were proactive and enthusiastic to engage with follow-up meetings at an institutional level to identify key individuals to lead on thematic groups. From the outset the approach adopted by the Combined Authority was to support rather than lead.

Box 3: Impact of strategic collaboration

The Greater Manchester Colleges Group comprises of nine FE Colleges. It sits within the GMCA, which is a mature Combined Authority with a track record of strong strategic thinking and the distillation of policy into effective plans.

Lisa O'Loughlin, Principal of The Manchester College and Chair of the Greater Manchester Colleges Group, recognised the value of the project to accelerate technical education discussions across the area. She saw that the project served as a catalyst for progressing technical education ambitions through the provision of investment, time and a structure that helps colleges consider how they can collaborate in the design and development of T-levels and in coherent planning for broader technical education pathways.

The Principal's Group developed a coordinated strategy to support T-levels which included identifying opportunities for growing provision, strategic priorities for the local area, and natural existing specialisms in geographical clusters across all nine FE Colleges. This was implemented at a curriculum level through route ready network groups which brought together curriculum leads for each subject from each institution. The leads played a pivotal role in identifying training needs for staff and arranging professional development and working collaboratively to build capacity.

The T-level project influenced a collegiate approach for delivering a coordinated strategy for technical education. It has enabled the colleges to focus on their specialisms and also supported route progression conversations. The routes ready programme for T-levels has been adopted as a framework for Level 4 and 5 focused activity and has influenced strategic thinking for an approach to the Local Skills Improvement Plan and College Business Centre opportunities. In addition, the Greater Manchester Colleges Group has identified Principal leads across a range of thematic areas, including technical education, mental health and careers community focused activities, all of whom are focused on adopting a broader, whole systems approach to coherent planning of technical education.

3. ESTABLISHING ROUTE NETWORKS

The implementation of technical education reforms, including the introduction of T-levels, supported the growth of partnerships across local FE providers, and gave local areas an opportunity to consider the breadth of technical education offers available at each institution and across the local area. All local areas created route networks, which brought together curriculum leads for particular routes (for example, Construction, Digital, Health & Science).

The network typically met once or twice a term. They had clear agendas focused on curriculum and became key vehicles for connecting curriculum colleagues and supporting them to prepare for the introduction of T-level programmes. For example this involved building understanding of local progression pathways, and developing collaborative approaches for employer engagement (for example, in professional development opportunities for teachers). In most areas a separate group was also established with a focus on industry placements.

Project Managers developed and refined surveys to identify professional development needs for teachers. These needs were met by: (i) arranging tailored local professional development, for example, by working with a local employer; and (ii) accessing appropriate national support through T-level Professional Development offered by the Education and Training Foundation on behalf of DfE.

Broad learning from the route networks:

- Teaching colleagues from different institutions had not previously had opportunities to collaborate with peers and so felt the route networks brought significant benefits. The forums created opportunities for questions, confidence building and sharing experiences, which has positively impacted on T-level delivery within their respective institutions.
- Where the Project Manager facilitated rather than chaired route network meetings, greater provider ownership and sustainability of the networks was achieved.
- Plans for sustaining collaborative working and provider ownership should be agreed from the onset, with governance arrangements being handed over in a timely manner by Project Managers to providers to enable good practice sharing to continue.
- Adopting a route network approach for T-levels has offered a platform to build on to support the delivery of HTQs.
- Staff responsible for industrial placements were often based in curriculum teams rather than apprenticeship or business development units. Bringing them together with other employer facing colleagues strengthened the understanding between internal college teams and promoted an appreciation of how T-levels exist alongside apprenticeships.

Box 4: Route networks in action

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) T-level Project Manager initiated the creation of T-level network groups, inviting all early T-level adopters and those FE providers who were considering future delivery of T-levels. The groups were established for each of the first three T-levels (Digital, Construction and Education & Childcare), and were well received and well attended by Curriculum Managers, building on an already established culture of collaboration amongst colleges in the WMCA.

Staff involved in curriculum planning and delivery were provided with the opportunity to complete a knowledge and skills gap questionnaire, which enabled the identification of areas for CPD and staff training. The results across all three T-level 2020 pathways highlighted needs in a number of areas such as project management skills, with Construction and Digital staff identifying Agile SCRUM⁴ as being particularly important to their pathways. A significant number of staff also acknowledged subject specific legislation as an area requiring development and training. In response to the results the partner colleges organised a 2-day project management (Agile SCRUM) training for all WMCA colleges delivered by the University of Wolverhampton in February 2020. Feedback on the training included the following:

“The Agile SCRUM training was really worthwhile and will definitely help my teaching on the digital T-Level from September 2020. This is the best CPD I have attended in my 11 years at the College, it was excellent.”

