

May 2018

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T Level Work Placements Literature Review

1. Literature Review

1.1 T level policy intentions for work placements

In the budget of March 2017, the government announced that a new strand of classroom-based technical education for 16-18 year olds is to be introduced called 'T levels'. The proposals set out to build a new suite of occupationally-related qualifications that directly reflect the needs of industry in terms of each learner's ultimate skills and behaviours in particular occupations, and simultaneously draws on the ability and willingness of industry to engage in the process by making the completion of an employer-based work placement a mandatory element.



It is only in recent years that work placements have formed any significant part of the post-16 UK skills system, although they have been widely used in the UK employability and welfare-to-work markets, often on a job-trial basis, for some years. Despite general agreement that a range of benefits could accrue from them to both participants and employers, their use has been controversial (DfE 2012) and their outcomes and value for money often questioned, in part because their purpose has never been universally properly articulated or agreed (Mann 2012).

In the budget of March 2017, the government announced that a new strand of classroom-based technical education would be introduced, to be named 'T levels' (Camden 2017), the remit for which was placed with the Department of Education (DfE). A phased budget rising to £500m p.a. by 2023 was announced (HM Treasury 2017: 25), indicating serious backing by the government for the concept. A government consultation from December 2017 (DfE 2017a) stated that mandatory work placements will form part of the overall qualification, which in turn is being set at Level 3 (and broadly equivalent in scope to 3 A-levels). Within this model, an external work placement must take place, which is intended to last between 45-60 days across a total qualification duration of two academic years, and without which it will not be possible to complete the T-level qualification (DfE 2017a: 20).


The timetable for the rollout of T levels was initially set with the first teaching of 'pathfinder' routes in 2019, with all routes set to be taught by 2022 (DBIS/DfE 2016a: 44). This was subsequently amended by Minister Anne Milton MP (UK Government 2017) and the current timetable for implementation now expects the first T levels in Education, Digital and Construction to be taught for the first time in September 2020, although the ultimate timetable of full teaching for all T levels by 2023 remains in place.

1.2 Current purposes and practices in work experience/placements

In undertaking this research the author was unable to identify robust evidence that work placements (work experience of 1-2 weeks and longer placements, as opposed to apprenticeship placements) actively aid the delivery of technical learning. There is a recurrent theme in current literature which shows that while work experience placements are seen as useful for building and demonstrating overall employability and used with that purpose in mind, they are not generally used or viewed as vehicles for skills training. Moreover, employers do not generally want or expect them to fulfil this function. The evidence for the rationale of work placements in T levels is consistently rooted in the need to build general work behaviours, rather than whether or not their addition would be a benefit to the learning of 'actual' technical skills.

Whilst there is a broad anecdotal feeling that work placements explicitly incorporating skills training and application could bring about a relatively improved skills base when compared to relying on purely classroom-based routes, there is little hard evidence in the literature to demonstrate this. Mann (2012) is relatively unusual in devoting a specific part of his work to exploring this issue, but notes that 'it is an area where high quality research is relatively limited' (Mann 2012: 20). He concludes that whilst periods of work experience can improve overall motivation, the evidence of it directly enhancing the attainment of skills is at best mixed.

Indeed, UKCES (2015) found that



When recruiting new staff, more employers value work experience than either academic or vocational qualifications. Contrary to popular wisdom, employers find that the young people they employ are on the whole well prepared for work. (UKCES 2015: 9)

If employers therefore feel that young people seeking their first jobs are 'on the whole' prepared for work, and employers view periods of work experience and work placement as merely recruiting tools, it is important to understand the role work placements are intended to play within T levels, and to assess whether the evidence in available literature supports the proposition being made for them.

