Department for Education

Process Evaluation of Support for T Level Industry Placements

Research Report

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Government Social Research

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Executive summary

The T Level programmes represent a radical reform of vocational qualifications in England and ambitions for them are high. An integral component of the new qualification will be the inclusion of an industry placement which enables technical skills to be developed and honed, and which builds links between the curriculum and the workplace. The Department for Education set up the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) with the aim of helping providers prepare for the phased roll-out of industry placements and T Levels from 2020. The CDF was designed to operate across two academic years (2018-19 and 2019-20).

In the first year of CDF (2018-19), providers receiving CDF funding also received non-financial support delivered by different stakeholders: 1) The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) field teams was the link between departmental policy and providers and offered support by telephone; 2) Association of Colleges (AoC) and The Challenge developed new guidance and marketing materials to providers and delivered workshops and intensive support; and 3) The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) developed employer interest for industry placements and referred employers to the CDF providers.

In 2018, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned by the Department to evaluate the first year of the CDF and its associated support package to providers. The work follows on from our evaluation of the T Level industry placements pilots[1] in the academic year, 2017-18. The objectives for the current study were two-fold: 1) to explore challenges and solutions to the implementation of industry placements; and 2) to evaluate the effectiveness of the support offered to CDF providers. This report presents findings from an evaluation undertaken in two phases, comprising qualitative interviews with providers, employers and stakeholders; an online survey of providers; analysis of the intensive support reports providers submitted to the AoC/The Challenge; and analysis of the management information providers submitted quarterly to the ESFA.

The evaluation found that the implementation of industry placements had broadly been successful although some challenges remain. One of the primary activities that providers undertook in CDF year 1 was engaging with employers to source placements. Providers had a target of sourcing 315+ hour (with an average of 350 hours) placements for 10% of their eligible cohort of learners. The qualitative research found differences between providers that had previous experience of employer engagement (including pilot providers and large general FE colleges with existing employer links) and those who did not, in particular sixth form colleges.

The second important factor in providers meeting their target was how effectively employer engagement activities were resourced. Where providers had fallen behind targets, they described challenges with staffing and capacity. Here again, there were differences by provider size and type. Funding was provided based on the number of learners that would be placed and, as such, providers with larger eligible cohorts of learners received more

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-industry-placements-pilot

funding and could invest this in staffing to support employer engagement. In sixth form colleges with small eligible cohorts, placement sourcing was commonly shared between different staff members (including teaching staff). Consequently, they had less time and capacity to invest in employer engagement.

The first year of CDF gave providers an opportunity to test different 'engagement' messages with employers. One approach was to highlight the benefits of placements (increased capacity or giving back to the local community); another was to market the qualities of the learners (their ability to bring fresh ideas or skills). The message providers used most frequently, and the one they found the most effective, was that placements offer employers an opportunity to develop young people's skills and shape the future talent pipeline. This was also the message that employers who had offered placements this year had found to be the most compelling.

Of the 11 T level routes, providers considered Catering, Education and Childcare and Hair and Beauty as most easy to source placements for. These industries have a long history of offering young people work experience and suitable employers are found in every locality. In contrast, providers considered Digital and Creative and Design routes the most difficult, largely due to the lack of suitable employers local to the providers. Employers in these industries (and employers in Construction, Engineering and Manufacturing and Health and Science) also believed there were obstacles to hosting under 18s in the workplace which surrounded concerns about health and safety, data protection and whether employers' insurances could cover this.

Departmental guidance set out that the placements should be of high quality: 315+ hours in duration, relevant to the industry and outcome-focused with agreed learning objectives. Providers assessed that the provision of high-quality placements could be difficult. Many found this length of placement challenging in industries where SMEs are prevalent and, whilst most providers aimed to achieve a good match between learners' career aims, placement content and the curriculum, there was also evidence of some providers not yet fully embracing one the central tenets of the policy: moving away from the acquisition of soft skills, such as communication, understanding of the workplace and team work, through work experience, to learners acquiring and applying technical skills.

Employers that had hosted industry placements were broadly positive about their experiences. Employers considered the extra resource to manage placements to be in line with their expectations for other new starters. Employers were content that learners had developed and practiced technical skills that were specific to the industry. While most employers felt support from providers during placements was sufficient, a number of employers would have appreciated a better understanding of the learners' curriculum at the outset in order to relate this to the workplace. Many also called for better learner preparation, in particular around managing expectations on attendance.

Providers, in particular sixth forms colleges, experienced challenges with fitting the industry placements into timetables. Some thought that this related to retrofitting placements into existing qualifications not designed to embed them; providers believed that when they can design their timetable to be bespoke to the T Level programme, this issue will be alleviated. Many employers said they can be flexible on the placement model

and precise timetabling if required. However, they also believed this should result from a dialogue with the provider to agree what works best to accommodate their own and the learners' requirements.

The evaluation found that the support offered to providers, through ESFA, AoC and The Challenge, and NAS overall worked well. Providers thought funding levels for the CDF were broadly adequate. In the main, the funding was used to invest in additional staff or increasing hours of existing staff. It was also directed to support learners with travel and equipment costs and to invest in their own (or employers') software and hardware. In addition to the CDF, providers were allocated additional 16-19 discretionary bursary funding to support learners on placements with subsistence and travel. Providers used this fund for learners' travel in the main, and meals in some cases, and considered the alleviation of learner costs an important part of delivery. However, the evaluation found that not all providers were attentive to the rules around the discretionary bursary fund.

Providers reported that they had underestimated the support they would need in order to source the required number of placements. Only a small number of providers had used the ESFA field teams to answer their queries and these had considered it helpful. Providers found the workshops delivered by AoC and The Challenge useful; the chance to meet and share experiences with pilot providers was highlighted as particularly valuable. Providers in receipt of intensive support from the AoC and The Challenge reported that the approach was reasonably well-configured and effective. The number of employers referred from NAS has been less than providers anticipated. Feedback from providers and NAS suggested there was a mismatch between providers' expectations for support on employer engagement and the actual support model NAS offered.

In line with policy aims, CDF had given participating providers an opportunity to start their preparations for the roll-out of T Levels. In particular, many providers recognised the positive impact that the hiring of industry placement coordinators had made in their progress towards targets. The work carried out by these new staff members had increased providers' understanding of what employers want and what messaging works with different types of employers when selling the placement opportunities. Even where providers had not met their full target this year, many still felt that CDF had a positive impact in increasing their knowledge of employers and offering positive experiences to learners.

Many of the employers who had not engaged in the programme did not have the capacity to support placements and they saw other development routes, such as Apprenticeships as a more important organisational priority. Others were not yet convinced that the benefits of participation would outweigh the costs involved in supervising learners and ensuring placements were of a sufficiently high quality. Employers that had engaged in the placements articulated many positive benefits resulting from their participation. Employers believed they had supported young people and the local community, developed management and supervision skills in their own staff and improved their understanding of the future workforce and young people's perspectives.

Looking to the future, providers were confident that many of the challenges they had faced when implementing placements at the organisational level (such as with timetables) during CDF year 1 would be overcome with the additional hours and funding T Levels will bring.

However, providers anticipated on-going challenges with employer engagement even with the additional skills and knowledge they had gained in year 1, particularly as the target number of placements they need to achieve will increase to 20% next year. Providers were also concerned about future funding levels and their ability to create a stable workforce to support industry placements. Providers did anticipate that they would take the lessons they had learned on employer engagement and continue to apply those to CDF year 2 and onwards towards T Level roll out. Where possible, they would make use of staff that had become skilled and experienced during the pilot and CDF year 1: they could build trusted relationships with employers and set out clear expectations about industry placements by making use of case studies and establishing clear and relevant learning objectives.

Providers aimed to continue with their preparations for CDF year 2 and beyond, ensuring that an early start would provide sufficient lead-in time to engage with enough suitable employers. Providers had learnt more about learner preparation and support and that regular checks and visits to learners while on placement made a difference to the learners' continued attendance on placement. Finally, the providers had welcomed the external support they had received and acknowledged the importance of internal senior support and curriculum teams' support in in order to drive forward the organisation changes required for successful delivery of industry placements.

1. Policy context

The introduction of T Level programmes, and particularly the industry placements, represents a radical step change to the provision of technical education in England. The placements will be an integral component of T Level programmes and awards will not be made without successful completion of a placement of a minimum of 315+ (and average of 350) hours, involving a structured learning experience with an employer. This aspect of the programme will ensure that learners understand the workplace – not simply in terms of the soft skills and employability attributes that employers require – but in respect of how the technical skills and theoretical knowledge they have gained in the classroom are applied within industry. The aim is to clearly articulate the relevance of technical education to the workplace for learners and employers in order to support more effective education-to-work transitions by enabling learners to develop their technical skills in the workplace. T Levels also aim to support transitions to higher level studies for vocational learners which may include higher and degree Apprenticeships.

In recognition of the scale and complexities of introducing industry placements for the cohort of technical learners (studying in the range of post-16 provider types – sixth forms, sixth form colleges, university technical colleges (UTCs), FE colleges, land-based colleges and specialist training providers) the Department provided pilot funding to 21 providers in 2017-18 to identify early issues in engaging employers and with delivering the new model. The pilot sought to understand the characteristics of effective placements for different routes, different types of provider, different types of employer, and different sub-groups of learners. It offered a diversity of provider contexts – although not the full range - to allow highly useful lessons to emerge. The evaluation, conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), revealed a range of important insights into delivery but indicated that further evidence was required particularly in respect of:

- flexibility to provide a better mesh between business needs, the curriculum and assessment cycle, and learners' personal circumstances,

- information about the curriculum and learners' technical skills to help employers structure placement experiences,

- engagement with small and micro businesses to build understanding about what would lift barriers to their involvement.

The Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) supports the second phase of work to assist the roll-out of industry placements. The academic year 2018-2019 was the first of the CDF phase and involved c.360 providers working to scale-up delivery. It is viewed as critical for providers to build their capacity to offer industry placements, increasing understanding of how these can be most effectively delivered, and how more employers can be engaged to support placements. Providers were deemed to be eligible for the CDF if they were delivering qualifications that could map to the new T Levels and were invited to apply to the fund in order to increase their capacity to deliver T Levels. Successful applicants were required to secure 315 hour placements for 10% of their eligible cohort. This was deemed

by ESFA to be fair for the first year i.e. not unduly high or overwhelming. In the second year of CDF, the requirement will increase to 20% of the eligible learner cohort.

During CDF year 1 an update to the industry placement policy was announced[2] which included a framework of additional models and approaches to delivering industry placements, some across all placements and some route-specific. These are optional i.e. to be used where appropriate, and allow:

- The 315 minimum hours for the placement to be split across a maximum of two employers where appropriate,

- Work taster activities, up to a maximum of 35 hours, to be counted towards learners' total number of placement hours, as long as these are relevant to learners' chosen pathways,

- Learners' part-time working hours to be counted towards the required hours of placement, as long as certain requirements are met,

- Placements to be recorded in hours rather than days to take into account different industries and working patterns,

- Onsite facilities to be used for SEND students for up to 105 placement hours and for the full duration of the placement for learners in young offender institutions or other custodial settings,

- Learners on digital T Levels to be able to take route-level placements rather than placements only relevant to their particular specialism,

- Learners on Construction T Levels to work in small teams alongside external construction industry professional(s) to develop and implement a project that clearly develops students' construction skills for up to a maximum of 105 hours of their placement,

- Construction and Engineering and Manufacturing students to begin their placement within an established skills hub or employer's training centre for a maximum of 105 hours.

Further to these developments, an Employer Support Fund pilot was announced at the same time, to run throughout the 2019-20 academic year. This will trial the provision of financial support to help employers with the costs of delivering industry placements and aims to increase understanding of the financial barriers faced by employers across different industries. Alongside this, the Department announced that Employer Support Package in May 2019 which will develop tailored guidance, tools and hands-on support to help employers effectively plan and deliver high quality placements. Subsequently, it

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[2] DfE (2019) 'T Levels Industry Placements: Update on delivery models and support' available from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/802703/Industry_placements_policy_update.pdf Accessed 11.11.2019

announced that this package will be developed and delivered by the Strategic Development Network.

The CDF year was supported by:

Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

The ESFA field teams were responsible for leading communications with providers and being the conduit between policy and providers to ensure that messages were heard on both sides. They collected and quality-assured quarterly monitoring information (MI) from providers. They identified which providers were in need of additional support through the intensive support programme (see below).

