

T Level industry placements at a system level

reflections from industry placement coordinators

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About us

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We support workforce leaders and represent employers to develop a sustainable workforce and be the best employers they can be. We also manage the relationships with NHS trade unions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Overview

- System colleagues play a vital role in helping organisations facilitate and upscale T Level industry placements. They foster collaboration among stakeholders, including employers and education providers, to streamline the placement process and ensure best practices are shared. By aligning placements across the system, they reduce duplication and provide clarity and develop standardised approaches such as shared induction processes and consistent policies.
- System colleagues can offer guidance and resources to help organisations effectively implement T Level industry placements, assisting with planning, administrative tasks, and compliance. They also engage young people by promoting T Level industry placements, organising events and raising awareness and interest.
- This comprehensive support helps build a skilled and motivated workforce for the future.

This resource explores how those working at a system level can upscale T Level industry placements in their system. It focuses on establishing the role of a system, the documents to support T Level industry placements and how to engage education partners and other colleagues.

Introduction

From 2023 – 2025 the Department for Education has funded industry placement coordinators (IPCOs) in seven integrated care systems (ICSs) across England to support upscaling of T Level industry placements. We spoke to these coordinators to learn how to improve placement delivery and support colleagues, so students and employers have the best placement experience.

This resource will support systems, regardless of locality, resources or dedicated T Level staffing, to upscale industry placement delivery. It is intended to be used by those working at a system-level, who are implementing and upscaling T Level industry placement delivery. Each system partner will require differing levels of support, depending on current infrastructure, upscaling ambitions and previous history of offering T Level industry placements.

For employers looking at the first steps to hosting industry placements, or considering upscaling the number of placements on offer, we have developed a [T Level hub](#) with guidance and case studies to support you with your industry placement journey.

Support from the Department for Education

The DfE has a range of materials for employers to support their placement journey. This includes guidance on planning the content of an industry placement, a guide on the type of delivery approaches systems can take and support with how to manage young people who, in many cases, will be in a professional work environment for the first time. There is also specific support for the health and care sector, where most placements are likely to be in health and science.

"T Level students bring a fresh perspective and an eagerness to learn. Feedback shows that T Level industry placements benefit not just the students, but those mentoring them, boosting team morale. Also worthy of mention is the positive impacts in terms of supporting staff with patient-centred care." –
Chiamaka Kennedy, IPCO, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS

The system as a driver of T Level industry placements

For those working at a system level, a systematic approach can help create a strategy for upscaling industry placements. This means setting the direction and encouraging stakeholder collaboration among organisations that have established T Level industry placements already, like larger NHS trusts. Smaller organisations, which may not initially have the necessary structures in place, will benefit from a more in-depth package of support and there may be areas of the system which have no exposure to T Levels.

Objectives and measures of success

System colleagues should set their success criteria based on workforce needs, the local context and the [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#), before looking at the specifics of industry placements. This will be system-specific but could involve onboarding new employers, upscaling of placements with current partners or expanding into new areas.

Initial analysis

Those working at a system level can start with a situational analysis using a questionnaire to gauge stakeholders'

understanding of T Levels and current industry placement provisions. This will help identify workforce supply needs.

The analysis results will set a baseline for future conversations and can then be used to inform the objectives and success measures.

Adapting to needs of employers

Once you have engaged with business partners from across each organisation, you should identify and adapt support based on the results. This support could include the creation of resources and a standardised memorandum of understanding and establishing an employer network to share best practices and concerns.

Employers may want the system colleagues to host practical events to raise T Level awareness, such as webinars, lunch and learn sessions or direct engagement with ward managers. We recommend asking colleagues currently hosting placements to share their insights on the benefits of hosting a T Level student. This also allows local-level concerns to be addressed.

Engaging with providers

At a system level, engaging with providers, either ad hoc or through structured forums, ensures consistency, especially where providers work with multiple employers. Inviting providers and employers to meet can align T Level industry placements with organisational needs and establish a continuous feedback process for improvement.