1.3 What are work experience and work placements for?

Work experience did not become an accepted part of the curriculum for school students until the extension of the Employment Department's Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in the

late 1980s. (NatCen Social Research/SQW 2017). Since that time, opportunities for short periods of work experience (generally one or two weeks) or a variety of models of more extended work placements have become more generally available, although an amendment to the Education Act 2002 in September 2012 removed the statutory duty on schools to provide periods of work experience (NatCen Social Research/SQW 2017: 12). They have therefore only relatively recently formed any significant part of the post-16 UK skills system with the introduction of Study Programmes and Traineeships, both of which were inherently mandated to include arrangements for work placements, albeit to a relatively small proportion of learners in post-16 education and training.

At the same time, work experience and work placements have been widely used in the UK employability and welfare-to-work markets, often on a job-trial basis, and were central to much of the methodology in Department of Work and Pension (DWP) provision between 1997 and 2015 such as the New Deal (House of Commons 1997) and the Work Programme (DWP 2017).

Both the outcomes and value for money of work experience have often been questioned, partly because its purpose has never been fully articulated and agreed between education institutions and employers (NatCen Social Research/SQW 2017: 12). However, there is a substantial body of evidence that the process of young people engaging with the workplace gives perceived benefits for both students and employers.

The Gatsby benchmarks of good careers guidance (Career Development Institute / Careers & Enterprise Company, 2017) acknowledge this; encounters with employers and employees and experiences of the workplace are rated as two of the eight good practice benchmarks. Noticeably, Gatsby agrees that the benefits of work experience and longer work placements lay in terms of overall employability, rather than as a benefit or trajectory to general technical learning.

In a seminal report, Alison Wolf (2011) contended that the qualification system was misaligned to industry needs and proposed the extension of work placements and work experience as part of the solution. Wolf however largely saw the incorporation of work experience not as a vehicle to aid learning but as an improved way of demonstrating ability of the learner to apply their learning in a real-world setting to potential employers. In the March 2017 budget, the Government announced that a new strand of technical education would be introduced, to be named 'T levels' (Camden 2015). A phased budget rising to £500m p.a. by 2022 was announced (HM Treasury, 2017: 25), indicating serious backing by the government for the concept. In a government consultation paper on the subject (DfE 2017a), the T-level qualification was set at Level 3 (broadly equivalent in scope to 3 A-levels), including a work placement element to last between 45-60 days, without which it will not be possible to complete the T-level qualification.

The consultation is relatively unambiguous as to the connection between the work placement and the qualification when it states that 'Students will study a broad occupational area before specialising, and will have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills on a substantial work placement.' (DfE 2017a: 8/9)

It is therefore proposed, that the work placement should be in a work environment directly related to the occupation being followed by the technical qualification element. It is not intended to act as a form of job trial, nor as a general vehicle to build employability skills – it is a vehicle to apply the skills and knowledge taught as part of the technical qualification, and T levels are therefore dependent for their existence on being able to demonstrate the learning they have imparted, in the workplace via a work placement.

It is worth at this point repeating the UKCES (2015) finding that 'When recruiting new staff, more employers value work experience than either academic or vocational qualifications. Contrary to popular wisdom, employers find that the young people they employ are on the whole well prepared for work.' (UKCES 2015: 9)

Research therefore indicates that despite qualifications being less important to employers than work experience, the benefit of a T-level work placement is built on its linkage to a qualification rather than because of its ability to build work experience. This is not to say that developing a policy that benefits the attainment of a qualification and simultaneously builds work experience is not a positive one. However, whilst it is relatively clear from the evidence that periods of work experience are considered to build overall employability, it is less clear that they build technical skills, certainly under current models. It is right therefore to consider where the evidence is that such an approach has potential to work, and what challenges this may present.