Association of Colleges (AoC) and The Challenge

The AoC, working with The Challenge, was contracted to provide a programme of support for providers during CDF year 1 to supply:

- **Workshops**: 22 workshops were delivered between November 2018 and February 2019. The workshops were an opportunity to share learning and materials with CDF providers and 2020 T Level delivery providers. The aim of these workshops was to promote learning from the pilot and support the early stages of the CDF year 1. Workshops covered topics including employer engagement; learner preparation; high quality placements; and how to engage other stakeholders such as parents. The workshops attracted around 500 attendees. The AoC analysed participants' feedback and its figures showed that 90% of attendees thought that the workshops we either helpful or extremely helpful.
- **Case studies**: AoC and The Challenge were to deliver 11 written case studies each focused on a different technical route, alongside 11 video/social media case studies that focused on different employers, learners and providers. These case studies were aimed at prospective learners, employers and parents and aimed to increase awareness ahead of the second year of CDF and T Level roll out from 2020. One example from the Hair and Beauty route aimed to raise aspirations by including a case study of a high-end hair salon.
- **Intensive support**: This tailored 1-2-1 consultancy support was only offered to providers identified by ESFA as being at risk of not delivering to their agreed targets in CDF year 1. The Department anticipated that this support would focus on how to accommodate the placement in the curriculum, gaining buy-in from learners, preparing learners, working effectively with employers, and monitoring learners on placement. The contract intended support to be delivered to up to 100 providers, for a maximum of 3 days, mostly providing support over the phone, with some face-to-face meetings where necessary. Despite early MI monitoring forms showing that some providers were struggling to make progress in sourcing and securing placements, this was characterised as providers making a late start and therefore there were fewer referrals to the intensive support service than anticipated. As a result of this the AoC changed their delivery model to make more use of peer learning workshops.

- **Peer learning workshops**: The aim of these was to troubleshot problems that providers were having with delivering industry placements, to be responsive to their needs and establish sustainable regional support networks. Providers that were not making good progress towards their targets were linked with providers that were doing better and who could share their expertise. AoC ran an expression of interest exercise and 87 providers indicated that they would participate in a network event and could state their main issues and challenges. The workshops were facilitated by The Challenge and AoC in order to disseminate policies and solutions from other regions. The agenda included key messaging for parents and learners; strategy; sustainable networks; route specific marketing; and learner readiness. Providers that attended were supported to create an implementation action plan, mainly focused on steps they would need to take to support industry placements in CDF year 2.
- **Update to guidance**: Based on early feedback from the workshops, AoC and The Challenge updated the guidance materials that were originally produced from the Pilot. These new guidance material included updates based on policy changes for example changing from recording the industry placements in days to hours.

National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)

NAS was provided with additional funding from the Department to support the CDF and transition to T Levels by working directly with employers to source potential placements. The aim was that NAS becomes a single point of contact for employers, who can talk with them about both Apprenticeships and industry placements. NAS worked with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to gain access to small employers through LEP-run events and workshops and give them information about T Levels, Apprenticeships and Traineeships and were moving towards 'one conversation' about skills. NAS staff also held discussions with local authorities about including T Levels in local industrial strategies. In addition, NAS looked at social media and marketing and welcomed the new T Level branding as it allowed them to co-brand their activities. However, it proved difficult for NAS to track the success of the marketing activities as employers often would not recall where they saw information.

A NAS stakeholder reported that NAS worked through national account managers (who manage relationships with levy paying employers) and the National Contact Centre, to prepare them to 'sell' the benefits of industry placements to employers. Where an employer expresses an interest in industry placements, the contact details are emailed to the nearest CDF provider. Through these activities, up to 20% of placements were anticipated to be generated through NAS, though this target was not met. It took longer than NAS anticipated for teams to be set up and start working with their contacts and then also more time to reach the employers through the LEPs and the local authorities. NAS discovered that many of the employers that they were reaching wanted longer to think about how they could support industry placements and so anticipated that these employers would come to fruition in 2019/20. A NAS stakeholder reported that they would welcome more awareness raising activities from DfE.

NAS will continue to raise awareness of industry placements and provide support and guidance to employers to help them plan for industry placements. It will also continue to lead the Department's employer engagement strategy to support employers plan to deliver industry placements into 2019/20.

To complement the activities of NAS, as noted earlier, the Department announced the provision of an Employer Support Package in May 2019, and this is being delivered during the 2019/20 academic year by the Strategic Development Network. The Department will also develop and refine the package of support (see above) that NAS will deliver going forward.

2. Method

This report brings together the findings from across two phases of evaluation. The first phase focused primarily on the provider experience with a sample of providers taking part in CDF year 1. In the second phase there was a dual focus on employers and providers as well as an analysis of monitoring information and delivery of a provider survey.

In sum, the evaluation included:

- **Inception phase** – to confirm the evaluation approach and finalise the research questions.

- **Stakeholder interviews at phase 1 and 2** – to set the context for the evaluation, develop key insights into CDF delivery and changes over time.

- **Provider interviews at phase 1 and 2** – following an agreed sampling strategy, telephone interviews with 25 providers took place in phase 1 and 52 interviews in phase 2. The interviews aimed to understand different perspectives on progress in the CDF year 1 including insights into delivering different routes and feedback on the support made available to providers.

- **Employer interviews in phase 2** – the evaluation included interviews with 100 employers at different stages of engagement with the industry placements to gather feedback on decision-making around participation in placements and feedback on how the placements progressed.

- **Provider survey in phase 2** – a survey invitation was sent to all providers that had opted-in to take part in research. The short survey aimed to gather route specific feedback on sourcing placements and support during the CDF year.

- **Data analysis in phases 1 and 2** – analysis of the available quarterly monitoring forms to provide data on provider characteristics, progress, funding and spending. In addition, qualitative analysis of the intensive support reports was conducted and reported here. In phase 2, this included analysis of the intensive support logs kept by AoC and The Challenge.

- **Employer costs analysis in phase 1** – to meet the Department's requirement to provide analysis and an infographic specifically reporting on the financial support that providers have given to employers in order to host industry placements.

As this demonstrates, the method for the evaluation was predominantly qualitative, and as will be shown below, samples were purposively selected. This means that while the research can provide robust and detailed insights into implementation from multiple perspectives, it should not be understood to be fully representative.

2.1. Research questions

The CDF process evaluation built on existing insights from the industry placements pilot to explore: how the CDF is being implemented and used by providers and employers; the challenges of implementing placements within different contexts; and whether and how

policy needs to be further developed to support the implementation of meaningful placements. The evaluation themes are summarised as follows:

Figure 1 Evaluation themes

Employer engagement	Funding and Costs
Reasons for (not) engaging Messages that encourage employer engagement Support/guidance needs Plans for future engagement	How providers spend CDF Sufficiency/ shortfall in funding Learner costs / additional financial support Additional costs for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) Employer costs / concerns about placement costs Easing of employer costs via CDF
Delivery	**Support**
Planning / implementation of placements Ensuring quality Challenges / best practice	Provider views of intensive support (from external provider)

Source: IES, 2019

2.2. Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews were planned for the early stages of the evaluation and at the mid-point, in order for the research team to understand the development of the CDF policy and provider support programme. In addition to gathering strategic policy and practice insights from the Department, other stakeholders were also included. The Challenge, the AoC and the Sixth Form Colleges Association were interviewed in order to gain additional perspectives from their memberships or from their role in CDF delivery. In phase 1, 12 interviews were conducted and in phase 2, 9 interviewees were followed up to explore any changes to delivery. The findings helped to shape the policy context (Chapter 1) and were used to support the drafting of provider discussion guides for Phase 1 and 2.

2.3. Provider interviews

The research team aimed to achieve interviews across a spread of providers to supply a range of perspectives. The key sampling criteria were: to achieve at least two provider perspectives on each of the 11 routes; to reach as many different pathways as possible; include a range of provider types, which involved purposively sampling school sixth forms and sixth form colleges, land-based and independent training providers along general FE colleges; pilot providers, and 2020 providers, to reflect on progress made and to understand responses to the support available; a range of locations to see any difference

between rural and urban locations; and, some providers that had been in receipt of the intensive support from AoC/The Challenge.

The research team achieved 25 provider interviews in phase 1 and 52 interviews in phase 2. After the initial sample was drawn, some providers were not able to participate during the time frame so alternative providers were selected from the CDF data, matching on key sampling criteria. The interviews provided a good representation from across the 11 routes (Table 1 below) and the other criteria (more detail is given in Appendix A).

Table 1 Routes

Routes	Provider perspectives Phase 1	Provider perspectives Phase 2
Agriculture	4	10
Business Administration	4	11
Catering & Hospitality	3	6
Construction	5	13
Creative & Design	3	10
Digital	5	8
Education & Childcare	2	7
Engineering & Manufacturing	6	8
Hair & Beauty	4	8
Health & Science	5	9
Legal, Finance and Accounting	4	4

Source: IES, 2019

2.4. Provider survey

All providers that had opted-in to take part in the research (which was captured in the February MI sheet) were invited to take part in a short survey. Providers were invited to complete the survey for each route that they were delivering with the aim of gathering route-specific feedback on sourcing placements and support during the CDF year. The research team were conscious that providers were already reporting quarterly to ESFA using the monitoring form; however, the Department agreed that a short online survey could provide additional insights.

The short survey of around 10 questions was agreed with the Department and information was pre-populated from the monitoring forms so that providers did not have to repeat information they had already supplied. In addition, most of the questions were 'multiple response' with answer options derived from phase 1 of the evaluation, with options to given further written responses

The questions were themed around:

- Ease/difficulty of sourcing placements

- Effective messaging to engage employers

- Ease/difficulty of achieving high quality placements

- Views on support

- Insights into overcoming travel barriers

- Future plans - attendance model, placement start and key learning.

From 294 invitations, 124 responses were received (a response rate of 42 per cent), providing 223 insights into the 11 routes.

2.5. Employer interviews

During Phase 1, stakeholders and providers reported on the feedback they were receiving from employers. In Phase 2 the direct experience and voice of employers was included in the evaluation. Interviews aimed to include employers that were not yet engaged with industry placements, employers that were not yet decided about hosting a placement or who had withdrawn, as well as employers that had hosted industry placement(s). Based on the findings from Phase 1, a topic guide was agreed with the Department that explored with theses employers:

- views on industry placements and level of engagement to date

- employers' existing experience or levels of involvement with other programmes including apprenticeships, university sandwich year students, work experience, and other curriculum activities

- the referral process and initial conversations about T Levels, with NAS, providers or other brokers – how it is 'sold' to them and what messages are most compelling

- cost/time for supervision of learners and, more broadly, costs associated with other aspects of placements

- skills to supervise learners on placement

- length of placement and views on the characteristics of quality placements

- differences by route.

Working with the Department, various approaches to securing the employer sample were tried. An initial plan to reach employers via the NAS database was not fruitful to the scale required by this evaluation. The Department also sent invitations to participate in the research to employer contacts who they had engaged in consultations and roundtable events on industry placements and T Levels. These two approaches reached over 300 employers and resulted in 64 employers opting in from which 55 were interviewed. These employers were a mix of 'not engaged' 'not yet engaged' and 'engaged'.

In order to reach the remainder of the interviews required, the research team approached CDF providers to ask for them to identify up to 5 employers that would be willing to opt-in to the evaluation. From this the final total of 100 employer interviews was reached.

In the analysis of the employer interviews a behavioural insights framework was used to understand the relative importance of different factors for different employers (see Figure 2). This included enabling factors such as fit with business, meeting skills needs and supporting talent pipeline, as well as deterrents such as concerns over health and safety, staff resourcing and planning of work. The framework also took into account context, opportunity and motivation to understand how decisions to host placements were reached.