The responsibility of the system

Those working at a system level can act as an ambassador for T Levels, engaging organisations beyond the reach of individual employers. This could include initiating conversations with employers not yet offering industry placements, such as primary care, ambulance services and the voluntary sector. The system can also share best practices and foster collaboration, encouraging more areas to host industry placements. Colleagues can also ensure that T Levels are represented in a number of different spaces that discuss broader workforce needs, integrating T Levels as a part of wider system-level workforce strategy.

It could also be the responsibility of system colleagues to stay abreast of changes in industry placement delivery and guidance, to ensure that the information is disseminated to colleagues, and guide adoption across employers.

"Having a strategic approach to T levels across an integrated care system is crucial for growth and utilisation as a talent pipeline into our sector. Co-designing a curriculum and collaborating with educators helps shape the skills we need now and in the future. Efficient, consistent processes from engaging education providers to onboarding employers, through a shared system strategy, and ongoing stakeholder relationships are essential for success. T levels offer a fantastic opportunity for us to engage, create, and shape this talent pipeline for our future workforce." – Simon Bone, IPCO, NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire ICB

System strategy in practice

Chiamaka Kennedy, IPCO for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS, explains how a strategy was established in their system.

When considering strategy, Chiamaka defined success as the number of partners adopting T Levels, the development of supportive tools and resources, and some standardisation of the T Level industry placement among employers.

Chiamaka's approach

After an initial analysis, she found that one of the four trust partners was already engaged with T Levels, while two others expressed interest. This established where her focus needed to be with each employer. She focused on each employer's needs and, after discussions with business partners, identified the need for an employer network forum to engage with other employers, including local government. There was also a request for shared resources and a system-wide memorandum of understanding. The network was developed to prevent duplication, reduce the administrative burden, and share best practices. The network also helped expand T Level industry placements by suggesting strategies for engaging with new areas such as radiography, podiatry and maternity and supporting local authority partners to offer placements. Providers were invited annually to reflect on successes and challenges.

Chiamaka also initiated conversations with primary care and community pharmacy to explore further placement opportunities, sharing information and dispelling concerns. She organised webinars with those current placement providers, to showcase success stories, leading to new placements in radiography and podiatry.

Fostering collaboration through stakeholder groups

Kim Alexander, IPCO for Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, engages with three different stakeholder groups that represent the T Level agenda at different levels, ensuring T Level

employers and providers feel connected. Networks can be useful for ensuring the sustainability of T Level industry placements with those working at a system level serving as organisers and facilitators.

Kim's approach

Network group

The main interaction for T Level stakeholders is through a monthly network group. This group includes employers, providers and careers leads from across the system. By connecting as a network, the time burden on employers is reduced and confidence and awareness of T Levels grow. Each meeting has a spotlight session which allows employers and education providers the opportunity to share challenges and concerns, seek guidance from and inspire others.

"As a trust, we were working with two local T Level providers, however since engaging in the T Level Steering Group and making connections through the group, we are now working with and supporting T Level learners from six different providers across the trust." – Laura Horn, Lead Practice Learning Facilitator, Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust.

Education and training community of practice

This group discusses wider education and training topics, and T Levels are regularly discussed as they are integral part of education and training pathways across the system. This quarterly meeting has a dedicated theme, with allocated time for free

conversation. The sessions are open to any stakeholders working in the health and care education and training space, with regular attendance from employer heads of education and practice educators, integrated care board staff, the local authority and both further and higher education.

Education and training committee

This is the highest level of meeting that includes a T Level focus, with attendance from senior colleagues from employer and provider organisations. It provides strategic oversight, support and challenge in the delivery of a collaborative systemwide education and training plan and can be used as an escalation route for challenges and concerns and ensuring that senior leaders have a strategic understanding of T Level industry placements across the system.

These meetings happen every other month and the industry placement coordinator can provide updates on the system T Level landscape. As this group has representation from local universities, it also serves as a forum to discuss how T Levels can be an effective route into higher education. Senior leaders can also be asked for feedback to resolve concerns and explore how T Levels can offer a direct entry point into a health career.