Computing teacher – Walsall College

The establishment of the route networks and collaborative training opportunities across partner colleges strengthened the culture of collaboration which exists across the FE providers in the WMCA at a curriculum level. The networks have acted as a catalyst for further collaboration from College Collaboration Fund activities through to establishing teacher expert groups, project groups and middle management forums. The focus, and uniting factor, is on being stronger together.

Video feedback on the collaborative CPD model is available here: www.improvingtechnicaleducation.org.uk/introducing-t-levels/themes/staff-cpd

Exemplars:

Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): Engagement with the Work-Based Learning Forum proved to be a very useful vehicle for increasing knowledge and understanding of T-levels amongst apprenticeship providers and for demonstrating alignment through occupational standards.

Sheffield City Region: Positive collaboration and shared learning supported colleges, regardless of when their delivery commenced with for example, helping a Wave 3 provider prepare the investment for their engineering department in advance of a 2023 delivery.

4 Borrowing the term from the sport of Rugby, Scrum is a framework that helps teams work together which encourages teams to learn through experiences, self-organize while working on a problem, and reflect on their wins and losses to continuously improve.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA): Engagement with teaching teams from the outset was paramount to understanding and responding to their individual needs. Conducting surveys to identify training needs for the delivery of specific route ways proved highly effective in engaging providers, resulting in collaborative approaches across institutions and the fostering of new working relationships across teaching teams.

4. EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

As part of providers preparation to introducing T-levels they sought to establish strong employer engagement to co-design the curriculum, to build opportunities for industry placements, and to support appropriate professional development for teachers. Providers regarded the opportunity to explore a more uniformed approach towards employer engagement as a key benefit of the Local Areas Programme.

Broad reflections from participants included:

- Employers were very receptive to the technical education route occupational maps as a visual tool to inform how T-level students might progress through their own staffing structures.
- Communicating how T-levels sit within and complement other technical education opportunities supported employer engagement. For example, employers were keen to understand the complementary nature of apprenticeships and T-levels.
- Engaging employers for feedback and support in knowledge transfer for the teaching workforce to deliver new content within T-levels can act as a springboard to engage in further delivery and industry placement support.
- Employers respond more positively when the provider 'ask' is specific and they benefit from understanding the different requirements for distinct requests for workplace experience – for example, work experience for younger students needs to be different to that provided for T-level industry placements. This helped clarify expectations and also build employers' understanding of the benefit of industry placements for businesses.
- Replacing subject references with pathways and occupations resonates with employers, supporting their understanding of the industry placement.
- Highlighting the many benefits for employers who engage in T-levels is powerful. They include discovering new talent, getting fresh perspectives from young people, developing mentoring and supervisory capacity in your team, and building capacity with additional resource.
- Establishing wider employer engagement groups, instead of just focusing on T-level industrial placements, lends itself to attracting more employer facing colleagues across the provider network, such as apprenticeships and teaching staff. This can strengthen their understanding of the broader curriculum and the pathways available to employers for developing future talent pipelines.
- Promoting the flexibility of options available for supporting industrial placements including weekly, block release or hybrid options is attractive to employers instead of there being a one size fits all.
- Employers sought reassurance on safeguarding and the support available to them throughout the placement.
- Delivery of peer-to-peer T-level awareness sessions to skills brokers, Enterprise Advisers and Business Growth Hub Connectors supported the promotion of T-levels in non-educational/skills forums.

Exemplars:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA): Convening an employer-industry placement network for providers has been hailed as a key benefit of the project with providers keen to share ideas to support more effective employer engagement across the curricula 'asks'; this has now led to exploring what a central employer hub to support engagement across Greater Manchester could look like.

Sheffield City Region: The Project Team found one of the most effective methods for engaging employers in T-level discussions, was to position it as an alternative and an addition to apprenticeships. For example, whilst some employers were able to support an apprentice over a four-day period they were encouraged to extend this to five days by supporting a T-level learner in a placement for one day. This provided the employer with access to a high-level learner who could potentially transfer to an apprenticeship programme following their T-level qualification. Alternatively, if the apprenticeship commitment was too demanding, the industrial placement could be a useful alternative to trial hosting a learner.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA): The Project Manager engaged with several Chambers of Commerce and delivered awareness sessions in partnership with the Mayor of the Combined Authority who set the scene for skills and productivity as an introduction to the importance of technical education. Following these sessions further invitations to sector specific representative groups were received, which facilitated employer engagement discussions at a route level.

Box 5: Partnership approaches to developing and delivering meaningful industry placements in the NHS

Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): East Lancashire NHS Teaching Hospitals (ELTH) is a large NHS organisation in the LEP area, which employs more than 8,000 staff in acute and community settings. There is a well-established programme of work experience and a high level of engagement with four partner colleges.