Figure 2: Analytic framework for employer engagement
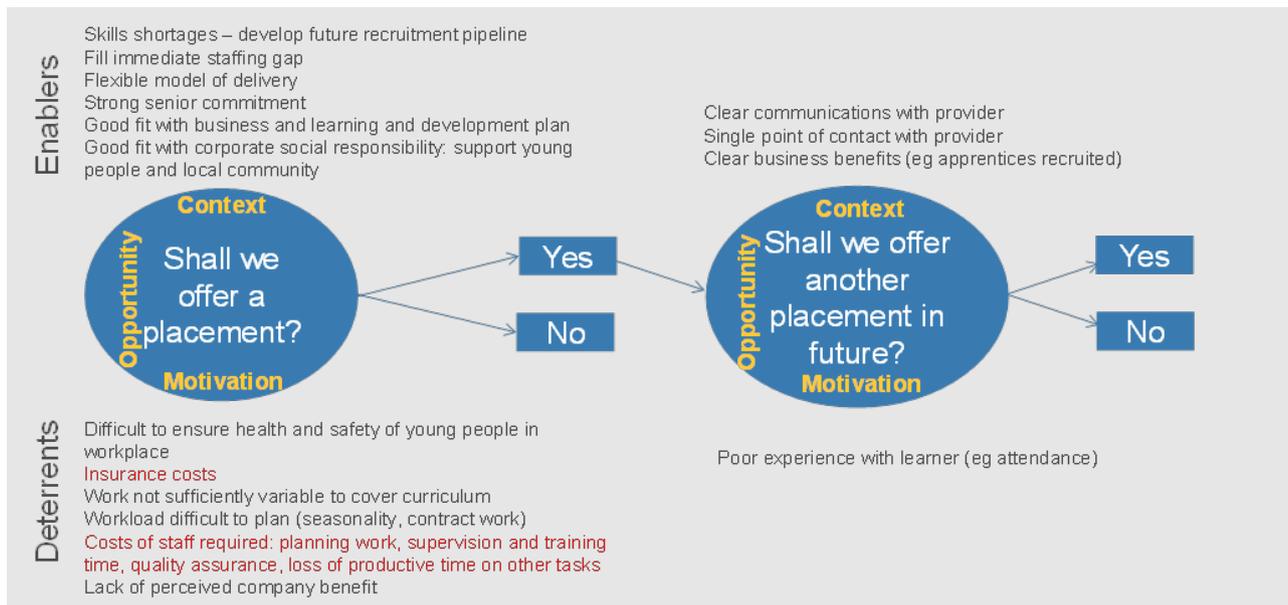
Source: IES, 2019

2.6. Documentary analysis

The ESFA collected and quality-assured quarterly monitoring information (MI) from providers. These forms collated information on provider characteristics, progress, funding and spending, and learner/employer satisfaction. The research team analysed aspects of these data and this analysis is included throughout the report. It focused on:

- Progress towards delivering targets

- Expenditure

- Confidence in progression

- Employer engagement

- Where the data allowed, analysis is shown for different provider types.

In addition to quantitative analysis of monitoring forms, the research team used computer–aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to assist with the qualitative analysis of

the intensive support monitoring forms. These forms were completed by AoC/The Challenge as a record of the work done to support providers who needed additional support to progress to their targets. The forms were analysed individually and collectively for common themes and an analysis framework was created that allowed the researcher to analyse the reports for common themes. Findings from this element of the evaluation are included in Chapter 7.

3. Drivers for involvement

In order to understand the contexts of providers at the start of CDF year 1, the provider research began by exploring their drivers for being involved this year. The sample included some delivering industry placements for the first-time during CDF year, alongside some providers that had been part of the pilot of industry placement in 2017-2018. There were also some providers that would be delivering the new T Levels during the first roll-out in 2020. This chapter describes the motivations of these different types of providers.

3.1. CDF providers

Providers usually described the industry placements and the CDF year as a good fit with their ethos on employability and the work they were already undertaking in relation to Apprenticeships and work experience on the Study Programme. The CDF year was a way of building on this and an opportunity to make changes to develop and refine their practice in preparation for the roll out of T Levels.

It was common for the interviewees from Sixth Forms to similarly describe how the industry placements fitted with their ethos around local employers and community and the drive for employer involvement in curriculum as well as in meeting the Gatsby benchmarks.

> 'We've always embedded work placement in what we do - that element of practical learning. It was one of the four pillars of our school.'

Provider, Sixth Form College

Providers described wanting to 'get ahead' in order to be more prepared for T Levels and the requirement to source industry placements for their learners. A general FE provider in a rural setting described how they wanted to make sure that they were prepared so that when the industry placements are a course requirement, they are in the best position to support their learners. This was echoed by a coastal sixth form college that stated that they 'don't want to go in blind' to T Levels. For some providers it was also about being ahead of other local providers (this view mainly came from providers in urban and coastal areas) whereas a general FE College wanted to be able to learn from other providers and saw the additional support offered in CDF year 1 as a way of developing their expertise.

Providers wanted to build their internal capacity and sought to organise their teams to make use of the CDF to identify staffing requirements for sourcing placements and supporting learners while on placement. Some were looking at how these activities could be added to existing roles, such as apprenticeship coordinators. Providers were pleased that funding had been made available to support the development and capacity building for industry placements, in particular that it allowed them to dedicate additional staff resource to the activities.

The providers were also using the CDF year as a way to 'iron out problems', to 'test the water' and find out more about what employers want and how to encourage, motivate and prepare learners. Furthermore, they hoped to use this first CDF year to understand what local employers would look for in industry placements.

3.2. Pilot providers

In recognition of the different starting points of the providers involved in CDF year 1, the evaluation oversampled providers that had also been involved in the pilot of industry placements in the 2017/18 academic year. This was particularly important for the first phase of this evaluation which took place early on in the 2018/2019 academic year.

These providers reported that the pilot had provided them with valuable lessons which they wanted to test at a larger scale. They were aiming to increase the number of curriculum areas or routes that were involved in the delivery of industry placements.

During the Pilot, The Challenge led some sourcing of employers for some of these providers, whilst others had used existing relationships with brokerage contractors. As this support from The Challenge did not form part of the CDF, the providers had taken the opportunity to bring this role in-house, building towards T Level delivery.

Pilot providers also described wanting to maintain momentum, build on their expertise and retain resources that were configured under the Pilot, rather than lose staff and knowledge before the T Levels are rolled out fully. They wanted to take all opportunities for learning and to get ahead with their employer engagement activities, particularly in what they anticipated to be more difficult routes. For example, one described how they wanted to gain understanding of how the industry placements would work for their rural setting across more routes and ensure that these messages are heard by the Department.

Other pilot providers described how seeing learners on the Pilot progress into apprenticeships and jobs as a consequence of the industry placement had encouraged them to carry on for the benefits delivered to their learners.

3.3. 2020 providers

In both phases of the evaluation the interviews included some providers that were going to be amongst some of the first to deliver T Levels in 2020 (two of these were also in the Pilot). These 2020 providers described their reasons for taking part as about internal structures, processes and knowledge development. They wanted to make sure that they had the right people in place for the roll-out of T Levels, building the skills and experience of staff ready for delivery.

Involvement in CDF year 1 was also about disseminating information to local employers and building up their networks, ready to be involved with industry placements, in

Apprenticeships and in other ways on their courses – for example setting assignments, supporting careers education activities.

For these providers, the CDF year was not just about building staffing capacity, it was also about having funds that would support learner preparation and changing the culture of the college in preparation for additional hours as would be required by industry placements and T Levels. A provider described how they hoped that building their employer network would help to attract prospective learners to T Levels in the futures. Another was working to prepare prospective learners and their parents for the increase in hours that will come with T Levels compared with current vocational courses.

These providers typically described their institutions as 'forward looking', 'cutting edge', and they wanted to 'get ahead' and 'feel prepared' with their preparations for T Level roll out. They wanted to understand what the particular challenges around industry placements were so that they could start to overcome these before the placements impact on the achievement of qualifications. Furthermore, many of these providers described how committed to the policy of technical education and industry placements they are, and how they wanted to be involved so that they could provide early feedback to the Department and help shape implementation.

4. Employer engagement

This chapter explores provider and employer experiences in sourcing placements and pulls out differences according to provider size and route of the placement. Information is gathered from three sources: qualitative provider interviews; the provider survey; and, qualitative employer interviews with the source of findings indicated in the text. In places, findings from the different sources are compared and contrasted to deepen insights from the analysis. These comparisons should not be treated as indicative of the experience of all CDF actors as the data sources are qualitative and not generalisable.

4.1. Provider progress towards target number of placements

In the first year of CDF, providers had a target of sourcing 315+ hour placements for 10% of their eligible cohort of learners. The first MI returns, submitted at term start in October 2018, show that for 56% of CDF providers this translated to targets of between 0 and 49. 20% of providers were asked to find placements for 50 to 99 learners, and another 20% between 100 and 199 of their learners. A small portion of providers (5%) had a target of more than 200 placements. There were differences in the numbers between different types of providers: sixth form colleges and other specialist (i.e. land-based) providers were more likely to have small (0-49) targets (89% and 71% respectively). 42% of general FE and tertiary providers, in comparison, had targets between 100 and 199 placements.

Most of the providers who took part in the qualitative interviews reported that they were on track to meet their targets at the time of the interview. The interviews explored barriers and enablers to progress in meeting targets. Generally, those providers who had fallen behind cited barriers such as the limited size of the local labour market; internal staffing and capacity issues; lack of relevant employers; and issues with transportation and placement accessibility. In contrast, CDF providers that had reached or exceeded their target typically described an approach to employer engagement that included existing employer links or an early start to employer engagement; effective internal resourcing of sourcing activities; and robust internal communication with staff and learners that started early.

When looking at the progress providers had made towards their target, there were differences by provider size and type. Pilot and 2020 providers generally felt positive about the progress they had made at the time of the interviews. Pilot providers attributed this to the capacity-building and employer engagement they had done in the pilot year. Large, general FE colleges also tended to feel more positive about the progress they had made compared to sixth form colleges that had less prior involvement with employers and fewer existing contacts. Some large general FE providers in urban and metropolitan areas with a high target number of placements, as well as smaller providers in adjacent geographies, were concerned about competition between providers. They believed that their local labour market had already reached a saturation point and that they were now contacting the same employers as their competitors. In addition, some larger FE colleges were also the ones most struggling with their internal resourcing of sourcing activities.

4.2. Sourcing placements

Organisation of sourcing activities

In the February MI returns, providers were asked how many employers they had engaged with in order to achieve each placement. 43% of providers said they were in contact with between 0 and 4 employers per placement; 22% with between 5 and 9 employers; and 15% between 10 and 14 employers. These figures demonstrate the significant resource providers were required to mobilise in order to source their target numbers of placements.

In the qualitative interviews, providers were asked to describe how they had organised sourcing activities. The overwhelming majority had used internal resources. A limited number of providers had outsourced the function to lead generation companies but reported that their experiences of this were poor. In one such case, the quality of referrals was too poor to lead to high quality placements, and in another, the company making referrals collapsed during the sourcing period which led to significant delays in establishing the requisite number of placements.

Providers had different ways of organising sourcing activities depending on their size. Larger providers typically had a team of people working on sourcing whereas smaller and medium-sized providers had one or two dedicated staff members sourcing placements. Sixth form colleges with a low target number of placements typically did not have the funding to hire a dedicated placement coordinator, and the responsibility for sourcing was shared between different members of staff, in some cases teaching staff as well. Owing to the lack of capacity/time and prior employer engagement experience, staff at sixth form colleges reported a lack of confidence in their skills and ability to sell opportunities to employers compared to staff at other types of providers.

> 'We went along to the DfE briefings and a one-day industry placement workshop... There was a strong emphasis on sales and 'closing the deal' and 'hot leads' – we thought 'we're not sales, we are teachers!'. We felt a bit despondent after that...The FE colleges are probably more used to this and have dedicated teams.'

Sixth form college, 2020 Provider

The approach of the vast majority of large providers was to use their existing business development function used to generate apprenticeships and non-mandatory work experience opportunities. Provider accounts suggest that the AoC workshops had recommended it was best practice to hire dedicated industry placement coordinators to work on placement generation even where providers has existing business development teams. Following this advice, providers either used the business development team to generate initials leads and hired industry placement coordinators to follow-up on these and coordinate the placements; or they hired new industry placement coordinators to work as a 'team within a team' in the business development function, working on both leads and coordination. Both approaches appeared to work equally well.

Employer engagement teams in large providers were mostly organised centrally rather than by curriculum areas. Providers generally fed back positively on this arrangement – in one case, a pilot provider changed from an initial approach of curriculum-based teams to a centralised team, and had achieved better outcomes due to the specialised skills the centralised sourcing team was able to dedicate. There were also cases where the opposite approach was adopted: in one very large FE provider, a team of five industry placement coordinators specialised to work on the different curriculum areas. The provider commented that this approach worked well for the purpose of finding high quality placements at scale as it allowed coordinators to get to know the students and curriculum staff. This level of specialisation was not typically available to providers, as most providers had smaller cohorts of eligible students and they consequently received less CDF funding, which in turn could limit their options for staffing.