1.4 What are the relationships between work placements and technical skills development?


As noted above, Study Programmes and Traineeships were the first major strands of UK skills provision that incorporated work placements and work experience into their intrinsic design. Their introduction stemmed from the Government's implementation of the 2011 Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011), though this did not explicitly call for the implementation of work placements as such. Where Wolf did speak favourably of them was in terms of their relation to the development of overall general transferable skills, rather than as a demonstration of technical or occupational aptitude. She cited evidence (Berthoud and Iacovou 2000) that the experience of work led to greater incidences of future employment, using apprenticeships as a key example of where learning and work experience combined well - but in terms of work experience her report confined itself at Recommendation 21 to saying that 'DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as full-time students, not apprentices, and for reimbursing local employers in a flexible way, using core funds.' (Wolf 2011: 17)

In fact, the Wolf Report in the main covered the structure and purpose of qualifications in the system rather than the role of work experience as such, though it agreed the latter factor was important in operational employer recruitment decisions. She did not argue in this report that work experience was necessary in order to enable qualifications to be properly studied, or that it was required for the qualification to be more beneficial than was currently the case. In fact, Wolf quotes Hilary Steedman of the LSE as saying of the German system that 'employers are not in the least interested in any training ... but in the educational level of the applicants. Employers want the training to be done by them ...' (Wolf 2011: 41)

This supported Wolf's more general contention that the qualification system was misaligned to the needs of industry and required an overhaul. She did not explicitly say that including work experience as a mandatory part of qualifications was the best course of action to take to remedy this.

It was the DfE which introduced the concept of work experience placements as an integral part of learning provision (DfE 2015). They did so on the basis that Wolf had 'recommended increasing work-related provision for students aged 16 years and older' (DfE 2015: 4). In a brief section entitled 'Rationale for providing work experience opportunities to 16 to 19 year old's, the document cites the UKCES Employer Perspectives Survey of 2014, which found that relevant work experience was rated by 66% of recruiting employers as being a critical or significant factor looked for in candidates, and from Pearson/CBI in 2013 which found that 31% of young people starting their working lives do not feel they have the appropriate skills, citing a lack of work experience (71%) as their main weakness. It is notable however that neither quote demonstrates work experience being necessary to complete qualifications – only that there is a case for work experience being a part of a young person's preparation for entry into the workplace, which is a slightly different issue. Furthermore, the actual implementation of Traineeships and Study Programmes saw work placements being more or less directly related and structured to the needs of the qualification or non-accredited study aspects of the provision rather than to the needs of the employer, which could be argued, if anything, as exacerbating Wolf's argument that the qualification system is misaligned to employer needs rather than resolving it.

From an international perspective, the influential economic and social think tank the OECD reported that:



When evaluating young job candidates with little work experience, employers attach high importance to educational qualifications in the absence of other information on the quality of potential employees. On the other hand, for older workers with longer labour market experience, educational attainment is just one of the many pieces of information available about their qualities as employees.
(OECD 2013: 232)


It is a fairly small step from this quote to make a case that qualifications are therefore secondary factors in the thinking of some employers regarding recruitment, because for older age groups they matter less than work experience, and for younger age groups they are largely only important in the absence of work experience. In both cohorts it is the work experience itself, as much as if not more than the content of technical learning, that is of importance to the employer. It is not making a case that work experience helps to build skills – only that it allows skills to be demonstrated. In the case studies that form part of this project that were collated by AELP researchers, one employer is quoted as regarding the use of work placements merely as 'long format job interviews', with another expressing concern that employers are 'being asked repeatedly to be the crutch of the education system.' (AELP 2018)

There is nevertheless a case to be made for a set of technical qualifications such as T levels that combine accredited technical learning with a period of work experience. This connection was made to some extent by the Sainsbury Panel review (UK Government 2016a), which said that the UK was behind in its engagement of employers in the design and delivery of learning compared to its international competitors. Its solution was clear: 'By getting employers more involved in both the design and delivery of training, the reforms will reinforce the value of training to employers, while also ensuring that the education system delivers the skills employers need.' (UK Government 2016b: 17)

This begins to make a case that work experience placements could successfully act as an inherent vehicle for the delivery of technical learning.

