

T Level transitional programme



Case studies

1 April 2024

Summary

Progression

We challenge the view that the only measure of success for the T Level Transition Programme is progression to a T Level.

Level 2

There was a wider issue about where Level 2 progression as well as occupational qualifications will fit. It was recognised that it was very important to be able to understand clearly the place of Level 2 vocational qualifications within the whole framework.

Challenge for some providers

Difficulties for how some providers are in a position to offer a generic programme when offering only one specific construction T Level to progress to.

Need for greater flexibility

There was a call for more flexibility as well as for more effective promotion of T Levels and the Transitional Programme.

Also flexibilities to meet the needs of individual sectors could be permitted: for example given the relative importance of Level 2 provision for construction this should be the starting point for establishing effective routes for progression.

Impact on special needs

The impact on learners with special needs of a very broad and prescriptive set of practical outcomes which are not all required in the intended progression route should also be considered.

Background

In late 2022 the Chair of the CBEE 14 to 19 Group reported that an issue regarding the T Level Transitional Programme had been escalated to the CBEE Advisory Committee. At that meeting it was explained that the new framework requires providers to offer experiences (particularly around the trade skills) that small school providers may not be in a position to run. There will also be students beginning a T-Level that are not exposed to this at all, so the rationale for insisting on it for the Transition students is opaque. The Advisory Committee concluded that we should use opportunities to challenge the view that the only measure of success for the T Level Transition Programme is progression to a T Level.

Members were unclear about how a provider might be in a position to offer a generic programme when offering only one specific construction T Level to progress to. There was a call for more flexibility as well as for more effective promotion of T Levels and the Transitional Programme. It was also commented that a more prescriptive programme would not help to maximise demand for progression to a future T Level. Reference was made to the recent Review of Level 2 and it would have been more helpful to have known the outcomes of this first as the Programme, Level 2 and Level are all intertwined. The impact on special needs also should be considered. In addition it would be useful if flexibilities to meet the needs of individual sectors could be permitted: for example given the relative importance of Level 2 provision for construction this should be the starting point for establishing effective routes for progression.

Case Study 1: Ruth Coyle, La Retraite School

With regard to the T Level transition course we have been offering this course for 2 years under the old framework. If you look at page 11 of this brochure you can see our Transition program is called Route2Three. It comprises of resit Maths and English GCSE and we develop the students Digital skills through the level 2 OCR Technical in Business and Digital Media, which is the equivalent to a further 2 GCSE's. As we are a school we have all our transition students in one group so we make our work experience sector specific e.g those who want to progress to childcare work in a Nursery and those that want to progress to Digital work in an Office.2.

Under the new T Level framework for the transition we would choose to offer just the Digital route, as all T Levels have a Digital core. Again we would try to get sector specific jobs in digital for the students e.g a job in the Construction industry which involves design and planning.3.

In terms of progress, last year 4 students went onto T Levels, 4 students went on to other level 3 courses and 2 students had to go back to college to resit their Maths and English.

Case Study 2: Mark Andrews, North Kent College

North Kent College (NKC) began recruiting for its T-Level Design Surveying and planning programme in October 2021, for delivery at its general purpose FE campus at Tonbridge, which had been successfully delivering BTEC qualifications in Construction and Built Environment for more than 5 years. At that time it had been planned to offer the T-Level Transition programme Construction route as an alternative to learners who were not yet ready to start the T-Level programme: in most cases this was because of predicted grades in English and Maths that would not satisfy the course entry requirements. In January 2022 NKC held a launch event involving employers and prospective students and their parents and consulted with all parties regarding the appropriateness of the curriculum offer. Around this time NKC's careers teams met individually with prospective applicants who would be offered the T-Level Transition programme rather than their first choice: this was to gauge their enthusiasm for the proposed transition programme delivery model, and their suitability for progression.

As a result of the consultations the following comments were noted:

- a) Amongst the employers who were consulted, they expressed little interest in recruiting employees into the Surveying and Planning roles who had a broad exposure to Construction craft trades. Some could see the relevance of some practical training to roles in site supervision and project management, but felt that that experience in site occupations was not necessary to roles in Architecture, Civil Engineering, Town Planning and Quantity Surveying. One expressed the view that practically orientated learners with weaker GCSE results may not be their first choice of candidate for these roles.
- b) Amongst the learners consulted about the offer of a transition programme, many expressed an anxiety that should they fail to improve their GCSE grades, the proposed programme, having no formal qualifications attached, would leave them with no progression opportunities at the end of one year of study. When offered a Level 2 Carpentry qualification with an opportunity to resit GCSE's as an alternative to the transition programme, approximately half said they had no interest in taking a practical course, and the remainder felt that this would be a better alternative to the transition programme offer, but that they would want to keep open the option to progress to e.g. Level 3 carpentry apprenticeship, as opposed to the T-Level. Very few learners expressed an interest in a course designed to lead into a career in surveying and planning, which included elements of Building Services Engineering and Site Occupations.
- c) The Careers team expressed their view that any transition programme which allowed learners with a Grade 4 in English or Maths (for instance where the T-Level entry requirement was a 5 in Maths), to improve upon it, was fundamentally unfair to the hundreds of learners on Level 2 and Level 3 study programmes who were not afforded this opportunity due to the lack of funding and staff to be able to deliver this.
- i. There was insufficient appetite from learners to participate in a programme of mixed site construction and surveying skills for it to be viable to try and deliver the transition programme across its Tonbridge campus and its specialist site construction provision at other campuses.