Aligning placements across the system

Ensuring consistency of placements across the system streamlines discussions with providers and ensures certainty for everyone involved. It requires an understanding of the best times of the year for T Level industry placements, the structure that works for each system, and how it fits with demand for other placements, such as undergraduate students.

Having multiple placement models with multiple education providers can be labour-intensive for employers. A system-wide placement model reduces administrative pressures and streamlines the process.

Considerations for a system-placement structure

For all T Level students:

- Exam schedules: avoid placement times around exams and re-sits, to ensure good attendance.
- Avoid academic breaks: consider that many students might work for extra income during an academic break and faculty support from further education providers may be limited. Placements during breaks could disadvantage students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

For health T Level students:

- Overall placement activities and demand: consideration of other placement activities across the system. Although T level learners may be working with different staff groups to undergraduates,

there is a finite number of learners that could be hosted in the organisation at any one time, so quieter times may be more suitable.

- Operational pressures: avoid high-pressure times like winter or the changeover of doctors in training.

Beyond the placement structure itself, systems could consider further standardisation in the following ways:

- A shared induction process including statutory and mandatory (STAM) training.
- One placement handbook across the system.
- The same approach to DBS checks, occupational health and uniforms.
- A set agenda for T Level working group meetings.
- Standard work experience policies across the system, which include T Level students.
- A standard service-level agreement or memorandum of understanding for employers offering placements.

Student inductions

Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICS has a strong induction for students through its Social and Health Care Partnership Training Academy, which other employers can emulate. Similar to the training received by healthcare support workers (HCSWs), this involves two weeks of face-to-face sessions hosted at Telford College and 32 e-learning modules. Students learn the 15 standards of care for the Care Certificate, manual handling, resuscitation, personal care and catheter care, handwashing, food safety, professional behaviour and record keeping.

This training, provided by trust staff, makes up 75 hours of the placement as the learning is patient focused. Students train with newly appointed HCSWs who have completed DBS checks, which fosters informal mentoring and teamwork before starting their placements.

The benefits of a consistent system approach

Matt Holmes, IPCO for Sussex Integrated Care System worked with stakeholders across the ICS to create a consistent system approach to placements. Sussex ICS decided on a hybrid model of three days a week on placement for three to five weeks at a time.

The system found that this had the following benefits:

- Students feel a sense of belonging and integration into the clinical teams whilst on placement.
- The students are able manage their studies and connect with classmates.

- The students have regular contact with their college and tutors whilst on placement.

Most placements occur in the second year, with a three-week block at the end of the first year. This model includes e-learning, work taster days and a trust induction before starting placements.

To ensure consistency across the system, any new providers are asked to adopt this model. New employers have since come onboard and have followed this process. The system found that a formal structure streamlined the discussion process and allowed providers to integrate into the system quickly and effectively.

Documentation to support upscaling of T Level industry placements

Organisations within the system will benefit from a comprehensive set of documents to help establish and expand T Level industry placements. These documents support administrative tasks, can spark discussions about hosting placements and prevent duplication by employers. A shared suite of documents will be easier to update and can be included in network discussions.

For systems seeking support with the documentation, the DfE provide detailed guidance for employers. Referring to this ensures that you are accessing the most up to date, authoritative policy and guidance. Links to this guidance can also be integrated into local documentation for employers within the system.

Chiamaka Kennedy, IPCO for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS, created a toolkit to help organisations get started. It included role descriptions, interview packs, mid-point review templates for students, induction checklists, and a presentation for internal stakeholders to use to generate interest in T Level industry placements from other parts of their organisations.