Research from IPPR (IPPR, 2015) reported that 72% of the UK employers surveyed stated that formal qualifications and courses were effective at making candidates more employable. Despite this, they also reported that the bulk of UK spending on employment support was being spent on public employment services (e.g. Job Centre Plus) and administration (80%), with only 5% spent on training, and 2% on employment incentives. Once again a recurrent theme emerges, whereby research shows that work experience placements are being used in their context of usefulness in building overall employability rather than as a vehicle for skills training – indeed, there is scant evidence that employers actually want or expect them to fulfil this function, and particularly not if they have to actively deliver the learning content themselves.

One website that does explicitly make a link between work placement and study is that of the NCUB (National Centre for Universities and Business), an independent and not-for-profit membership organisation that promotes, develops and supports university-business collaboration across the UK:



**Quality placements should either be linked to the student's study or to their long-term career goals.....if placements are taken alongside study there should be a reasonable balance of academic and placement workloads. It is also important that the student's prior learning and technical skills are at an appropriate level for the projects/activities they are undertaking.
(National Centre for Universities and Business nd)**

There is however a difference of context here – the NCUB are primarily concerned with academic study that requires business collaboration rather than vocational study. The DfE in their guides to setting up high-quality placements do not generally deal with the need to incorporate study and if anything, highlight the principle need to make it as easy for the employer as possible rather than making it useful for the learner (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2017: 3).

A report from JP Morgan Chase & Co (JP Morgan Chase 2015) looked at summer youth employment programmes in the USA. This found that young people were facing both diminished opportunities to gain work experience, and a labour market that is increasingly demanding a more skilled workforce, concluding that 'These heightened expectations mean that it's more essential than ever for young people to gain work experience and develop skills today to enable them to compete in the global workforce in the future.' (JP Morgan Chase 2015: 1). It does not make a clear recommendation as to how this should happen however, beyond generally advocating for periods of summer work experience and advising that 'it is essential to understand which skills-based approaches can be most efficiently designed and delivered, which ones are proving most effective in building the skills of the participants, and which models can be most easily scaled and replicated.' (JP Morgan Chase 2015: 16)

There is little hard evidence for the view that work placements explicitly incorporating skills training and application (as opposed to apprenticeship placements) bring about a relatively improved skills base when compared to relying on purely classroom-based routes. The evidence for the role of work placements in T levels is in fact consistently rooted in the need to build general work behaviours rather than any efficacy in building technical skills.

This is not to say that there are no examples of work experience placements being used as the direct vehicle of learning in technical contexts – for example, Curo Group, a Bath-based housing association and house-builder, offer a range of NVQ unit-accredited work placements with both themselves, their contractors, and partner organisations. Their website (Curo Group *nd*) includes several case studies of individuals who have benefitted from work placements. However, Curo appears to be one of very few employers that link their work placements to formal accreditation in this way, and there is limited evidence of the more general effectiveness of work placements in delivering learning.

1.5 Challenges and success factors for extended work placements within the new T level qualifications

There are substantial challenges to be faced in the implementation of a work placement regime to support T levels, not least the volume. The original Report of the Independent Panel into Technical Education known as the 'Sainsbury Panel review', (from which the T-level proposals ultimately derived) estimated a need for 250,000 such placements per year for 17 year olds alone (UK Government 2016: 53). There is therefore a concern that such scale may mean that (particularly in the early years) any restricted supply of placements will impede equality of

access and opportunity, benefiting those with "contacts" who can offer work placements rather than the general population. This concern is shared by Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008) who found clear evidence that work placements tend to reflect and reproduce patterns of social class inequality, rather than widening students' vocational horizons 'with working class kids getting working class placements and middle class pupils experiencing the benefits of "professional placements"'.

For its part, the Equalities Impact Assessment (DBIS/DfE 2016b) published alongside the Post-16 Skills Plan (DBIS/DfE 2016a) did not tackle this point. Whilst concluding that the technical reform programme as a whole would proportionately impact on disadvantaged groups more than others, it did so on the basis of projected levels of participation rather than in terms of ultimate learning benefit. Specifically, it only very briefly touches on the role of work placements within the reform programme and makes no comment at all about the potential impact of these in terms of access and equality of opportunity.