- ii. There was little support for the transition programme from employers.

As a result NKC concluded that:

- iii. That the transition programme principles were somewhat unfair, both in allowing more flexibility than other study programmes in funding GCSE retakes, and in the intent that progression should be limited to the T-Level programme only. This risks learner dissatisfaction on both counts.
- iv. That in general our range of Level 2 study programmes offer a more secure route to progression, without a narrowing of options, than the transition programme, and so NKC would not be offering the transition programme.
- v. We believe that the decision to require Transition programmes to cover all pathway disciplines across the entire T-Level route that they service is reductive of the diversity of career pathways and learners characteristics. It presents challenges in delivery which restrict learner choice and compromise financial viability for providers. This is a mistake in the Construction and Built Environment Route to adopt this approach, and is likely to prove so in other Routes.

Case Study 3: Andrew Bristow, Thomas Telford UTC

The T-Level Transition Year was originally developed by Wave 1 providers as a 'readiness' year for students who may not yet be well placed to begin studying the T-Level, but who would develop with additional input and time to be ready within a year of additional study. The Transition Year development focussed upon the students' technical knowledge, behaviours, English and maths skills alongside the expectation of working with employers to become 'work-ready'.

The Transition Year was not prescribed to providers, and could include qualifications if deemed appropriate, but also could be free of qualifications.

Most providers, Thomas Telford UTC included, saw this as a chance to support students who perhaps were not quite achieving the appropriate grades in English and Maths, or students who needed a little more time to mature and develop appropriate behaviours. Indeed, at the UTC we have not actively marketed the course, instead seeing it as a safety net for students who have gone through our rigorous T-Level recruitment process and then not met the required grades.

For September moving forwards a National Technical Framework has been developed that is sector specific and guides what the experience should be for a student on a Transition Programme, so that there is consistency across the country and it becomes an understood route from provider to provider.

As a sector specific framework, the document requires students to experience a range of learning and development that includes a common core from all 3 Construction T-Levels. Part of the framework focusses upon Practical Skills and exclusively requires students to have some experience of some construction trades, **omitting surveying as a practical task**.

The rationale is to help the student understand the range of possible routes within construction across the 3 T-Levels developed. However, for a centre such as ours, there is not the facility or curriculum programming

available to make this practical trade experience happen – the Transition Year students will get practical experience, but it is route specific – setting up surveying equipment and completing surveys. The requirement to offer the trades, places us at risk of not being able to meet the demands of the framework.

This appears to not be fully thought through – students at our centre have already had extensive CIAG input when applying for the T-Level and will have been guided to other centres where there is a possibility of them wanting to study the On-Site route, this is established from the outset by a one to one meeting with our L6 qualified careers director.

Students on our T-Level who do not need to complete the Transition Year, will probably NOT have any experience of trades at all, and almost certainly have no experience of surveying.

To this end, the Transition Year students will be incredibly well placed WITHOUT a trade experience. Given the practical nature of surveying and that a good surveyor will tell you that 'nothing replaces the experience gained by conducting surveys', it would seem far more valuable for our students to spend their time working to this end.

Case Study 4: James Watters, Chichester College Group

Chichester College Group introduced transition programmes from September 2020. We opted for a qualification approach with Education & Childcare and Digital, and a non-qualification approach for Construction. The intent was to provide a 1 year study programme for students looking to progress onto a T Level. The minimum entry criteria for a transition programme was a grade profile of 3's in at least 5 subjects including Maths and English. Timetables included lessons for theory and practical sessions relevant to the subject area with lessons for students retaking their GCSE's in Math and/or English. Students had the opportunity to resit in the November series and the Summer series. We built diagnostic assessments into the first 6 weeks to ensure students were suited to their course. A one week work experience programme was embedded to prepare progressing students for an industry placement. Education & Childcare have a 2 day per week delivery model to ensure they can fulfil at least 250 hours to obtain their licence to practice and work in industry should they wish to progress straight into employment.

We found the achievement of the transition programmes to be successful, however, the barrier to progress onto T Levels was due to students not achieving at least a grade 4 in their GCSE Maths and/or English retakes. During our 2nd and 3rd year of delivery we changed the entry criteria for transition programmes to include at least a 4 in either GCSE Maths or English so there was a greater opportunity for the students to progress onto a T Level if they wanted to. Since the publication of the national technical outcomes and new framework for delivery we have refined curriculum plans to align. We have found recruitment to be quite low, this could be due to national promotion being limited or simply because prospective students would ordinarily apply for a Level 3 course when in school.

Going into our 4th year of delivery we have decided to remove transition within our construction departments and have reverted back to offering Level 2 BTECS as we find most employers will accept a student into employment or an Apprenticeship with this level of qualification. Students studying a T Level in construction tend to progress onto University or a higher level Apprenticeship. Transition programmes in Digital will remain as this has proven to be more successful. However, we have also decided not to run

the transition programme in Education & Childcare at our Chichester college campus as we have large groups of L2 students moving into employment in most cases with T Level students coming directly from school.

Moving forward, we are continuing to work on raising awareness in our local feeder schools and the information, advice and guidance we provide during open events and to prospective students at interview are key to ensuring learners are fully aware of the requirements and expectations. With the recent decision to change transition programme to T Level Foundation Year is focused on selling the product as a 3 year programme as opposed to a separate 1 year programme with the option to study a T Level. It will be interesting to watch how this landscape further develops and what impact the new framework has.