To provide meaningful industry placements for T-level students within the NHS required broad stakeholder engagement, including ward managers and staff, departmental managers, workforce leads, HR and senior management. The aim of the project was to evaluate a T-level industry placement pilot within the NHS across both a nursing pathway and an allied health professional route. Key objectives included:

- Exploring the use of extended placements with an increased emphasis on integrated care, for example, placements based on a patient journey or disease pathway rather than more traditional departmental placements.
- Maximising learning outcomes by supporting students to explore the multidisciplinary nature of the patient journey through the healthcare system.
- Seeing learners experiencing placements from the perspective of the patient journey/disease pathway improves the value of working with placement students amongst Health Trust staff.
- Raising awareness of the range of new potential pathways for learners to consider, thus future-proofing the NHS workforce.

The development of patient case studies was fundamental to the placements. They enabled the student to collate and deepen their learning, creating a golden thread through the placement which could then be aligned to classroom education.

Colleges in Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington, and the Nelson & Colne College agreed the number of students on both pathways and that the students would come on a block delivery at the same time for each college. This ensured the continuity of staff and also supported the journey of a patient, which is often rapid within the NHS. The model developed included a three-stage framework:

Stage 1 – Entry points into NHS care provision and diagnostics.

Stage 2 – Experiences of acute care.

Stage 3 – Experiences of community care settings.

The nursing pathway was developed as a vehicle to implement the nursing cadet scheme and focused on investigating entry points into the NHS; experiences of acute care and care in the community, which involved placements in different settings ranging from GP practices through to Outpatients. Similarly, the allied health professional pathway induction focused on understanding diagnostics, for example, pharmacy and radiography. The placement covered the acute care of patients through multidisciplinary team working – such as physiotherapists, dieticians and

speech therapists – followed by experiences within community care settings such as rehabilitation.

Throughout the placement students wore a uniform clearly highlighting they were on placement – this proved valuable in terms of highlighting their position in the organisation and avoiding confusion amongst service users. In addition, it became a useful signal for staff who often approached students to offer them an additional learning experience. Students also completed a handbook which enabled them to capture observation testimonies from staff and evaluate their experiences daily. Many students have since reported finding these useful as records of achievement and they have subsequently presented them at interviews.

Box 6: Effective employer engagement training

Sheffield City Region: Sales Geek were commissioned to provide business engagement training for any college staff (teaching and non-teaching) responsible for engaging with employers. They delivered business relationship training focused on consultative approaches to local business communities. This proved to be high value training which gave providers an opportunity to come together to agree a consistent employer offer which transcended provider boundaries.

The sessions were delivered online and included modules such as:

- establishing a positive rapport and building a relationship;
- consultative questioning;
- embedding strong values of T-levels for business;
- handling objection and achieving buy-in.

The model of delivery included weekly virtual classrooms for cohorts of 15 staff who were responsible for external facing employer engagement activities. The classroom activities were supported with on-demand exercises and post-training access to further learning on the Sales Geek Hub via an Online Virtual Academy.

This training provided an opportunity to gain and/or refresh skills which were transferable to a range of post-16 offers such as traineeships, apprenticeships, and HTQs.

5. CAREER GUIDANCE

The importance of T-levels in supporting future talent pipelines cannot be underestimated. For this to be achieved, teachers and career guidance practitioners need a clear understanding of T-level qualifications. This section explores what worked well in preparing professionals for such discussions.

Reflections on building understanding and knowledge of T-levels for career professionals:

- Introduce T-levels as part of wider technical education reform, referring to the occupational maps for technical education routes that illustrate the employer-developed standards underpinning both apprenticeships and taught qualifications.
- Dispel myths surrounding T-levels and build awareness of the many benefits of industry placements to individual learners and to future employers. Benefits include the development of employability skills and the opportunity to consider broader pathways prior to deciding on an occupational specialism.
- Communicate the requirements for, and progression routes from, T-levels to career practitioners.
- Emphasise the difference in provider and employer expectations between work experience and industry placement requirements which can inform if T-levels are a suitable option for a learner.
- Engage T-level providers to participate in awareness raising roadshows to promote the benefits of T-levels; to share their views of ideal T-level candidates; to provide an insight into T-level content and assessment; and share what an industrial placement involves.
- Encourage professional peer-to-peer discussions to explore anticipated questions and responses from learners and parents/carers to build confidence amongst the Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance community in discussing these new qualifications.

