T-Shaped and Future-Ready: T Levels are Delivering on Progression and Promise

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T Levels launched in September 2020 as pioneering 'gold standard' technical qualifications, with the 'right blend' of classroom-based learning (80%) and industry-relevant experience (20%) in the shape of a 45-day, meaningful, co-designed industry placement. The placement enables students to gain real-world experience and applied learning to build and hone skills, while developing the knowledge and behaviours to be work and future ready. This strategy has paid off. We now see approximately a third of T Level students returning to the same employer for work following completion of their industry placement. For others, T Levels have been the gateway to higher education, inspiring inclusion and innovation.

T Levels were developed in collaboration with employers, with reference to technical standards, and there has been a clear focus on meeting the needs of industry. Their aim is to develop students with the 'ingredients for success': T-shaped learner characteristics. These include:

- transferable professional skills: instilling in students a deep understanding of their chosen industry occupation and sector;
- transferable personal qualities including the all-important employability or 'soft skills', often referred to as innovation or productivity skills; and
- subject specialist technical knowledge: practical skills and experience, and scientific and technical discourse.

Together, these knowledge, skills and behaviours give students their best chance of realising their goals and ambitions of progressing to higher level study, an apprenticeship, or employment.

Resources such as The UK Standard Skills Classification, published in November 2025, have provided a useful standardised list for both providers and students of the skills, knowledge and tasks required for UK occupations. The classification outlines what effective occupational skill performance looks like, enabling individuals to improve their performance by benchmarking for success.

Recognition of T Levels as high-quality study pathways to employment and/or higher education has been earned. Students have progressed to gain employment with major national and international companies, and there is a growing list of diverse UK universities, helpfully listed on the Department for Education website, who offer T Level students places for higher education study. It is also notable that many universities are now offering high-quality industry placements for T Level learners, which provides students with the opportunity to experience work and life in a university setting before they attend. For some individuals, this experience could be just the 'lifebelt' they need, developing a sense of belonging to support their progression.

T Levels are delivering on progression and promise, helping to level-up access to higher education, enabling social mobility, and creating progression pathways to professional studies and higher paid

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December 2025

careers. In August 2025, 11,909 T Level students received results, with a 91.4% pass rate—and a 57% increase in students studying T Levels in just a year. They are helping to break down barriers to opportunity, enabling young people to stay living in their local learning environments, while helping to meet the needs of industry and contributing to sustainable local economic development. In just five years, news headlines have changed dramatically, from the challenges of delivering T Levels to a focus on the positive outcomes being achieved as a result of their delivery.

- **'Let's back T Levels to break down barriers to opportunity in every part of the country.'**
- **'T Levels 2025: Spotlighting the future of technical education'**
- **'T Level Results Day 2025— A new generation of Engineers— skilled work-ready talent is set to enter the workplace'**

They are contributing to the build of the technical STEM talent pipeline, increasing skills in priority industry growth sectors, aligned to local skill improvement plans and national priorities, and enabling realisation of the UK's ambitions for opportunity and growth. A key highlight of 2025 was when T Level student Mohammed Mahmood from Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) won the Enginuity Skills Awards 2025- T Level Student of the Year, and the overall 'Best of British Engineering' award for his dedication in skills in Building Services Engineering, inspiring future engineers despite arriving in the UK with limited English and experience. Celebrating success in this way is important—if you can see it, you can be it. His success highlights the growing recognition of T Levels as strong pathways to successful careers in engineering and manufacturing.

T Levels inspiring innovation and inclusion— A people and place-based approach

Many of the reasons that T Levels are proving to be such a success comes down to the dedication and commitment of dual professional 'teachers', who work enthusiastically with employers and stakeholder partners to create high-quality personalised learning experiences so that each learner can take their best next steps. Oldham College in Greater Manchester, for example, has seen great T Level success. A college that made a decision to specialise in technical and vocational education and training, serving a diverse community within an opportunity area, they have developed teaching for excellence strategies that have resulted in the T Level curriculum expanding year-on-year, with enviable results being achieved that are well above the national average. In 2025, Oldham College celebrated a 96% overall pass rate.

Teachers are supported to develop effective working relationships with employers, enabling co-design, planning and delivery, so that there is genuine two-way exchange that ensures an intentional curriculum with a clear line of sight to work. Students work on live briefs, undertake real-world projects and experience masterclasses, site visits, and develop relationships with local employers, which can include mentoring support. There is also a whole organisational approach taken to adopting competition pedagogy.