The effective internal resourcing of sourcing activities was an important factor in determining whether or not providers' reached their target number of placements. Recognising that converting employer interactions into placements takes time and constant engagement, providers that were successful in reaching their target typically had dedicated industry placement coordinators in post. In addition to having the time necessary to develop relationships with employers, the most effective coordinators had the right skillset to sell the opportunities via different methods. Some successful industry placement coordinators also had existing links in the local business community from a previous role. In contrast, those providers that had struggled to reach their target commonly had issues with internal resourcing, such as staff lacking the necessary skills or responsibility for sourcing switching between different teams/individuals.

Larger providers appeared in a better position to hire individuals in dedicated industry placement coordinator roles compared to smaller providers, simply because a larger cohort of eligible learners led to a larger funding pot (see chapter 6). In small providers, especially sixth form colleges, the coordinator role was often split between different personnel, which led to individuals not having sufficient time to engage with employers outside their other responsibilities. This was particularly challenging for teaching staff at sixth form colleges. But issues with internal resourcing were not exclusive to smaller providers. Many of the providers that had fallen behind their target were larger general FE colleges. A common feature for these providers was a lack a joint-up approach to internal resourcing that indicated a lack of planning and coordination at a more senior level. These colleges typically got off to a late start, and decisions about which individual or team's responsibility it was to source placements were left until late in the year, leading to difficulties with hiring staff with the right skills/staff turnover later on.

A small number of providers had used curriculum-based staff to source placements for students, in particular smaller providers. This led to positive outcomes where it was used and the providers felt that tutors are the best-placed to find placements as they know the learners as well as having links in the industry. However, these providers recognised that this was not a sustainable use of their resources and that in future they intended to hire dedicated industry placements coordinators to source placements.

Sourcing methods

Providers who took part in the qualitative interviews were asked to outline their sourcing methods. Providers had different methods at their disposal depending on their size. Large general FE colleges typically had an existing database of employers derived from other employment-related activities, such as Apprenticeships. In addition, pilot providers had built up contacts during the pilot year that they could use again to generate placements. The first priority of industry placement coordinators at these providers was to consult the database of employers. This approach had the advantage of lessening the burden on coordinators to find new employer contacts (perceived as more challenging and time-consuming) as well having a better conversion rate from lead to placement, as employers were more likely to engage with providers they have an existing relationship with.

Providers that had access to a database of existing employer links regarded this as their most successful sourcing method. The effectiveness of this approach was not emulated amongst sixth form colleges that commonly have less prior contact with local employers. Consequently, sixth form colleges relied more on cold-calling and networking from scratch which providers regarded to be a less successful method compared to existing contacts. Despite these challenges, many sixth form colleges had reached their target number of placements because they were only required to find placements for a small cohort of learners. For a large provider to meet their target, they typically deployed a mix of methods that tapped into existing employer relationships as well as forming new ones.

As well as consulting an existing database of employers, industry placement coordinators (where they were in post) also generated new contacts. Many providers said their coordinators have networked via their local Chamber of Commerce. Other innovative approaches adopted by coordinators included: advertising the opportunity at a parents' evening; hosting an employer event and asking employers to bring along a friend from another organisation with the hope of converting these employers into placements; and working within the providers' supply chain (for example approaching the provider's building contractor about potential finance placements at contractor's head office). Subject teachers were another possible source for useful links in the local business community.

There was more evidence of providers using learners to source placements in the second wave of provider interviews. This may indicate that many providers had reached a ceiling with their own employer leads by the spring term. Many land-based colleges have a tradition of encouraging their learners to self-source. In addition, learners in catering and animal care commonly have links to the industry through part-time work that many providers successfully converted into placements. There were also examples of providers generating placements from ideas conceptualised by learners, such as a photography learner completing a placement as a medical photographer at the local hospital; and a digital learner producing digital guides on heritage sites at the local archives.

Providers reported that the service offered by NAS did not generate a substantial amount of industry placements. The numbers of leads passed onto providers were lower than expected and often limited to two or three leads per provider. Furthermore, a significant

proportion of these leads were not deemed viable either due to location or lack of understanding of the industry placement agenda and therefore did not lead to a placement; although some were assessed to be potential contacts for next year.

The most commonly mentioned issue with NAS leads was employer location, which NAS had calculated based on the postcode but which did not take into account the time it would take the learner to reach the workplace using public transport (where public transport routes were available). Some providers also reported that they were already engaged with the employers that were referred to them, while others expected to receive help brokering with larger employers instead of the smaller, local employers. On the whole, while NAS leads had generated some successful placements as well as potential leads providers reported that this support did not have a significant effect in terms of overall placements sourced (see chapter 7 for their views of support).

In the qualitative interviews, providers overwhelmingly expressed the view that existing contacts were the most effective route to generating placements. Cold-calling and newer contacts were seen as less fruitful in comparison. While many providers had not specifically targeted employers by size, for providers outside of metropolitan areas SMEs tended to be the most common type of employer in their locality. Due to their size, these smaller employers tended to have less capacity to take on learners and were more likely to turn down the offer on that basis. Some providers also had safeguarding concerns about placing learners with micro businesses. However, many providers said they had more success sourcing placements with SMEs that have flatter organisational hierarchies and fewer bureaucratic processes compared to larger organisations, which meant that key decision-makers were easier to reach. In the survey, providers reported that size of employer was not a barrier to sourcing placements (63%). Size of the employer was not a decisive factor in how likely an employer was to host a placement student.

Overall, the size of the local labour market and the availability of suitable employers for the route the provider was sourcing for were the decisive factors in determining whether engagement was successful or challenging. The importance of the local labour market notably was challenging for non-metropolitan providers. Some coastal providers in particular, believed they were disadvantaged by their local labour market as half of their potential catchment area was '*in the sea*'. Coastal and rural providers found placement sourcing particularly challenging when they were sourcing placements for routes that are difficult in any context, such as Digital, Creative & Design and Construction. (The analysis of successes and challenges for different routes can be found in chapter 4.2.4.) In these cases, providers viewed the methods used to engage employers as less important than the supply of employers that were both suited for the route and accessible for the learner.

Employers' experience of sourcing

Employers interviewed were asked how they were approached about the placement opportunity, and by whom. Several employers who hosted a placement had been approached by the provider who told them about the industry placements and sought their

engagement. Some of the employers in the sample had an existing relationship with the provider, while others were working together for the first time. A few employers reported that they had been initially approached by a learner, in some cases because the young person was in their employment. This was commonly the case in the Creative and Design and Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care routes. If the employer was interested, then usually a meeting was arranged to discuss the process and expectations.

Some very large employers in the sample were industry representatives engaging in the national debate about vocational reform. These employers had been part of T Level employer panels, Trailblazer groups that define Apprenticeship standards, or other policy forums. These employers were engaged on the agenda but the large majority were not hosting placements in CDF year 1. Their awareness of placements came from these networks, and they tended not to have been directly approached by providers. This mirrors provider accounts of sourcing; that engaging with larger organisations was difficult due to the many layers of decision-makers needed to convert an initial employer engagement into a placement.

Generally, employers felt that the information they had about the placements was sufficient, although some suggested that short, one- or two-page documents with key information would have been helpful including some information about the curriculum as well as what the placement would involve. This was viewed to be particularly helpful in gaining support for hosting a placement from more senior colleagues.

Placement sourcing for different routes

In the online survey, providers were asked how easy or difficult they had found the different routes to source for. These results are represented in the figure below, with providers rating Catering, Education and Childcare and Hair and Beauty as the easiest routes to source placements for. In the qualitative interviews providers described how these industries have a long history of offering young people work experience and employers do not perceive there to be many barriers to hosting a young person at the workplace. Hair and beauty salons, hotels, restaurants and nurseries were also found near providers in all localities. By contrast, providers found Creative and Design and Digital the most difficult routes to source for, largely due to the lack of suitable employers in the providers' local area and the lack of entry-level jobs in these industries in general.

Figure 3: Ease and Difficulty of sourcing placements for different routes

	Difficult or Very difficult	Easy or Very Easy
Hair & Beauty	5	47
Education & Childcare	5	68
Catering	11	74
Business & Adminstrative	25	25
Agriculture & Animal Care	44	11
Health & Science	49	18
Engineering & Manufacturing	70	9
Construction	72	4
Creative & Design	75	0
Digital	80	0
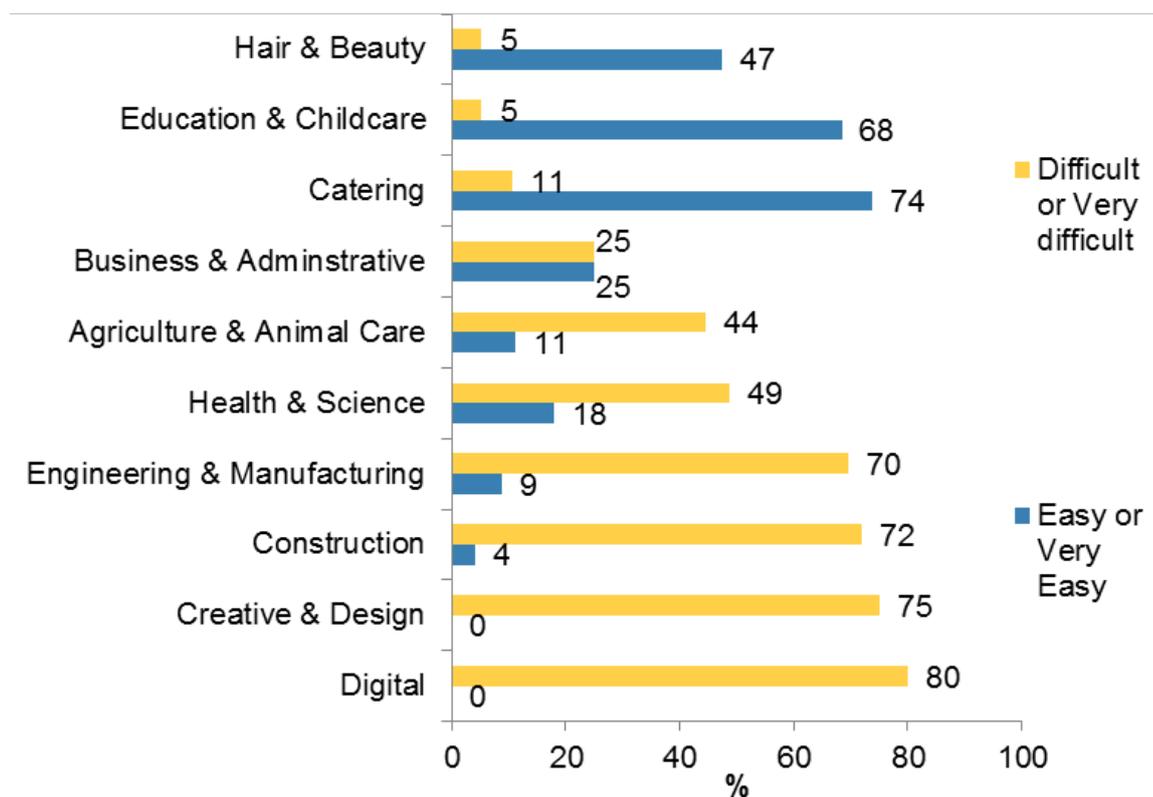
Source: IES, 2019 Provider survey

As Figure 3 shows, 47% of providers responding about hair and beauty noted it was easy or very easy to source for. When asked what made this route easy to source for, 65% of these providers responding said it was the availability of entry-level jobs in the industry. Providers were more likely to say this about Hair and Beauty compared to any other route. In the qualitative interviews, providers said the prevalence of hair and beauty salons in every high street and the tradition of young people's work experience in these workplaces additionally make this route easy to source placements for. Meanwhile, 79% of providers responding about Catering believed that the match between employers' needs and FE level skills was what made sourcing easy. In the qualitative interviews many providers noted that Catering learners typically have links in the industry through part-time work, which have been converted to placements. In addition, providers reported that employer demand for learners in the catering industry is high.

Similarly, in the survey, 68% of providers responding about Education and Childcare said it was easy to source these placements (see Figure 3). When these providers were asked what made it easy to source for this route, 47% responded that it does not take them much time to get employers ready from a due diligence and safeguarding point of view. In the qualitative interviews, many providers described how there is an existing expectation and tradition of young people taking up work experience in the industry, and how that makes the route easy to source for. One potential source of confusion for providers was whether to count the work placement hours that make up the current qualification towards the minimum required hours for industry placements. The CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education (that most providers offered) consists of a minimum of 750 work

placement hours. The interviews indicated that providers had taken different approaches to integrating the CACHE work placement hours into industry placements (i.e. some attempted to add 315 hours for the placement on top of these hours, while others did not). Some providers had found the sourcing of placements easy because learners were already undertaking work placements, while others reported finding it hard to source additional hours on top of what learners have already completed.