A how-to guide for employers

A how-to guide or handbook is central to the documentation provided to employers, outlining steps for implementing industry placements, from early discussions with providers to supporting students at the end of their placement. The specifics of this document will depend on the local context, but could include:

- Support for employers: available system-level support, forums for engaging with other employers, sharing successes and escalating concerns.
- Objective setting: what is the purpose of the placement for both the student and the employer, and how does this vary across different organisations.
- Identifying suitable placement areas: guidance on engaging with organisational areas, student capabilities, mentoring support, and placement models (e.g. rotational, hub and spoke).
- Policies: example policies for industry placements such as safeguarding, absence and behaviour policies.
- Student role descriptions: consistent and clear role descriptions for different placements across the system.

The list above is not exhaustive and can be complemented by the other documentation noted in this section.

An ideal how-to guide

Fiona Lord, IPCO for North East London ICS, breaks down the specifics of what the how-to guide contains, to support other systems with creating a guide best suited to their requirements.

Fiona's approach

Getting ready to host a T Level placement

This includes information to support employers with establishing T Level industry placements, such as interacting with established T Level networks, engaging with clinical areas to gauge buy-in, and identifying pilot sites. It also advises stakeholders on what a T Level is, the locally agreed placement structure and tasks suitable for students.

The pre-placement planning stage

This section advises stakeholders on setting up industry placements based on local needs. It covers selecting eligible students through interviews or expressions of interest. It also guides employers on placement details, for example, whether they prefer placements in one area or a rotational model. It includes a sample role description, tailored for the system or type of organisation and guidance on the recruitment and upskilling of mentors.

Employer documentation

The suite of documentation includes a copy of the memorandum of understanding, an example of an honorary contract and other standard documents for employers including a standard student workbook.

Engagement with students

This section outlines safeguarding practices and suggests rules and expectations for students. It includes managing the sign-in process, examples of student timetables, listing expected standards and how to gather student placement feedback. It also

covers review points for organisations and advice from employers currently offering placements.

A focus on the talent pipeline

The guide can advise organisations on opportunities available to students. It includes information and case studies on T Level students progressing to local higher education institutions, apprenticeship pathways in local organisations or direct employment. Sharing the destinations of previous T Level students demonstrates return on investment for the health and care sector and is an impactful way to support employers to engage students.

Post-placement process

At the end of T Level placements, employers are encouraged to help students with their next steps and offer guidance on continuing in the health and care sector. The handbook contains system-specific information on the end-of-placement process, for example, offering guaranteed interviews, joining the bank, or providing support with application and interview skills.

"It needs to be more than a document of how to host T Level students. It's an analysis and improvement guide on how to use your knowledge and skills in health and social care to give the students the best experience possible. It's about how to develop strong relationships with providers." – Fiona Lord, IPCO, North East London ICS

Induction checklist

The training that students receive prior to starting on placement is crucial, including statutory and mandatory training, professional conduct discussions, and information on the employer and placement. System colleagues can develop an induction checklist for employers to use with students on arrival, the DfE have developed a sample induction checklist that can be adapted for a health and care context.

Student workbook

Employers should receive a copy of the student workbook, an example of which can be found on the HASO website. This workbook contains what students are expected to complete during their placement and should be developed between the employer and provider. It can also contain information reminding students of expectations, their role description and placement policies. If a student workbook hasn't been developed a list of required items can be shared.

Case studies

A bank of case studies can be developed to inspire employers and students when discussing career aspirations. These could be case studies relevant to the local context, for example similar sized systems, geographical location or organisations offering similar T Level placements.

System talent pipeline

Documentation for employers should include information on the system talent pipeline, outlining the opportunities for T Level students post-placement, examples are available from Skills

England. This helps organisations understand the broader health and care careers landscape. Some organisations may not have a strong understanding of the wider system talent pipeline, providing this information will help them give guidance to students on the health and care careers landscape.

Memorandum of understanding

A system-wide memorandum of understanding (MOU) ensures consistent understanding of stakeholder roles and responsibilities when hosting T Level industry placements, facilitating quicker engagement with new providers and employers.

The MOU, tailored to the local context, should outline the placement model, responsibilities of all parties, the full placement journey (including pre-placement and post-placement support), and issue resolution channels. It is a living document and should form part of employer and provider conversations as the placement offer in the system develops.