There is also concern that the huge expansion of work placements required under the T-level proposals will result in a further contraction of the youth employment market (in particular for part time work). Research by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES 2015) indicated that sectors that valued work experience more highly in their recruitment decisions (such as construction) were not generally tending to recruit young people, which may infer that in those sectors at least, any widening of work placement availability for 16-18 year olds may have little impact on the availability of paid work for them. On the other hand, it also reported that in sectors such as education over half of employers (55%) were recruiting straight from education institutions, whilst in many others (for example hospitality, health and retail) such rates were in excess of 32%. It could thus be inferred that in these sectors, the availability of 'free' periods of extended work placement may well supplant paid work in some cases and thus restrict the opportunity for actual employment of young people.

It has been recognised from the outset that the work placement component is fundamental to T-level design, and with this in mind DfE retained The Challenge – a charity delivering integration programmes for young people including the National Citizen's Service - to run a pilot programme among providers to start model testing for delivery (The Challenge 2017). However, of the 21 pilot providers selected, only one was not a Further Education college, this was criticised as insufficient to begin to model the potential scope of innovation that there might be in the sector as a whole (Camden 2017). As part of the implementation programme surrounding T levels, the DfE introduced the Capacity and Delivery Fund (DfE 2017b) worth £70m, to run from April 2018 to support providers to build the capability and capacity to deliver work placements alongside classroom-based provision. Feedback will be formative as delivery happens, with a report scheduled for August 2018. However, the CDF is in most cases likely to merely fund interim models of work placement as a "bolt-on" to the delivery of existing technical qualification programmes of study. As a "pump-prime" to begin to build ultimate sector capacity this approach is understandable, but it is unlikely to produce robust and reliable evidence as to how the work placement model as envisaged under the brand new qualification stream of T levels is likely to work, and what challenges may result.

AELP, the leading representative body for independent training organisations in England, drew on the collective

experience of its 860+ member organisations to identify 8 major challenges in establishing viable work placement programmes to meet the requirements of T levels (AELP 2018a):

- » Profile of local industry by sector - a T level offering can only reflect occupations that are already in place at sufficient scale to make a learning offer viable, not what may develop in the future.
- » Relative costs of single and multiple placements
- » Employer capacity to support and mentor
- » Legal constraints - particularly on the work that may be undertaken by 16-18 year olds in some sectors.
- » Accommodation of existing paid part-time work commitments
- » Travel-to-placement availability and costs
- » Subsistence facilities and cost
- » Adjustments for SEND/LLDD learners

AELP argues that the existing experience and expertise in employer engagement demonstrated by apprenticeship and traineeship providers, and the processes of work placement management used by providers in the welfare-to-work space should also be used in order to build a viable work placement structure for T levels. This is because the basis of most of the identified challenges are already familiar to such providers and to one extent or another have already been addressed and/or overcome.

Most of the literature surrounding challenges in establishing work placements does however concentrate on the employer perspective rather than those faced by the education supply side, or indeed on the participant themselves. Guidance from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2014) is one of the most high-profile pieces on the implementation of work experience in the UK in recent years. This was aimed at employers and includes 16 employer case studies offering their reasons for being involved in work placements, and what worked effectively. This was an important piece because it was published at a time when work experience and work placements were receiving a raft of negative publicity and were the subject of judicial reviews at the Department of Work and Pensions.

The publication sought to address the major headline issues that it felt might detract from engaging employers, which were identified in a section entitled Mythbusting (UKCES 2014: 6) as:

- » the prevalence of red tape
- » a perception that work experience could only ever be short periods of relatively unproductive time
- » a perception that no business benefits would result.