In the provider survey, Business and Administration was rated as moderately easy to source for by those providers responding on this route – 25% thought it was difficult/very difficult and 25% thought it was easy/very easy (Figure 3). When asked what makes it easier to source placements for this routes, 71% of providers offering the route said it was the optimal mix of employer size and resource to offer placements. In qualitative interviews providers discussed how the route is less vocationally-specific and how placements can be customised to the organisational needs of the employer, opening more options for the provider and the learner. Learners within this route took up varying roles within HR, finance or general business administration. However, some providers believed that placement quality and learner engagement were challenges. Providers reported that some learners undertaking a business qualification were unsure about what to do after i.e. they have less firm career goals and less firm ideas of next steps in respect of education and training. These learners could be more difficult to find a good match for, leading to poorer engagement on placement. Other learners had a specific occupation in mind, in law or accountancy, and were reluctant to undertake a placement that does not match with their desired career path.

Providers responding about Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care reported it was moderately challenging to source for (44%), according to the survey (Figure 3). Land-based colleges in particular encouraged self-sourcing and these providers typically had strong links to employers in their local area. Indeed, when discussing what makes sourcing for this route easy, 100% of providers responding for this route said it was existing employer links. In addition, learners undertaking a qualification in Animal Care commonly have part-time jobs in the industry that providers converted to placements. Placements were found in farms, veterinary surgeries, pet stores, dog homes, zoos and pet grooming spas. The challenge many providers faced was the seasonality of farm-based work. Agricultural employers are hesitant to take on learners during the busiest time of the year in spring/summer when they have limited time to supervise a learner. They are also reluctant to offer placements out of season on the basis that they lack relevant/meaningful tasks for learners to do. There were, however, many examples of successful placements where the providers worked closely with the employer to find suitable times for a learner to work in-season. This highlights the importance of good working relationships between employers and providers.

Construction, Creative and Design, Digital, and Engineering and Manufacturing were the most difficult routes to source for according to those who responded about these routes in the provider survey. Providers viewed Digital as particularly difficult due to the structure of the industry, specifically, that many employers worked freelance and remotely. When

asked what makes sourcing for the route difficult, three-quarters of these providers (75%) said it was the predominance of small/micro employers and employers' associated lack of resource to take on extra members of staff[3]. One solution providers had tried was offering these employers work space to use. For example, a provider had used the CDF funding to rent a room in an industrial park and worked with a game development company to offer a number of placements testing a game.

In the qualitative interviews, many providers said that Digital employers are reluctant to take on under 18s because they do not want young people accessing sensitive data. It is not clear from provider accounts whether this presents a genuine barrier for employers or whether Digital employers, unlike those in Hair and Beauty, Catering and Education and Childcare, were still inexperienced in working with young people and therefore reluctant to take them on. A further barrier to sourcing for the Digital route was the lack of entry-level roles in the industry (35% providers responding about this route in the survey said it made it difficult to source placements). This indicates a mismatch between employer demand and the provision of FE skills, with Digital employers looking to hire graduates instead.

Providers have found the Creative and Design route difficult for many of the same reasons as they found Digital difficult. Firstly, the success in sourcing placements for this route depended largely on the availability of suitable employers in the local area to the provider. In non-metropolitan areas travel and lack of public transport at late hours formed a barrier for sourcing placements in creative and performance arts venues. Secondly, many of the employers in the industry are small/micro employers and not able to support a young person for 315+ hours because of the fluctuating nature of the work they do. In the survey, 85% of providers responding about this route considered the prevalence of small/micro employers and lack of resources to be the main factor that made sourcing difficult. Thirdly, Creative and Design employers, akin to Digital ones, do not offer many entry-level jobs, making it challenging to find a suitable placement for a learner undertaking a Level 2/3 qualification (in the survey, 35% of providers responding on this route thought this makes the route difficult to source for). The qualitative interviews brought to the fore cases where providers had successfully highlighted to employers the benefits of working with young people who could help bring fresh ideas. One provider had placed learners at a local festival to help develop a mobile application. In another case, learners had produced a video for the local road safety campaign.

The main challenge for sourcing placements in the Construction route is that there are many barriers for employers to take on learners. In the survey, when asked about what makes sourcing difficult for this route, providers cited a lack of employer readiness to take on a learner (64%, which was more than for any other route). In the qualitative interviews, many providers reported lack of Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards to be a barrier although many had opted to use the CDF funding to pay for these in order to

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[3]The May 2019 policy update on T Levels announced flexibility to the model available to Digital and Creative routes that will be able to place a student with two different employers over the same placement.

remove the barrier. Travel could also be a barrier for Construction learners; if the work takes place across different sites during the same placement. As a solution, one provider organised a minibus that took several students to the site they needed to be at on that day. Smaller construction employers (that make up the majority of the industry) were commonly not in a position to offer consistent work as their work patterns tend to be seasonal and unpredictable, risking quality. Larger employers typically had longer-term projects but to deliver the work rely on smaller subcontractors who providers reported are difficult to engage in placements.

Engineering employers perceive there to be many barriers to placing a learner, too, according to provider interviews. A key barrier for engineering companies was the time it takes to train a young person (in contrast to the many entry-level tasks available to learners on a Hair and Beauty, Catering or Education and Childcare route). Employers commonly cite hiring of under-18s as a barrier to taking part in the workplace, although as with Construction and Digital employers, it was not clear from provider accounts whether this was due to health and safety concerns or Engineering employers' lack of experience in working with young people on the site. Success in sourcing placements for this route also largely depended on the availability of employers locally. In addition, some qualitative responses in the survey suggested engineering companies prefer to hire graduates and apprentices and are more reluctant to consider FE learners on placements.

In the Health and Science route, providers have had more success with the Health pathway compared to Science. Providers found success in sourcing Health placements in care homes, nurseries and schools that are present in most localities and have a long history of offering work experience to learners. However, many Health employers were only used to offering a two-week period of work experience and some providers found that the availability of staff to supervise a learner was a barrier alongside the longer placement. In addition, larger hospitals were reluctant to take on under-18s. On the Science pathway, providers struggled to find relevant employers for learners. In addition, Science employers were reported to commonly cite the age of learners and access to sensitive data as barriers to taking on young people on placements. Some providers found success with Science placements outside of health and medicine settings in research settings or organisations that offer laboratory testing, digital analysis or digital processing.

In the qualitative and survey sample, there were a limited number of cases in the Legal, Finance and Accounting routes. In the qualitative interviews, providers had success sourcing for the Finance and Accounting pathways, particularly within SMEs, but had more difficulty sourcing for Legal as they had failed to gain traction with large law firms.

4.3. Engaging with employers

4.3.1. Providers' approaches to employer messaging

Providers had used different types of messaging to attract employers. Providers communicated messages through online and digital marketing, employer open evenings,

employer brochures, flyers produced by the Department as well as case studies that highlight successful placements shared with prospective employers. Some providers mentioned using the AoC resource packs and marketing materials as models. The qualitative interviews asked providers to weigh different types of messages in terms of their effectiveness to engage employers.

One approach was to market the benefits of placements to employers. The message providers used most frequently, and one that they found the most effective, was that placements offer employers an opportunity to develop young people's skill and shape the future talent pipeline. In addition, some providers highlighted how placements offer employers a future recruitment pipeline. Others had appealed to employers' corporate social responsibilities and marketed the placements as an opportunity to give something back to the local community and/or young people.

Another approach providers used was to market the qualities of the learners, such as their eagerness to learn and their ability to bring fresh ideas and skills (especially around digital and social media). Other approaches included a provider saying the placement students will be 'the best of the best' young people and another saying that significant resource will be put towards matching employers with the personal characteristics and skills they require from a learner. Another provider circulated 'skills postcards' to employers highlighting the qualities of individual learners in an attractive and easily-digestible format.

A handful of providers interviewed offered incentives such as vouchers and use of college facilities in exchange for employers hosting a placement student. However, the evidence on the effectiveness of this approach was mixed. In addition, some providers felt the use of incentives should not be encouraged widely and that employers should see the benefits of engaging with the education system without individual incentives.

Some providers found messaging around the length of the placement compared to the traditional two-week work experience effective. These providers highlighted how industry placements offer more value to employers due to being longer and both more immersive and progressive, giving learners more time to settle in, become productive and have an impact in the organisation. However, there was also a view among some providers that this had mixed results, with some employers viewing the length of the placement as disruptive to the business.

Altogether, the evidence on the effectiveness of different messages was inconclusive from the qualitative research. Consequently, providers were also asked about effective messaging in the online survey. This asked responding providers to rank the effectiveness of each message by route. Business and Administration, Catering, Creative and Construction employers were all rated as being more receptive to messaging around the future talent pipeline than employers in other routes. Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care, Construction, Digital and Education and Childcare employers were said to like the idea of placements giving learners a chance to gain practical insight into their industry. Messaging around having an additional resource to take on additional tasks was particularly effective with employers in the Creative, Hair and Beauty and Health and

Science industries. A more detailed table of the effectiveness of different messages by route can be found in Table 2 below.

Finally, many providers reported that employers have a low level of awareness about T Levels in general. In many cases, the first discussion providers have with an employer is explaining what industry placements are in the context of these new qualifications. This frustrated many providers, and many firmly believed there should be a national publicity campaign to raise awareness amongst employers.

Table 2 What messages are you finding effective to engage employers?

	Agriculture	Business & Administrative	Catering	Construction	Creative	Digital	Education	Engineering	Hair & Beauty	Health & Science
Chance for young people to gain practical insight into industries	88.9%	64.3%	57.9%	72.0%	60.0%	55.0%	94.7%	52.2%	50.0%	69.2%
Improve technical skills for the future	88.9%	39.3%	57.9%	44.0%	50.0%	50.0%	47.4%	60.9%	65.0%	51.3%
Addressing skills needs	55.6%	42.9%	73.7%	60.0%	25.0%	35.0%	42.1%	69.6%	50.0%	59.0%
Feed diversity initiatives/attract under-represented groups		3.6%		8.0%			5.3%	4.3%		10.3%
Opportunity to give something back	77.8%	39.3%	36.8%	28.0%	50.0%	30.0%	31.6%	34.8%	25.0%	28.2%
CSR activities and their reputation	11.1%	25.0%	21.1%	28.0%	20.0%	20.0%	5.3%	21.7%		12.8%
Business benefit	55.6%	71.4%	63.2%	48.0%	35.0%	50.0%	52.6%	39.1%	55.0%	46.2%
Extra pair of hands/resources to take on additional tasks	77.8%	57.1%	84.2%	44.0%	65.0%	35.0%	84.2%	47.8%	85.0%	71.8%
Fresh ideas for contributions to projects	22.2%	35.7%	26.3%	16.0%	45.0%	50.0%	36.8%	26.1%	10.0%	20.5%
New ways of working	22.2%	10.7%	5.3%	20.0%	15.0%	10.0%	15.8%	13.0%		7.7%
Filling skills gaps and shortages	55.6%	25.0%	68.4%	56.0%	25.0%	35.0%	47.4%	69.6%	45.0%	38.5%
Acquiring valuable skills for their business	44.4%	46.4%	47.4%	24.0%	25.0%	10.0%	31.6%	39.1%	35.0%	28.2%
Products for the business (presentation videos etc.)	11.1%	10.7%			45.0%	20.0%	5.3%	4.3%		5.1%
Talent pipeline	77.8%	71.4%	89.5%	72.0%	65.0%	50.0%	68.4%	78.3%	75.0%	56.4%

Test drive their future workforce	44.4%	53.6%	78.9%	44.0%	40.0%	35.0%	47.4%	69.6%	65.0%	48.7%
Selling the industry	11.1%	3.6%	31.6%	8.0%	5.0%	5.0%	15.8%	17.4%	20.0%	12.8%
Increase the awareness and understanding of roles and types of work	33.3%	35.7%	21.1%	24.0%	15.0%	20.0%	52.6%	30.4%	25.0%	53.8%
Boost their industry's reputation amongst prospective future staff	11.1%	28.6%	42.1%	12.0%	20.0%	5.0%	42.1%	34.8%	25.0%	28.2%
Wider staff development opportunities	22.2%	28.6%	10.5%	12.0%	5.0%	15.0%	31.6%	30.4%	25.0%	28.2%
Supervision and learning programmes	22.2%	3.6%	10.5%	4.0%	5.0%		26.3%	8.7%	15.0%	7.7%
Other		3.6%		4.0%		5.0%				
Total	75	196	157	157	123	107	149	173	134	267

Proportions reflect the number of providers responding about each route and should not be considered representative of all providers involved in the CDF year 1 offering these routes.