Creating a comprehensive memorandum of understanding

Ruth Field, IPCO for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICS, has created a comprehensive memorandum of understanding (MOU) which outlines the responsibilities of the employers, providers and students. This MOU is used by all providers and employers in the system and enables new employers and providers to start offering placements without individual negotiations

Ruth's approach

The MOU has the following sections intended to provide assurance of both the employer and provider responsibilities:

- Introduction to T Levels: explanation of what T Levels are and what the course provides.
- Placement requirements: a breakdown of placement requirements, structure, expectations, shift patterns, supervision and pastoral support.
- Commitment from employer: the number of students employers will commit to offering placements for, with the caveat that organisations will explore increasing placement opportunities by engaging with new areas or increase numbers in established areas.
- Pre-placement experience: includes work taster activities, introductions to the employer and any relevant training.
- Provider commitments: such as ensuring the student has occupational health clearance prior to starting placement, DBS checks, uniforms with the college logo and photo ID.
- Employer commitments: providing a local induction, a named supervisor and a buddy whilst on placement and support with completing the student's industry placement workbook.
- Absence policies: provided for both employers and the further education institution.
- Appendices: copies of relevant documentation such as the student industry placement workbook and industry placement guidance.

"Having a robust MOU in place ensures quality across all our industry placements. The MOU has been shaped by all those involved in the T Level industry placement process. We can refer to it to address concerns and ensure we're maintaining high-quality placements for students." – Ruth Field

The MOU is updated annually and signed by all parties before placements start. Some updates that have been made to reflect the learning taking place within the system are:

- Placement blocks: set dates for industry placement blocks, increasing system alignment but allowing for flexibility within these dates.
- Collaboration: providers are expected to collaborate with employers, through the ICS, to reflect workforce demands. This could involve providers running T Level health specialisms that match workforce demand.
- Community placements: policies about students travelling in cars, reflecting the increase in community placements, including safeguarding guidance and expectations of the students.

Engagement and promotion of careers

Those working at a system level are encouraged to engage with schools to promote careers in health and care, discussing pathways and dispelling myths about T Levels. This helps students learn about the breadth of roles and choose suitable placements for their career goals. Employers across the system can support career engagement for young people, both for those considering T Levels and those already enrolled. Career engagement ensures all students have equal access to relevant information and promotes widening participation.

Employers can support career engagement by:

- attending career events in schools, raising awareness of careers in health and care, T Level pathways to these careers and promote career options directly with providers
- visiting further education institutions during the first year of the T Level to offer career sessions or training sessions, which count towards the 35 hours of taster activities
- talking with students on placement about their options after they finish, like going to university, starting an apprenticeship, or moving into a healthcare support worker
- sharing local contacts with system-level colleagues to better engage with school career services and promote T Levels
- ensuring there are clear education and career pathways for young people, that integrate T Levels.

Colleagues in the system can work in partnership to promote T Levels as a talent pipeline. This includes:

- collaborating with apprenticeship leads to show how T Level students can transition into apprenticeships
- engaging with health and care banks to explore the onboarding of students and sharing the benefits of this option with those on placement
- working with local authorities to explore T Level pathways into care roles
- increasing health ambassadors' knowledge of T Levels and supporting them with resources.

"The NHS and social care sectors are facing increasing staff shortages. By introducing young people to health and care careers early, we can inspire them to pursue these paths and help mitigate future staffing issues. Early engagement broadens the pool of candidates, including those who might not have considered these fields. Many under 16s are unaware of the diverse career options available, such as social workers, radiographers, and biomedical scientists, beyond the more visible roles of doctors and nurses. This awareness helps them make informed career choices and builds a pipeline of future talent.

Early exposure these opportunities can inspire young people to develop essential skills for the effective operation of the NHS and social care systems. In Devon we have recognised the importance of gaining a wider audience, we are placing posters in GP surgeries and advertising on buses to promote the Health T Level." – Nicki Wright, IPCO, Devon ICB.

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