Dear Sir/Madam,

As a national organisation representing the health sector, NHS Employers is pleased to provide a response to the consultation by the Department of Education (DoE) on the proposed development of T level programmes published on Thursday 30 November 2017.

We have summarised the key points highlighted by employers in the NHS to inform this response, and in addition have raised awareness about the consultation through our communications channels and encouraged individual organisations to respond directly.

Our response focuses on the key area of delivering T level programmes as these are identified as having more of a direct impact on employers.

The response emphasises these key points:

- There is a lack of knowledge and understanding about T level programmes.
- Employers are concerned about their capacity to accommodate work placements.
- A funding system is needed that allows for flexibility to support infrastructure.
- There is apprehension about how T level programmes will complement apprenticeship routes.

CURRENT CONTEXT FOR T LEVEL PROGRAMMES IN THE NHS

The NHS places great importance on investing in the education and training of the workforce to ensure that every member of staff has the skills required to provide the very best possible care for all. According to the Health Foundation (2017) more people than ever are using NHS services, with demand growing faster than the service can sustain. Employers in the NHS
recognise the need to redesign the way care services are delivered to better meet the needs of patients.

More responsibility is being placed on employers to invest in education and training of the workforce. There are a number of routes into education and training available for the existing and future workforce, these include pre-employment programmes, apprenticeships, and clinical training programmes, all of which include supervised work placements.

From 2018, T level programmes, which include a minimum of 45 days’ work experience, have the potential to become a training route into the NHS. The healthcare landscape is currently changing at pace and scale, to sustain momentum and not cause change fatigue it’s important to consider how T level programmes will complement existing routes into education and employment such as apprenticeships.

Capacity to support training and supervision due to staff shortages and the number of work placements already supported is one of the issues frequently raised by employers in the NHS. To deliver placements employers in the NHS need time, capacity and funding. This pressure is further compounded by emphasis from government to expand apprenticeship starts, introduce new roles such as the nursing associate role, and, in future, provide work placements for T level programmes.

Employers within the NHS are firmly committed to supporting students during training, and are keen to explore what further can be done to increase opportunities to access routes into roles. The introduction of new T level programmes could support to raise the profile of career pathways within the health sector via higher level apprenticeships, so that these are considered as an alternative to traditional degree courses, and as a part of a wider potential solution to addressing supply challenges across the broader workforce.

T level programmes also provide an opportunity for employers to strengthen their links with local colleges and the community and could play a key part to establishing and sustaining a future talent pipeline for organisations. Long-term investment in development and training can result in employee loyalty and a skilled workforce. However, the time required to develop the new T level programmes should not be underestimated and there will be a further period of time before employers, professionals and patients can recognise the benefits T levels have to offer. Employers would welcome further communications and engagement so they can be at the forefront of development and implementation of T level programmes.

EMPLOYERS VIEWS ABOUT THE PROPOSAL

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ABOUT T LEVEL PROGRAMMES

Employers have expressed a lack of knowledge about T level programmes set to launch later this year. For this reason, employers are struggling to understand how they should plan for the implementation of T level programmes, and the integrated work placements that they will host for students. Employers have also questioned how T level programmes will complement existing routes into the NHS, specifically apprenticeship routes.

Employers suggest training providers are also unclear about what action they need to take to make T level programmes a successful route into education and employment for young people. Providing employers with further communication and engagement on what actions
need to be taken to implement T level programmes and within what timescales would be beneficial to supporting successful planning and implementation.

CONCERN ABOUT THE CAPACITY FOR EMPLOYERS TO ACCOMMODATE WORK PLACEMENTS

Employers have shared two key challenges to hosting placements, and have suggested ways that they could be assisted in facilitating these. These challenges are:

- capacity to support training and supervision
- dedicated work placement resource.

Capacity to support training and supervision

Employers are keen to understand how the supervision and assessment element of T level programmes will be delivered. There is a concern as currently practice supervision and assessments are supported by professionals who carry this out on top of their other daily duties. If employers are to implement T level programmes in the NHS they will need to scale up their capacity to offer work based learning but be able to do this in a way that is cost effective, high quality and ultimately supported by a funding system that allows for flexibility.

Employers have suggested that a way of facilitating the work placement and assessment element of T level programmes would be to provide block work placements as this can provide a better learning experience for students. Providing block placements can also enable learning to be applied in a concentrated way and fit with service planning and delivery.

Dedicated work placement resource

Employers have fed back that capacity to support infrastructure can be challenging as not all organisations within the NHS have dedicated resources for work experience. Providing support for a dedicated work placement coordinator would help employers to continue to be proactive and support them with offering T level programme routes into education and training in the NHS.

Employers have also suggested that a dedicated work placement coordinator would be beneficial to strengthening relationships with local stakeholders in the community. Employers have proposed that the role of a work placement coordinator could include coordination of learner placements, including some of the disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks, assessment, and supporting with supervision to provide a robust placement for students. This would help to reduce the amount of additional staff capacity needed to support placements enabling them and allow staff more time to focus on supporting learners with the relevant skills needed to complete their placements.
A FUNDING SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS FOR FLEXIBILITY TO SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Employers have stated that an associated cost such as a levy system or minimum requirement of student numbers would impact on their ability to deliver T level work placements.

If employers are to offer T level programmes in the NHS they need to scale up their capacity to offer work placements but be able to do this in a way that is both affordable and cost effective, and supported by a funding system that allows for flexibility to support infrastructure. Employers would welcome ring-fenced funding to support with set up and infrastructure costs.

APPREHENSION ABOUT HOW T LEVEL PROGRAMMES WILL COMPLEMENT APPRENTICESHIP ROUTES

The introduction of a strategy without the infrastructure to support a large increase in the delivery of T level programmes provides significant challenges for NHS organisations. Employers have expressed a view that T level programmes be designed in a way that enables students to progress into higher level apprenticeships, but again due to limited knowledge of the subject, employers are unable to conclude how T level programmes should be designed to enable students to progress.

There is also a level of apprehension about how T level programmes will complement apprenticeship routes. For example, for students completing T level programmes and gaining a level three qualification (equivalent to A levels), this gives them the option to progress into a higher-level apprenticeship, university degree courses or into a role within the workforce. Employers are currently unclear about how T level programmes will contribute to the talent pipeline.

There is a clear need for further communications and engagement for employers to better understand how T level programmes are to be developed to fit into the career pathway and how they would be beneficial. For example, some employers have voiced concerns that these will stifle routes from entry level apprenticeships into the workforce, rather than seeing these as another route that contributes to the talent pipeline at an intermediate level, and still provides an opportunity for students to progress through the career pathway.

CONTACT

If you would like to discuss the content of this response further, or you require any clarification on the points raised, please contact Heidi Williams

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Yours faithfully,

Sue Covill, Director of Development and Employment, NHS Employers
ABOUT NHS EMPLOYERS

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.