Teachers engage with WorldSkills UK Competence to Excellence continuing professional development, and wider training through the Centre of Excellence, so that they support their learners to pressure test and benchmark their performance, encouraging them to strive for mastery and skills excellence while developing a mindset for success. All students at the college participate in competitions that are industry sector specific each year, and many of them enter WorldSkills UK competitions regionally and nationally with the aim of representing the UK in the International Skills Olympics that take place biennially. There was cause for celebration in November at the WorldSkills UK National Finals for 2025, held in Wales, as Oldham College had medal winners: Jake Wilkinson (T Level: IT Support Technician) won Gold; Ellie Bennett (Foundation Skills: Hairdressing) won Silver, demonstrating excellence in skills-based learning; and Archie Casson (T Level: Electrical Installation) was also a finalist, showing T Level success at the highest level.

These experiences, in addition to the 45-day industry placement, are key to the success of Oldham College T Level students. Each student is supported to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours for their chosen occupation in the workplace, and support is also provided for employer partners to ensure a successful industry placement. Of course, the placement could result in more than a work experience—it could result in talent acquisition for the employer, and future employment for the T Level student. Oldham

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College prides itself on the support it provides for individuals with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), and steps are taken to ensure that learners are supported fully to gain valuable experience from their industry placement. For example, students may be accompanied by a mentor until they develop the confidence to take their best next steps.

A second example of teachers demonstrating pride in professionalism, and experimenting to see how they can provide high-value industry relevant learning experiences for their T Level learners, can be seen at Mid Kent College. Dr Alison Ackroyd, an ETF and Royal Commission Technical Teaching Fellow, and lecturer leading Science T Levels, has worked creatively with employers, university partners and stakeholders to bring learning to life for her T Level students, with positive impact.

Alison focuses on developing her students' knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout the course and during the industry placement, as practical laboratory experience is essential for T Level students. She works to explore opportunities for her personal and professional updating that will improve the quality of the learning experience for her students. Activity of recent years has led to Alison now being the Kent Hub Leader for the AMGEN Biotechnology Experience Programme (ABE), one of five UK Hubs working closely with Dr Phil Smith MBE at the University of Hertfordshire, who coordinates this global programme here in the UK. The programme is designed to inspire interest in developing skills in biotechnology that are vitally important for modern pharmaceutical research and drug development. It enriches and extends biology learning for learners aged 14-18 through the experience and excitement of real-world bioscience.

T Level students face the challenge in laboratory settings of accuracy and precision. The ABE-Kit offers guides and exercises to allow students to master pipetting techniques, sample measurements and data analysis—skills critical to genomic and pharmaceutical research, where even minor errors can have consequences. Throughout the course there is a strong emphasis placed on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to reduce errors, with T Level students routinely evaluating the calibration of micropipettes using industry protocols. By examining these techniques early, they gain an understanding of best practices in laboratory settings, preparing them for the technical demands of industry roles. On return from industry placements, it is routine practice for more experienced students to work with other students to peer evaluate technical competency. T Level students are also supported to record their competencies for the Science Council T Level Competence Log, a first step in professional registration.

Beyond skills, the AMGEN Biotechnology Experience kit introduces students to genomics, a rapidly advancing field with applications in healthcare and research, through activities like DNA extraction, cloning and electrophoresis. Students gain first-hand experience with molecular biology techniques. All experiences mirror real-world laboratory processes and reinforce the knowledge and practical capabilities that will benefit them in their future careers. If you would like to learn more about the ABE Programme, please take a look at the linked fact sheet: AMGEN Biotechnology Programme Fact Sheet

The last example demonstrates the importance of investing in the dual professional: updating staff, providing opportunities for staff industry insight placements and masterclasses, and encouraging opportunities for collaboration between cross-sector education providers, employers and key stakeholders. The recently published Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper highlights that high-quality teaching is the most important lever available to institutions to improve outcomes for individuals. There is an expectation that through greater employer collaboration, and a more joined-up approach between universities, colleges and wider post-16 education and skills providers, we will be able to raise standards, champion future skills and empower UK skills excellence.

T Levels are providing individuals with pathways to success—employment in their chosen industry sector, an apprenticeship, or progression to higher levels of study. Through these qualifications there is a gateway open to higher education for all who have the ability and desire to pursue it, with the earnings and career prospects it can bring. Higher education has an important role to play in ensuring that students from all backgrounds can realise their ambitions and future career goals. T Levels are delivering on progression and promise, ensuring that students are T-Shaped and future-ready.

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