Source: IES, 2019 provider survey

Providers encounters with employer barriers

In the qualitative interviews, providers were asked about the barriers employers cite when they decline to offer a placement. The most common reason reported to be given by employers surrounded their capacity and the time of their staff to supervise a learner. Other barriers included the placement being too long; lack of appropriate space/equipment; lack of relevant work or bad timing; and bad prior experience working with young people or educational providers.

Many providers struggled to offer counter-arguments to these barriers in order to set up placements in time for the 2018/19 academic year, particularly if they did not have an existing relationship with the employer. Only where employers lacked the appropriate space/equipment were some providers able to offer the required PPE and other equipment to the learner or offer space at the provider's own facilities for the hosting employer to use to overcome their barriers. In many cases, employers who declined the offer were still receptive to the idea of industry placements in general and would consider getting involved in the future. Providers therefore kept these employers as 'warm' contacts for next academic year with the view of negotiating the placement early enough to take into account the employers' needs for timing and tasks.

According to provider interviews, Employers in Construction, Engineering, Digital and Science commonly mention health and safety, age and lack of insurance as barriers. Many providers were able to offer effective counter-arguments that reassured employers about the offer. In the case of health and safety, some providers explained that they would conduct the necessary checks and risk assessments on the employers' behalf, and this worked effectively where employers trusted the provider to do so to the standard they required. In the case of insurance, some providers asked employers to check if their existing liability insurance can cover the learner and if not, they paid for this. Some providers reported that many employers have the relevant insurance already in place without realising it. Altogether, these interviews indicated that some variation in providers' ability to negotiate these barriers. The skills and prior experience of the employer engagement personnel, as well as existing working relationships between providers and employers, both made it more likely for the employer to accept the offer despite initial reluctance.

In most cases providers did not report direct costs to be a barrier for employers. They did however report that the cost of taking on a placement learner was mentioned by employers, but this was in relation to their lack of capacity and resources (i.e. desk space, staff time and productivity). In a limited number of cases providers had offered direct, partial reimbursement of these costs but there was also a view among many providers that this practice should not be widely encouraged, and that employers should be expected to engage with the programme for other reasons (such as developing young people's skills).

4.4. Employer decision-making

4.4.1. Engaged employers' reasons for taking part

Those employers who had taken learners on placements were asked about their decision-making when weighing the costs and benefits of the programme. Employers mentioned different reasons, depending on their organisations' priorities and values. They included:

- **Developing of future workforce and talent pipeline**. A common reason for employer engagement was they believed that industry placements offered the chance to shape the skills of young people and ensure they had industry-relevant and current knowledge. This extended to aiming to increase the awareness of learners about the career opportunities in their organisation and industry more generally, particularly in industries that experienced skills shortages and found it difficult to attract and recruit young people. Several employers saw placements as a mutual 'try before you buy' both for the learner and the employer, and would encourage learners to apply for vacancies within the organisation, and higher level qualifications such as Apprenticeships. Development of future workforce and talent pipeline was also the most common way in which providers attracted employers, and one that they found the most effective.

- **Supporting the vision of becoming a learning organisation.** Some employers described themselves as a 'learning organisation' and advocated the development of knowledge and skills among all job roles in their organisation. They therefore reported that hosting the T Level placements was a natural commitment.

- **Offering opportunities for staff development.** Some employers discussed how having a learner on placement could be a valuable opportunity for existing staff to develop their supervision and mentoring skills, and experience, and some employers felt that opportunities such as this increased the motivation of their existing staff.

- **Increasing capacity**. Some employers mentioned that they took on a placement learner as they offered an additional resource and increased organisational capacity to support existing workloads.

- **Adding social value.** Some employers discussed their organisations' commitment to corporate social responsibility, or social value, and viewed supporting placement learners aligned with this. Some employers explicitly wanted to build relationships between themselves and local communities and saw the placements as a means of doing this. For some larger employers that already had established educational collaborations with schools, colleges and Higher Education institutions, and are visible in the community, the corporate social

responsibility aspect was less important and not the main factor for considering taking part.

- **Understanding young peoples' perspectives.** Some employers set out to 'learn from the learners' and sought their views on delivery of their products and services. They anticipated the involvement of young people would enable more effective engagement with young people as customers by the organisation (e.g. in marketing or service delivery). For some industries, for example in arts and culture, placements were viewed as an effective way to engage with a younger audience and understanding more about how they viewed and experienced the exhibits.

- **Supporting the work of a local FE college.** Often employers that had taken on a learner from an FE college had good and long-standing relationships with them, which had been beneficial to the organisation over a number of years. They therefore wanted to support the college by providing placements for learners in order to support the college. Employers working with sixth form colleges were less likely to mention this as a reason for engaging, as their relationships tended to be newer.

Undecided employers' considerations when making decisions

In the sample of employer interviews, there was a group of employers who were engaged with the education and skills system that were currently undecided about whether to host an industry placement. Important considerations for this group of employers were similar to engaged employers in many respects and included:

- **Developing the future workforce and talent pipeline.** Similar to engaged employers a consideration and potential motivation for currently undecided employers was that placements and T Levels offered the opportunity to develop young people, and to assess in the workplace their employability and industry-specific skills. Placements therefore offered the opportunity to mould the skills of the future workforce. Some employers wanted to see how placements could support the development of their talent pipeline although some perceived there to be a lack of clarity about how placement learners would then move into established vocational qualifications, such as Apprenticeships. They had therefore adopted a 'wait and see' approach in order for the new technical routes and pathways to be tested and more established. This would better allow them to understand how placements would best fit within their current recruitment strategy and training programmes. The timeframe over which employers in this group felt this would be established varied, with some indicating that they were likely to become involved in the next few years, and others that wanting more evidence of the benefits to business, what employers would need to provide in order to ensure

a quality placement, and a better understanding of a the programme structure before they took on a learner.

- **Diversifying the entry points into the organisation.** Linked to extending the talent pipeline, some employers were keen to be able to increase the diversity of young people they reached with their recruitment strategies. This was more likely to be the case in industries that had traditionally gendered occupations, with employers in the Health and Science (Care) and Construction industry reporting these motivations. Some employers specifically mentioned that they might also aim to increase social inclusion.

- **Supporting the vision of becoming a learning organisation.** A small number of undecided employers discussed their organisation's ambition to become a learning organisation. They viewed offering placements to be part of this vision, and reported they were likely to engage as their organisation took forward this ambition.

Comparing employers' reasons for engagement and provider approaches to employer engagement

When mapping out employers' reasons for taking part (chapter 1.3.6) against the different messages providers used to appeal to employers (chapter 1.3.5), there are some gaps where providers could potentially add value in their messaging. Providers frequently use messaging around developing a future workforce/talent pipeline; adding extra resource/capacity; and supporting the work of a local FE college), which are also some of the key reasons employers decided to take part. Many employers additionally cited reasons such as adding social value and understanding young people's perspectives that were less frequently used by providers in the qualitative sample. Very few providers appear to be using messaging around supporting the employer's vision of becoming a learning organisation or offering opportunities for staff development (i.e. in line management), which some employers considered in their decision-making (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Comparing engaged employers' reasons for taking part and providers' use of messages to engage employers

Engaged employers' reasons for taking part	Frequent	Occasional	Rare
Developing a future workforce and talent pipeline	✓		
Supporting vision to become a learning organisation			✓
Offering opportunities for staff development			✓
Extra resource/capacity	✓		
Adding social value		✓	
Understanding young peoples' perspectives		✓	
Supporting the work of a local FE college	✓		

Source: IES, 2019 based on qualitative research

Unengaged employers' views on offering placements

In the qualitative employer sample, there were employers who reported that they were neither currently engaged with placements nor would they reconsider this position in the immediate future. The reasons for this were varied and included concerns about:

- **A lack of capacity to support placements.** Some of employers reported that they saw other training and development routes, such as Apprenticeships, as more of an organisational priority. Where employers undertook other training programmes, they did not want to reduce their effectiveness and the organisations capacity invested in those with emerging policies.

- **Costs outweigh benefits.** Some employers believed that the supervision of learners to ensure a high quality placement would be significant and require upfront investment from the organisation to initiate the scheme. Set against the perceived lack of proven organisational benefits, these employers were not convinced that the benefits of involvement would outweigh the costs for their organisation.

- **Remote working.** Some employers said their employees in their organisation worked remotely across a number of sites, with home-working prevalent. Without

a central site, they did not believe that they would be able to support and supervise learners sufficiently[4].

- **Payment to learners.** Some employers described their organisational commitment to paying learners undertaking work experience i.e. of one to two weeks because learners would be involved in useful tasks and contribute to the business. These understood that learners on T Level placements were unpaid. It was also clear whether they could resource the pay for 315+ hour placements. This highlights the need for clearer communications from providers about learner payments.

4.5. Timetables

Challenges to timetabling were generally described as: relating to the model that the provider had chosen for the industry placements (block, day release or a mix), and to placement timing, rather than the length of the placement per se; or to learners' situations and other commitments including part-time work, caring, and whether they needed to re-sit maths and English.

Some of the sixth form colleges in the sample reported particular difficulties with fitting in the placements to their timetables in contrast to FE colleges. This appeared to reflect different traditions of timetabling between these two provider types, with sixth forms more likely to timetable teaching fully across the week, and FE colleges more likely to contain programmes within 3 or 4 days of the week. In addition, the size of qualifications being undertaken by learners could have an effect: some of the sixth forms reported that as learners undertake multiple (smaller) qualifications, perhaps a mix of academic and technical, which made timetabling more challenging. Both sixth forms and FE colleges reported challenges associated with timetabling for those learners also undertaking maths and English re-sits. On this, there were different approaches: some providers only offered placements to those learners who were not resitting English and maths. Similarly, some providers only offered placements on courses with larger cohorts where it was possible to send the whole group out at the same time. More frequently, providers attempted to offer tailored and individualised flexibility – aiming to respond to both employer and learner where possible.

Some providers were unable to fit the 315+ hour placements into existing timetables during term time only. This led to changes in plan and the addition of small blocks during holiday periods. A future solution put forward by providers was to start the placements

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[4] From policy and providers' perspective learner safeguarding would also be a concern

earlier on in the academic year; something they thought would be possible in future years when they knew further in advance what they would be required to deliver.

It was notable that many providers reported that their timetabling challenges were a consequence of 'retrofitting' industry placements into existing qualifications. There was a strong view that when they can design their timetable to be bespoke to the T Level programme this issue will be alleviated. One general FE provider that will be delivering T Levels from 2020 will be creating a timetable from next year that will more reflective of the increased hours that will be funded for T Levels. They anticipate that this will allow them greater flexibility in the timetable to accommodate the industry placements.

Some of the providers described how they had started late with the placements or curriculum staff had not 'planned in' the placements and consequently there were challenges with booking in enough time for the placements within timetables. Other providers described how they had been able to work in advance with curriculum staff to plan the industry placements and therefore had adapted the curriculum and timetable to accommodate a placement at a time that best suites each pathways' industry. This included a general FE provider that had participated in the pilot starting placements in the construction industry in January to take into account a typical quiet period over Christmas. Other (non-pilot) providers described how they are making preparations for the next CDF year so that timetables are arranged, and learners are prepared for three days in college and two days on placement, for example.

A common challenge – where solutions appeared limited – concerned learners' commitments to part-time work or caring responsibilities which constrained the time they could free up to undertake placements. While part-time work, for example, in catering and hospitality or agriculture, could be converted into placements, those learners working in retail (or other routes that will be apprenticeship-only) were not afforded the same opportunity. Overall, there is less confidence amongst providers that they can resolve this in future. A further common challenge surrounded learners' commitment to placements compared to their timetabled courses and coursework. As often placements were seen as optional (since for the most part they do not form part of qualifications) providers have struggled to gain full commitment to the placement, despite the potential benefits that could arise.

Employers' responses to timetables and models

Many employers said they could be flexible on the placement model and exact timetabling if required, however they also believed this would result from a dialogue with the provider to agree what would work best to accommodate both their own and learners' requirements. Some larger employers highlighted that their various departments might have differing preferences regarding the model that would work best, depending on the

environment and nature of the work. The implied expectation was that providers could respond to this.

