TLevel Foundation Year programme

Supporting young people to progress onto and succeed on a T Level

Delivering the route-based project

April 2024

Purpose of resource

This resource is intended to support education providers delivering the T Level Foundation Year programme by setting out some of the key considerations for designing and delivering effective projects.

Background

The [Framework for Delivery](#) sets out our expectation that all students should complete a small project related to their chosen T Level route as part of the T Level Foundation Year programme. Sitting within the technical component of the programme, the project provides an opportunity to support the application and development of students' technical knowledge and understanding, whilst helping them to prepare for the T Level employer-set project.

The project complements the [national technical outcomes](#) that have been developed for each T Level Foundation Year programme route. It should give students the opportunity to combine their knowledge and skills to develop a piece of work in response to a real-world issue in their chosen occupational route and, where feasible, for meaningful interactions with employers. Tackling an issue that is topical and relevant to their chosen route will be a key source of motivation for students.

To help them prepare for T Level employer-set projects, and to ensure consistency for students, the project should support students to:

- develop their approach to planning a project brief
- conduct research using appropriate techniques
- apply appropriate knowledge and skills
- produce a project outcome

How to use this resource

Education providers have some discretion about how they design and deliver route-based projects. This resource covers some of the key practical issues relating to project design and delivery which education providers will need to consider when delivering this element of the programme. It is not intended to be an exhaustive guide.

Supporting students

Education providers will need to ensure that students are clear from the outset:

- why they are undertaking the route-based project and its overall aims and objectives
- the specifics of the particular project they are undertaking, for example, the project brief and the issue or problem they will be addressing
- what they need to produce and achieve by the end of the project
- how their work will be assessed
- the importance of planning and keeping their project on track

Students will need to be supervised to ensure that the work they are doing is appropriate and on track.

Project design and delivery considerations

Determining size

Projects are expected to be small. The exact size of the project (in terms of hours) and the expected outcome is for education providers to determine, based on the development needs of students along with wider programme design.

Setting the brief

The route-based project provides an opportunity for students to pursue projects which motivate and engage them. Teachers may therefore wish to offer a range of topics or provide a set of project briefs from which students can choose. All projects should be feasible for students to achieve and relevant to their area of study.

Some of the key considerations in setting project briefs include:

- clarity of focus and specific project aims which reference the project outcome
- the knowledge and skills that it will enable students to develop
- the outputs that students will produce, such as a written report or artefact
- ensuring student ownership of project objectives
- scope for initial research, drafting and re-drafting at the project planning stage
- opportunities for students to interact with employers
- how to link the project to a student's aspirations

While the project sits within the technical component of the programme, it provides opportunities to apply English, maths and digital skills, and to develop key transferable skills and positive social behaviours. As such, education providers can consider how the project can support and reinforce student development across other aspects of the programme.

Timing

Education providers will need to consider at what point within the T Level Foundation Year programme the project is delivered, and over what time period. Projects that take place towards the beginning of the programme, for example, can allow students to test areas of interest early on, but provide limited scope for applying their technical knowledge and skills. By contrast, projects that take place towards the end of the

programme provide an opportunity to consolidate learning that has taken place throughout the year, although at this stage students may have less time to complete, present and receive impactful feedback on their projects.

Education providers could deliver the project over more than one term if they wish. They could consider, for example, setting mini projects early in the programme, which may last for no more than one week, as a way of helping students to develop the necessary skills before starting their main project later in the year.

It may also be beneficial for some students to start and finish their projects at different times, based on individual development needs and readiness. This approach can also allow for phased interaction with employers. A staggered approach like this would require careful planning to enable teachers to monitor student progress and project success.