These 'myths' were 'busted' using factors relating to workforce productivity and diversity rather than because the

periods of work placement helped to cement skills in the young person or the potential workforce. However, a link was made to the development of skills in the existing workforce, rather than the work experience participant:

Staff can really benefit from managing young people on work experience placements ... Supervising and coaching young people on work experience also offers an excellent opportunity to develop management capabilities, especially for those who may not usually have these responsibilities or who are just starting out as managers.
(UKCES 2014: 8)

A small range of overarching issues to employer engagement was also identified by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD 2014). A section entitled 'What You Need to Know' identifies five major areas that they felt employers would be concerned about in considering whether or not to engage in work experience – four of these centred on aspects of process and bureaucracy, and one on potential pay implications. None of them related to whether a period of work experience would facilitate a higher level of training or skill among the participants than would have been achieved without. The issues were felt to be about how the employer would accommodate the period of work experience, rather than the benefit that a work experience participant would bring to the company or (for that matter) to themselves, should they subsequently become an employee of the host organisation.

This raises an interesting point regarding the relationship between the work placement and the T-level qualification – if all the evidence, and thus the rationale, of work placements in technical work environments is that they serve to build general employment behaviours, then there is no inherent need for the host environment of the placement to reflect the nature of the actual T-level qualification being studied – any work placement in any 'real-world' work setting should suffice.

This could both solve and present challenges to establishing T levels and work placements on the scale required. On the one hand, relaxing the need for the work placement to be a direct occupational reflection of the qualification could mean many more placement opportunities become available than would be the case if such a limitation was in place. Given the numbers required, and the inherent limitations on availability that will be imposed by the existence or otherwise of particular industrial sectors in particular locations, this is likely to relatively increase the availability of T-level provision across sectors in a wider range of localities. On the other, diluting the link between the T-level qualification and the work placement questions how the model improves upon the current situation, by undermining the role of the work placement as a specific vehicle to build relevant technical occupational skills.

Other issues relating to the challenges of implementing large-scale work placement programmes may also be illustrated with reference to the experience of the growing Internship market. The IPPR reported in 2017 (IPPR, 2017) that up to around 70,000 internships are taking place each year, although only around 11,000 are being advertised. In the view of this report, internships are becoming a required supplemental to the attainment of a degree, which is increasingly insufficient in isolation to secure relevant employment:

**Nearly half ... (of employers) report that candidates who have not gained work experience through an internship will 'have little or no chance of receiving a job offer' for their organisations' graduate programmes, regardless of academic qualifications.
(IPPR 2017:3)**

This gives rise to concerns that internships are becoming the prerogative of those with 'contacts' rather than becoming a generally accessible means of gaining work experience. If T-level work placements must take place in occupationally-relevant settings, and the numbers and/or availability of such occupational settings are limited, then a similar scenario could play out with the implementation of the T-level programme which would limit its effectiveness nationally and certainly not align with any social mobility agenda that it may seek to support.

The JP Morgan report cited earlier is also instructive here with regard to the relationship between the provision of placements and paid work opportunities. Whilst it primarily explores summer employment opportunities rather than work experience placements per se, it suggests that a skills-based programme of summer employment would be beneficial but warns that 'many cities and programs face trade-offs between investing in skills-based opportunities and using their resources to expand the number of summer jobs of any type.' (JP Morgan Chase, 2015: 16)

This raises the issue that given the huge expansion of work placements required under the T-level proposals, the youth employment market (in particular for part-time work) will come under immense pressure as employers, through accident or design, substitute part-time paid opportunities with T-level placements.

1.6 The roles of employers in providing skills training

The rationale of linking T-level qualifications directly to the workplace experience may also play to a general policy aim of raising the active involvement of employers in skills development as opposed to being merely passive 'consumers'.