Some individual employers and some industries indicated there could be preferences for specific models. For example, several Engineering and Manufacturing employers said that they would prefer a block release because it enabled greater continuity. Specifically, their learner inductions tended to be longer, given the health and safety. The block models afforded an immersive and efficient way forward. In some cases, employers believed that a block release would give the learner a better experience and enable them to most effectively integrate with the team while on placement. In some industries such as cultural and creative, the need for considerable flexibility was stressed – for example, a creative placement in a theatre or concert hall might primarily take place in the evening.

Most engaged employers said that the provider had determined the model of attendance, and that they had accommodated it. Some of these were also able to accommodate the learners' increased availability during term breaks and where some college requirements finished during the placement.

There were various considerations about the most suitable model:

- Did the model support the nature of the work? Employers reported that day release models could affect the nature of the projects and tasks learners were able to be involved with, with some employers were of the view that project work would be best supported by block release which gave the learner an immersive experience. For others, day release was sufficient to support project-based work.

- Would the model support effective team working? In a health and social care setting two consecutive days were preferred to enable learners to get to know staff and patients; another employer believed that block release had the advantage of incorporating the learner into the team more easily.

- What is the workflow of the business? Do peak periods coincide with block release? An employer discussed the seasonal nature of their work which made offering block release more viable.

- What model best supports progression onto apprenticeships? For example, an employer noted that a block release might better support progression onto apprenticeships, depending on the timing.

Some employers that emphasised flexibility discussed whether it would work better to count the placement in hours rather than days, which fits with the most recent policy response on the duration of placements.

5. High quality placements

DfE Guidance for the CDF year identifies that industry placements should be high quality, structured and outcome focused. Key principles (and quality indicators) should include:

- Duration – 315+ hours, with average duration of 50 days
- Occupationally specific – focused on developing technical skills relevant to learners' field of study
- Learner readiness – work-ready with appropriate work ethic and etiquette
- Externality – takes place with an employer external to the college
- Inclusive – learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) able to undertake high quality placements
- Outcome focused – with clear and pre-determined objectives

Source: DfE Guidance: Industry Placement CDF: Principles for high quality industry placements[5]

The accounts of the providers indicated that they have taken these principles on board (for the large part) and were working to ensure they underpin their learners' experiences. It was apparent from a number of providers' comments that it was a combination of factors that lead to a quality experience.

> 'It's about the match with the curriculum to get the technical skills development in place. It has to extend beyond behaviours and soft skills. You need to achieve a good match with student aspirations, so they see the relevance, and you have to put support in place for students and employers'

> Pilot provider, General FE and Tertiary

> 'High quality placements consist of a welcoming environment, safety, competence of those working around the learner, development opportunities for the learner, and alignment with learner interests and industry standards. We ensure this by learners keeping a diary, employers filling out a weekly progress report, and in-house surveys for learners and employers. These are specifically aimed at monitoring the placement and identify small problems before they get bigger.'

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[5] Downloaded 10.10.19 from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/work-placement-capacity-and-delivery-fund-principles-for-high-quality-work-placements

As part of the survey of providers, respondents were asked how easy or difficult it had been to achieve high quality placements for each route they were asked or elected to report on. Overall, the majority of respondents said that was either 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to achieve high quality placements, see Table 4. Providers responding about particular routes were more likely to say that the Catering (58%) and Education and Childcare (63%) routes were easier and that Creative and Design (85%), Construction (80%), Digital (80%), Engineering and Manufacturing (74%) were more difficult in respect of quality.

Providers were also asked what made it more difficult to achieve high quality placements and they reported that 'Employers staff resources' was overall the most challenging factor. For 4 routes (Business & Administrative, Catering, Education and Childcare, and Hair and Beauty) the 'Characteristics of learners (motivation levels, SEND, deprivation etc.)' was the most prevalent factor. The 'Lack of job roles/tasks at an appropriate level for learners' was also most prevalent for 4 routes (Agriculture, Business & Administrative, Construction, Health & Science).

Table 4 How easy or difficult has it been to achieve high quality placements for this route?*

	Agriculture	Business & Admin	Catering	Construction	Creative	Digital	Education & Childcare	Engineering	Hair & Beauty	Health & Science
Very easy	11.1%	.	5.3%	.	.	.	.	.	.	2.6%
Easy	22.2%	25.0%	52.6%	4.0%	5.0%		63.2%	4.3%	45.0%	10.3%
Neither easy or difficult	11.1%	39.3%	36.8%	12.0%	5.0%	20.0%	31.6%	21.7%	20.0%	25.6%
Difficult	44.4%	21.4%	5.3%	52.0%	45.0%	40.0%	5.3%	34.8%	25.0%	51.3%
Very difficult	11.1%	14.3%	.	28.0%	40.0%	40.0%	.	39.1%	.	10.3%
Not applicable	.	.	.	4.0%	5.0%	.	.	.	10.0%	
Total	9.0%	28%	19%	25%	20%	20%	19%	23%	20%	39%

* Legal and Finance not reported as only 1 respondent

Source: IES, 2019 provider survey

There were some particular quality concerns that were more prevalent for providers responding about some industries. As seen in the table below (Table 5), when considering what made it easier to achieve high quality placements, the answer that scored highest overall was 'prevalence of job roles/tasks at an appropriate level for learners'. Each route varied in the factor that made it easier; however, four of the routes had 'prevalence of high quality employers in the local area' as the most prominent factor.

One of the key research questions for the evaluation was to find out how providers ensure quality. The interviews with providers and employers gave insights into differences between routes with regard to high quality placements and these are discussed below with regard to the key principles and quality indicators as identified by the Department.

Table 5 What makes it easier to achieve high quality placements?*

	Agriculture	Business & Admin	Catering	Construction	Creative	Digital	Education & Childcare	Engineering	Hair & Beauty	Health & Science
Sufficient internal staff resource	77.8%	69.2%	52.6%	56.0%	45.0%	52.6%	52.6%	54.5%	42.1%	64.1%
Characteristics of learners (motivation levels etc.)	55.6%	69.2%	42.1%	68.0%	60.0%	52.6%	78.9%	54.5%	57.9%	69.2%
Employers staff resource	55.6%	46.2%	52.6%	52.0%	45.0%	63.2%	84.2%	50.0%	31.6%	66.7%
Employers physical resources (software/hardware)	11.1%	19.2%		32.0%	15.0%	47.4%	21.1%	13.6%	26.3%	12.8%
Prevalence of job roles/tasks at an appropriate level for learners	66.7%	69.2%	84.2%	64.0%	55.0%	73.7%	78.9%	54.5%	47.4%	64.1%

Prevalence of high quality employers in the local area	55.6%	46.2%	42.1%	56.0%	65.0%	42.1%	73.7%	63.6%	68.4%	69.2%
Other		3.8%		4.0%	10.0%	5.3%			5.3%	5.1%
Total	29	84	52	83	59	64	74	64	53	137

* Legal and Finance not reported as only 1 respondent

Source: IES, 2019 provider survey

5.1. Duration

Some of the key challenges to implementation in the CDF year have been sourcing industry placements of the requisite duration and keeping students engaged for the minimum 315 hours. Consequently, this quality principle was seen as hard to meet.

Some providers questioned whether 315+ hours with one employer was essential given their experience that many employers were unwilling to host placements. Some providers perceived placements did not work well in particular industries (e.g. creative and media, or digital) and some saw more learner benefit arising from placements with multiple employers. In the Construction route, some providers were concerned about whether employers would be able to deliver placements for the whole required duration. The preponderance of SMEs in some labour markets and industries (e.g. construction and creative and media) was a challenge: from the perspective of the employers' resources to host a placement as well as their workflow, which might mean they would struggle to support a long duration, structured learning experience.

Towards the end of the evaluation activity (in Spring 2019) the Department announced a suite of changes to the policy including being able to split come placements between more than one employer. This did not directly fall within the remit of the evaluation, however some providers reported to the research team that they welcomed these changes to help address the challenge of securing employers for long enough, particularly in construction.

An additional concern for the providers was the time it had taken during the CDF year 1 to set up new processes and ensure that all health and safety checks had been completed so that the industry placements could start early enough that all of the required hours could be fit in the remainder of the academic year. The model of attendance that providers selected – either predominant day-release or block of time on placement, also influenced when they needed to start the placement and therefore how much preparation time they had with learners. This was viewed by these providers to be a facet of the CDF phase and that with preparations continuing between CDF year 1 and 2, and into the roll out of T Levels, this would be less of an issue in the future.

5.2. Occupational specificity

The occupational specificity of the placements and achieving a good match between the learners' career aim and the placement employers offered was a common quality concern for many providers.

> 'A high quality placement is an opportunity for the learner to demonstrate and implement their occupational specific knowledge and personal life skills. To contribute demonstrably to the organisation, to be valuable and part of a team. The learner should

gain readiness to work, self-confidence and self-esteem, 'get a bit of sparkle'.

A few providers wanted to be in a position where they were able to allow learners to choose between different placements in order to secure the best 'match' between learner and placement. Others also highlighted that the match should be based on the learners' specific interests and careers aspirations; in this way the learner would have extra motivation to sustain the placement and it would be more enjoyable for them.

The development of technical skills is an important goal for the placements; alongside this, employers also noted the importance of the development of soft skills, such as communication. Generally, employers thought that learners were developing and practising a range of vocational and technical skills, specific to the industry, and of relevance to their curriculum. In a Creative and Design placement for example, an employer discussed learners' expertise in running a website and social media. In a placement on the Business and Administrative route the employer noted the development of learners' technical skills in relation to email communication, spread sheet management, and project management which formed learning objectives for the placement. Employers discussed ways in which they might best provide a 'meaningful placement'. An example of doing this was by providing short projects that learners could take ownership of.

5.3. Learner readiness

Providers saw learner preparation as crucial, particularly given the duration of placements and the difficulty of sourcing them. Providers realised their reputations were at stake in the context of hard-won employer support and some of their learners were not yet ready for placement experiences. Providers' thoughts were already turning to starting preparation earlier and working with learners at the application stage to start briefing them about placement requirements.

> 'Some of our students are very academically capable but are nowhere near being ready to go out in industry. Mitigating that against achieving the required hours will be a future challenge. These learners need to work on their employability skills.

A large General FE and Tertiary College had offered different types of learner preparation activities dependent on learners' starting point. Those that were identified as

not ready for the workplace and in need of significant support to be prepared were offered a specialist development programme on the world of work and employability skills, social support, and in some case field trips to experience the work environment. For others, preparation focused on the specifics of being prepared for the longer duration industry placements.

Learner preparation was important to developing learner characteristics such as motivation and engagement with industry placements. These characteristics were both a success factor and a risk factor for some routes (as identified in the survey): for example, where learners on the Business and Administrative route were not engaged and did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to do, because this routes covers a very broad range of occupations it was a risk to the quality of the placement. Conversely, where learners on this route were motivated and engaged and had destinations in mind, providers believed that this helped to achieve high quality placements.

Engaged employers had mixed views on the extent to which learners were prepared for their placements. Some believed that the learners had been well-prepared, with workplace expectations, surrounding punctuality, dress code, working with colleagues, and effective communication effectively instilled. Some employers discussed how they used induction to cement and build on the preparation led by providers; this meant they could reinforce their expectations, show learners the working environment, and give examples of the types of working scenarios that might occur. Some employers noted that the provider they worked with had provided employability training to the learners prior to attendance at the placements, and they welcomed this.

A few engaged employers, however, thought that the provider could have prepared the learners for the placement better, including managing their expectations of the work environment and situations. For example, an employer in the health care industry said that learners were not well prepared for a hospital environment and the demands of patients; they believed that the provider should have been more explicit about the situations that learners could encounter in such a work environment. Other employers who had poor experiences learners attributed this to a lack of preparation particularly in respect of work-readiness.

Some employers emphasised their own role in preparing the learner for the placements, for example, by providing information and offering the opportunity to attend the workplace as part of the recruitment and selection process. Some also used this opportunity to set in place learning objectives for the placements. Some employers said that it was part of their role to provide sufficient information about the nature of the tasks learners would be involved with, and outlining the support, review and management structures was also an important way of setting learner expectations.

5.4. Externality

The requirement for the placements to be delivered externally to the provider brought a number of quality issues concerning raising employer awareness in order to: source placements; the capacity of employers in the local labour market to host learners; the additional due diligence and safeguarding checks and monitoring that would be required when placing learners with employers; and the support required by employers to support them to deliver placements. Some of these issues have been discussed earlier in this report. The issues raised here in this section are those that providers raised specifically concerning achieving high quality placements.