Equipping students for the project

It is important that students are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake their project successfully. These will include:

- technical knowledge and skills related to students' chosen T Level route
- planning skills, including identifying discrete steps and sequencing activities
- research skills, including the ability to search for and identify suitable sources of information
- project management skills, including time, resource and task management

Supervision during the project

Education providers will need to consider how to supervise students whilst they are undertaking the project. There are different ways that students can be supervised and supported, for example:

- during supervised sessions on, for example, the development of research and project management skills
- through small group or individual tutorials (these could be scheduled on a regular basis while students are in their technical classes, perhaps with a longer session when a key milestone has been reached, for example at first draft stage)
- drop-in sessions to enhance core support (it is helpful to keep a log of agreed actions and progress between tutorials)
- allowing time to provide feedback to students on a regular basis, and encouraging student self-reflection on their progress

Assessment approaches

There are no national expectations about how route-based projects should be assessed, so education providers are able to determine their own approaches. Since the project is intended to provide useful preparation for T Level employer-set projects, education providers could consider how they can use assessment on the Transition Programme to help prepare students for how they will be assessed on T Levels. The T Level employer-set project is assessed against five assessment objectives:

- AO1 plan an approach to meet the project brief
- AO2 apply core knowledge and skills as appropriate

- AO3 select relevant techniques and resources to meet the brief
- AO4 use maths, English and digital skills as appropriate
- AO5 realise a project outcome

Quality assurance

A well-designed quality assurance process will support high-quality project outcomes. A successful quality assurance model:

- clearly articulates the assessment criteria for the type(s) of project outcome that best suit students' interests, capabilities and project topic
- monitors aspects of teaching, learning and assessment from start to finish
- logically orders the evidence, ensuring it is relevant and appropriate to the project type
- records how the assessment criteria have been met
- ensures that outcomes are shared

Where assessment is carried out by more than person, there will need to be a process of internal standardisation to ensure there is consistent application of the criteria set out at the beginning of the project. This approach will ensure high-quality outcomes and consistency in assessment across different project types.

Employer involvement

Projects based on a real issue or scenario relevant to employers can be motivational for students and can enhance the development or application of industry-relevant technical knowledge and skills. Employers can be involved at various stages during a project.

Employers could, for example:

- co-design a project or set a project challenge or live brief
- provide access to resources and experiences that aid or support the completion of the project, for example facilitating student visits to the workplace
- provide mentoring for groups or individual students as they undertake their project and provide information by answering any queries students may have as they complete the project
- act as an informed audience by reviewing project outcomes and providing technical and industry-relevant feedback to students

All of these are motivating opportunities for students to become involved with employers, and will help them to develop the confidence, skills and behaviours that are required for the T Level industry placement.

Building project skills throughout the transition year

For one college in the South West, the route-based project has been a key element of their T Level Foundation Year programme since it was first delivered in 2020/21. Engagement with industry partners showed that the ability to create, plan, deliver and review a project are skills which are highly valued by employers. The college saw the inclusion of projects as an opportunity for students to explore in greater depth subjects related to their chosen technical route, in a way that supports the development of crucial transferable skills and positive behaviours.

The college positioned the project as a standalone element of their T Level Foundation Year programme, because of its importance in developing students' attitudes and behaviours for the workplace. At the same time, teaching staff took opportunities to embed learning from other elements of the programme, including through the contextualisation of English and maths.

The college adopted an incremental approach to delivering projects, with students building up their project skills in the early part of the year before pursuing an independent project towards the end. In term 1, the teaching team guided students closely to achieve a clear and tangible end goal, with planned outcomes and dedicated teaching in time management, project planning and research skills. In term 2, students were required to take greater ownership over project content as they completed a small project qualification with a clear steer towards their chosen T Level route, and with staff providing periodic feedback and targets to help them develop their outputs. In the final term, students chose a short, intensive 'real-world' project which allowed them to focus on the pathway they planned to pursue at T Level.

The college has worked closely with local employers to develop work-based scenarios or case studies that students can address in their projects. Employer boards also feed in the soft skills and behaviours that they particularly value, allowing teachers to ensure that projects provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop these. In addition, employers have endorsed students' completed projects, providing further recognition of achievements and complementing the college's approach to assessment, which focuses on effort, progress, attitudes and behaviours.

Projects completed during the college's first year of delivery included a 'nostalgia book' to engage local elderly care home residents while COVID-19 restrictions were in place, a remote weather station and a children's book. The college believes students have benefitted significantly from developing these tangible products, which have provided a source of purpose, motivation and focus. It now aims to ensure that students have the opportunity to put these outputs to practical use within the college and wider community.