This subject was covered in length by Ewart Keep of Oxford University (Keep, 2015). His paper takes the view that skills policy continues to consistently over-estimate – or simply ignore – the willingness or otherwise of employers to assume an active role in skills development. He points out numerous examples of when the government has tried to raise the bar in terms of learning content delivered by employers, only to meet significant resistance from them. Indeed, Keep argues that in moving to a compulsory apprenticeship levy, 'the government is admitting that its ambitions for a larger and higher-quality apprenticeship system cannot be met by relying on voluntary employer action.' (Keep, 2015: 18)

The report casts doubt on the overall willingness or desire of employers as a whole to play a widescale and integral part in the design and delivery of skills training, quoting former Skills Minister Nick Boles as saying, 'I think we should all be honest ... and observe that the employers involved in delivering apprenticeships under (the trailblazer) pilot are employers of a particular kind ... they're not necessarily absolutely typical.' (Keep, 2015: 19)

Keep argues that the UK government has consistently fallen into a policy trap of continuing to frame the role of employers in skills development on the basis of 'national interest' despite the fact that national industrial policy has offered no protection to those employers in competing internationally – indeed, it has opened them up to unprecedented swathes of foreign investment and ownership, whereby profits are increasingly taken offshore. This is arguably best facilitated by a short-termist low-skill equilibrium rather than investing in higher skill levels. This aligns with the view that employers are not necessarily interested in skills per se, but in what skills may contribute to meeting (particularly short-term) organisational objectives. This is perhaps exemplified at least in part by a quote from the Chair of the management board of the Local Economic Partnership Network, Alex Pratt, when he said that 'my staff are assets being leased by my business, they are not assets that belong to my business. Their value stays with them as an individual (if they move companies).' (Offord, 2014)

This reflects a significant base of research which consistently argues that employers do not, in general, seek any improved role in the development and delivery of skills training, and certainly do not generally wish to become deliverers of it. For the most part, they tend to feel that skills will never be in their possession as an employer, but are firmly rooted in the individual concerned and could just as easily be taken elsewhere.

Nevertheless, on the basis that ultimately technical skills are deployed to the benefit of employers, government policy is forcing them to support such provision in two ways whether they want it or not – through the imposition of a mandatory apprenticeship levy, and (less directly) by proposing a fundamental overhaul of the technical education system that is reliant for its delivery on the participation of employers. The danger must be

therefore that if employers do not engage to the levels required, then the system of technical training as a whole will founder.

The stake is that employers will not allow this to happen and, in the absence of a choice, will therefore take a more active role in both the design and delivery of training rather than continuing to merely act as passive recipients of state-funded and delivered 'government schemes'.

1.7 Conclusion

The role of work placements within T levels is presented by the proposals for T levels as an improved vehicle with which to facilitate skills development relative to the current system of overall classroom-based technical education. However, there is little hard evidence that such an approach works, or that it improves upon the current situation whereby learning is not normally inherently dependent on a period of work experience.

The available evidence confirms that periods of work placement and work experience are more usually viewed by employers as recruiting tools – 'a long format job interview' - to assess overall attitudes and behaviours. They may give the participant an extended opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they already have, but are not usually seen as discrete opportunities to build those skills further. Nevertheless, this appears to be the basis of the rationale for their inclusion as an inherent part of T-level design.

If there is a policy intent to combine the existing general use of work placements as "long format job interviews" with an intent to use them to actively build technical knowledge and skills, this is not a detrimental proposal in itself. There is however little evidence that this latter approach will achieve its objectives, and no evidence regarding the ramifications of an attempt to combine the two approaches. It cannot therefore be definitively said that the new approach is an improvement on the current models of technical education if no trialling or testing of the concept has been undertaken. The Challenge's pilot programme appears to be overwhelmingly examining models being created by an existing part of the FE system rather than examining variety and innovation from elsewhere, whilst the Capacity and Delivery Fund is likely to merely fund the "bolting-on" of work experience to existing models rather than trial new forms.

There is also some concern that the scale of work placements required for 16-19 year olds under the T-level proposals may adversely affect the market for paid employment for this cohort.

This project also undertook two questionnaire surveys, one with training providers and the other with employers, almost all of whom are already engaged in work experience or placements for young people in England and so may reasonably be expected to be among the early adopters of T levels. These surveys, conducted in March/April 2018, build on this literature review by investigating more up-to-date and in depth issues of current practice and purpose, awareness of T levels, challenges and support. They are reported in the accompanying documents stored on the same web page as this literature review.

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