Exemplars:

Sheffield City Region: Fostering collaboration across a wide range of careers practitioners from independent providers as well as those employed by schools, colleges and universities not only strengthened understanding of the entry routes into, and progression pathways from, T-levels but also served as a catalyst for local undergraduate admission policy discussions.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA): Attending College Parents' Evenings in partnership with employers offering industry placements was successful in increasing awareness and interest. Employers provided keynote speeches on how they valued T-levels, which generated a lot of questions from parents/carers who were interested in the qualifications and progression routes.

Liverpool City Region: Maximising existing forums and networks, such as the locally funded Careers & Enterprise Company Career Hub, proved a useful vehicle for raising awareness of T-levels and engaging in discussions to dispel myths and clarify the local T-level offer.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA): The Project Team developed a set of resources and presentations on the broader technical education offer, which described where T-levels sat within the post-16 landscape. The resources were shared with career guidance practitioners across secondary schools and colleges.

Box 7: Embedding T-levels in careers practice

Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): The Project Team delivered several T-level awareness raising roadshows during 2019. This resulted in requests from career guidance practitioners for bespoke sessions to help them better understand the T-level offer and to be able to confidently frame it as a post-16 option for consideration.

Working with the New Directions Careers Service who deliver information, advice and guidance across the Lancashire LEP area, the T-level Project Managers worked with a Level 6 career guidance practitioners to co-design and co-deliver two virtual training sessions in 2020. The sessions included interactive polls and the use of breakout rooms to support smaller group discussions. Each session lasted for three hours and had the following aims and objectives:

i) Aims:

- Provide an overview of T-levels.
- Explore key messages for a guidance setting.
- Raise confidence in discussing T-levels with young people and parents/carers.

ii) Objectives:

- Identify the ideal candidate.
- Highlight the key differences in Level 3 pathways.
- Share good practice through interactive case studies and group discussion.

The first session focused on improving knowledge and understanding of T-levels amongst the careers community. It presented the national context and introduced senior representatives from local T-level providers, Nelson & Colne College and Blackpool & Fylde College, who explained the local offer. The colleges also described their reasons for engaging in the early delivery of T-levels and shared experiences from learners involved in the early stages of T-levels.

One of the key benefits of the sessions was understanding who the ideal T-level candidate was, and providing effective questioning techniques to support the identification of these candidates. To do this effectively participants were presented with pen portraits of learners in advance of the sessions and were encouraged to engage in pathway discussions during the training. Following the exercise, the T-level providers revealed their ideal T-level candidate, this highlighted the range of considerations attendees needed to keep in mind to support learners in their T-level thinking. The exercise was deemed particularly useful in underlining the importance of candidates being able to organise themselves in terms of study, engagement and industrial placements; being able to meet travel requirements; and being able to prepare for and take externally set exams. This exercise also broadened the

participants understanding of the demands of T-levels and how they differed from BTECs, other Applied General Qualifications and apprenticeships. It provided an opportunity to highlight industrial placement expectations and the standard of work required, which was evident through the higher-level entry requirements.

A total of four sessions were delivered to over 70 career guidance practitioners employed by independent providers, schools, and colleges. All were able to claim the six hours of training as contributing to their professional CPD requirements. The focus of the training was on encouraging professional peer-to-peer discussion. Feedback from the career guidance practitioners highlighted an increased confidence in embedding T-levels within their practice and in sharing their learning with their internal colleagues. A slide deck was developed for career guidance practitioners and teachers and was shared with the participants to support peer-to-peer learning. From these initial sessions, the T-level Project Team are now developing a follow-up session focused on individual route ways and associated career progression routes.

6. WIDER BENEFITS

The route networks infrastructure enabled local areas to bid for wider funding opportunities for T-level implementation support. Three areas were successful in collaborative bids for funding opportunities to support T-level implementation and professional development for teachers. These were:

- Teach Too, which is a development programme for addressing quality improvement in technical and vocational teaching and learning.
- T-level Resource Improvement Projects (TRIP) which encourages provider-led collaborative action research project approaches between early adopter T-level providers and key stakeholders such as employers, other learning providers, careers communities or universities.
- Small DfE grants to support with business breakfasts.

Universally it was recognised that engagement in T-level route networks proved to be pivotal in stimulating additional financial investment in local areas, benefiting both regional T-level providers and pan-regional provider collaborations. For example, Bolton College led a Digital TRIP that involved other colleges from Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Merseyside; and Blackpool College led a TRIP on Emerging Technologies in Construction that involved Wakefield College and colleges from Greater Manchester and Lancashire.

The establishment of route networks has accelerated FE partnerships. The collaborative model adopted for T-levels has been highlighted as the preferred approach for providers in progressing approaches to HTQs and to actions falling out of the Skills White Paper, such as Skills Accelerators, Skills Boot Camps and College Collaboration Funding opportunities.

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