Employer awareness

As discussed in Chapter 4, employers generally were not familiar with the T Levels policy agenda, including the expectations for industry placements, and therefore had not considered the implications for their resources. Providers had good awareness of this however, which meant they could feed information-giving into employer briefings as well as judge the level of support that would be available and whether this would lead to a quality experience.

> 'Industry placements require more investment from the employer in terms of time and attention given to individual students (via structured work plans and regular meetings). Employers aren't familiar with this at present, even in health and social care... Industry placements will require more input, and with more lead in time, we can do more to prepare employers for this.'

Provider, 6th Form College

Many of the providers described the process of gaining employer-buy-in as a challenge to high quality placements. In particular this related to ensuring buy-in at a strategic level to drive forward the placement at the host employer and buy-in to the overall strategic aims of industry placements to support learners gain technical skills in the workplace as well as the classroom.

Employer capacity

The capacity or resource demands that placements generate for employers was a concern for providers and a factor that they identified as a challenge across all routes in the survey. For the Engineering and Manufacturing and Digital routes in particular this was this biggest concern amongst those respondents on these routes. In contrast, for the Education and Childcare route, providers identified that this was a success factor,

suggesting the employers in this industry have more resources to dedicate to supporting placements or more experience meaning that they expect to do this. A provider delivering on this route described how they were able to make use of other schools in their multi-academy trust (MAT) group, much as construction employers may make use of their supply chain.

A provider described in their research interview how they addressed employer capacity by: being explicit in conversation with the employer early on about the expectations around the industry placement; offering support and reminders to the employer on an on-going basis; conducting skills audits so that all parties were aware of what skills needed to be developed; as well as the provider ensuring that they supported the learners to have tools to identify what they want to get form the placement.

Providers delivering placements on the Construction route had concerns about peaks and troughs of work and the sustainability of placements over an academic year. A provider delivering placements on this route described how they had initially struggled to secure placements but had worked with larger construction employers that had said they could work with their supply chains to help support the placements. Other supportive factors included this provider creating an industry board to help drive forward employer involvement within the college; and some construction employers forming a consortium to help support learners on placement, in order to provide a carousel experience between the employers to ensure they achieved the required number of hours, without over-burdening any one of the employers.

Due diligence and safeguarding

For some industries the issue of the availability of work for learners to do on placement was related to the health and safety responsibilities and requirements. For example, providers highlighted that in the animal care industry there are regulated tasks and duties that industry placement learners are not able to carry out and that this raised questions for how progressively developmental the placements could be over time. Providers sought to address this by maintaining regular communications with learners and employers so that issues can be identified and addressed early on. An engaged employer who had hosted a placement on this route referred to industry body guidelines in order to understand the tasks that learners could do under supervision, as well as which could not be carried out by learners. Other employers also called on industry bodies to provide employers with guidance on how placements could work.

Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care industries are considered high risk workplaces and so face-to-face visits by provider staff were necessary to establish that health and safety protocols were in place at the start of, and diligence on this continues throughout, the industry placement. Providers were generally able to identify higher risk industries

that required more extensive reviews before accepting employers as industry placement hosts. There was strong recognition amongst providers of the risks involved if due diligence pre-placement had not been thorough and some gave examples where they could not proceed with placements due to safeguarding and safety.

Providers sought employers with explicit high standards of health and safety as well as high standards in respect of other practices – particularly in the Engineering and Manufacturing, Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care, Education and Childcare.

> 'We have a couple of nurseries we don't place with because feedback has been consistently bad from students - they don't see the kind of practice introduced in the classroom in these so we'd rather not use those employers'

> Provider, General FE and Tertiary

For providers seeking industry placements in the Education and Childcare route, schools are seen to attend well to quality within industry placements as they use well-established protocols that they have set in place for Initial Teacher Training placements. Providers also sought out education establishments that have 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted ratings.

Support for employers

Several providers indicated the level of support they offered to employers and learners facilitated quality placement experiences to emerge. There were clear messages that both learners and employers required support to ensure the placement continued to deliver on quality, and this could involve significant staff time on liaising, troubleshooting and advocating for learners. On-going support and communication between the provider, employer and learner was identified in the provider interviews as a critical success factor to achieving high quality placements. This included visiting employer premises as part of reviews and ensuring that provider staff were checking in with learners about the placement when they were back with the provider. These touch-points would help to identify what tasks learners were being allocated and where additional opportunities to develop would need to be identified.

From the learner and staffing perspective, externality meant that transport and travel arrangements and distances had to be checked before proceeding. Consequently, with externality came thoughts about appropriate placements caseloads in the context of the local labour market as travel distances affected staff as much as learners. In the monitoring data, most providers reported that their learners were not travelling more than 75 minutes each way to their placement. However, over 100 providers had at least one learner that was travelling 75 minutes or more.

Further discussion of support for employers and learners is included in Section 7.7 in the context of support offered during CDF year 1.

5.5. Inclusion

Externality itself was typically not questioned, unless discussed in the context of SEND learner inclusion, where providers believed placements within simulated work environments as well as with their own staff teams would be effective and provide the safe space these learners could require. A couple of providers would have preferred to use internal resources because of sourcing difficulties in their small local labour market and overlapping footprint with other providers.

As with the pilot year, providers had low numbers of SEND learners taking part in placements. During interviews providers identified two main reasons for this: firstly, the challenge of timetabling maths and English alongside industry placements; and, second, the risk of reputational damage at an early stage of relationship building with employers. However, providers that were building on existing work experience provision and who had good existing relationships with employers could identify employers that could accommodate learners who required more support. There was also an example of a provider that had been able to send two SEND learners to one employer because they shared a support worker who could then be assured that this support would be available throughout the placement experience.

Funding for placements is discussed in detail in chapter 6 below, however the CDF and additional bursary monies were welcomed by providers and had helped to ensure that no learners were excluded from placements due to a lack of money.

According to a provider taking part in the telephone interview, inclusivity of the placements should also mean ensuring that the workplace is diverse and reflecting the diversity of the learners. This provider highlighted the importance for them of finding employers in the Creative route that reflected the BAME background of their learners.

5.6. Outcomes

The differing extents to which providers focused on outcomes in respect of development objectives specific to the industry, affected their assessment of placement quality and thereby quality assessments by outcomes were more varied.

Some providers were not fully on board with the concept that outcomes of industry placements should be focused on the application and acquisition of technical skills. These providers had the mind-set that the soft and employability skills gained were of equal value and should be recognised more within the policy. However, even where

providers fully embraced the differences inherent in industry placements, when compared to work experience, learning objectives were likely to straddle elements of soft and employability skills, as well as technical skills.

Many of the providers that were delivering placements across different routes described the importance of linking the placement to the curriculum. These providers wanted conversations with employers early on to ensure that the placement would complement what was being delivered in the classroom: as a provider in the creative industry described – 'an employer that looks at the qualification content and mirrors what they need' (Provider, Academy). Employers discussed the importance of work shadowing and then setting relevant tasks. One employer in Animal Care and Management reported that they sought to link workplace tasks directly to curriculum elements being covered each week in college.

In order to set the development objectives for the placement, the starting point for providers tended to be understanding what an employer could offer. This was an area of change since the pilot, and providers had started to formalise this practice. In the CDF year, asking employers to supply a placement 'job description' was relatively common; some also asked employers to help develop an action plan for the learner. It was also reported to be common for employers to want a pre-placement meeting or recruitment process.

Some providers found it more challenging to bring employers around to the need for a structured learning experience, which would require supervision by the employer, and associated monitoring by the provider. Many of the providers were attentive to the need for tasks to be developmental – immersive and progressive – rather than repetitive. As such they worked to provide employers' with insights into the curriculum that could help underpin the setting of development objectives for the placement.

Where providers found that employers could not guarantee a structured learning experience, they did not go ahead with brokering placements due to quality concerns. Industries with particular risks in this regard included Catering (where learners could default to a kitchen porter role) and Engineering and Manufacturing (where job roles could become limited to floor sweeping). Once again, providers identified that regular communication with employers and learners was important to identify and address where learner development was stagnating: 'it's about the relationship and rapport, support and feedback' (Provider, Sixth Form College).

6. Resourcing the CDF year

This chapter explores providers' views of the funding available to them which aimed to cover the costs of placements. It captures how they spent the CDF, including how they used it to support learners and employers as well as staffing and systems. The chapter focuses on the research questions concerned with how funding was allocated and spent, including on: the resources to offer placements, and the extent to which the CDF was used to cover employer costs and the effects of meeting these costs. The chapter draws on the provider and stakeholder interviews and management information analysis.

6.1. Funding

CDF providers were able to access two forms of funding. The first was the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) itself which was intended to build providers' capacity to deliver industry placements, including by putting in place the processes and resources they required to plan and implement high quality placements. Alongside this, an uplift to the bursary funds was available to allow providers to offer financial support to learners to overcome barriers to participation. Each source and their uses is explored below.

CDF allocations and planned spend

The funding for providers was allocated based on the number of qualifying learners, with a funding rate per learner of £250. Providers with small numbers of qualifying learners were allocated a fixed budget above the learner 'capped' funding. Guidelines were provided by the Department with regard to how providers could spend the funding; this was not prescriptive and could be used for a range of budget lines including staff costs, supporting learners' travel and subsistence costs, buying equipment needed for industry placements and travel costs for visiting employers. The Department allowed providers to use the fund flexibly although required information on providers' spending plans as well as how funds had been spent in practice.

Figure 4 shows how providers intended to spend their CDF allocation as reported in their October 2018 management information. This is sorted by three main types of costs: staffing (bottom three bars); internal resources and peer learning (middle three bars), and learner costs (top four bars). Please note these data have not been adjusted for size of funding pot (which derives from scale of planned activity). What these data illustrate is:

- Staffing to deliver industry placements (IP) was the key planned cost. The predominant form of planned staff spending concerned the recruitment to new part- or full-time IP Coordinator roles, although extending the contracts of existing staff was also relatively common. Many less considered outsourcing this task.

- Covering learner costs was considered important at the planning stage – and as part of delivery. While the extent of planned spend on this coalesced around lower proportions of overall budgets than staff, it was still a key aspect of planned spend and would cover equipment, learner preparation, travel and subsistence costs and additional support for SEND learners.

- Planned spend on resources and peer learning were similar across providers (i.e. less variance by size of funding pot). Most providers planned to spend up to 10% of their funding on this.

Figure 4: Providers' planned spend
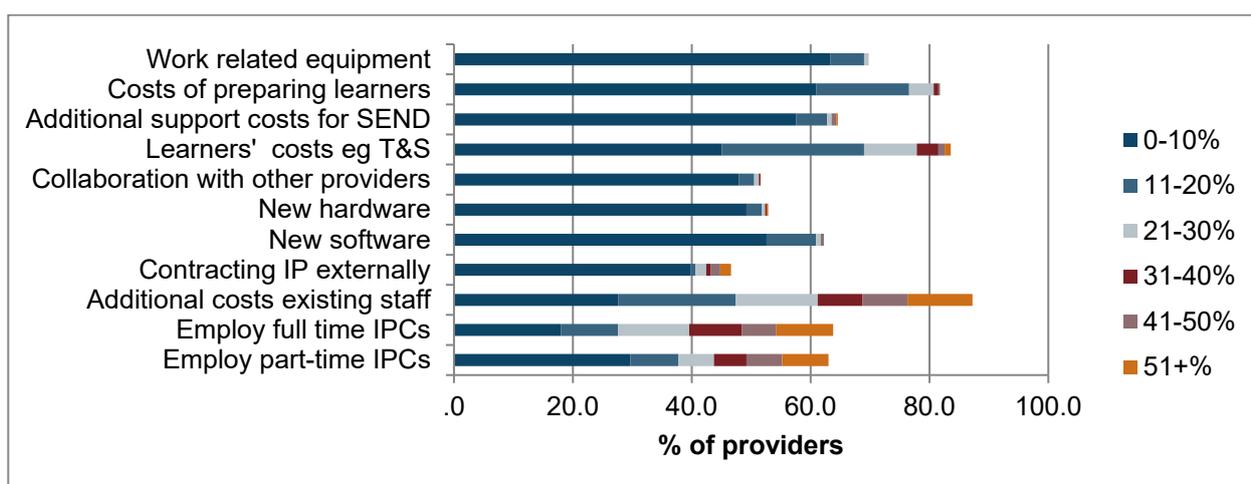
Source: IES 2019, based on ESFA MI

While providers appreciated the spending flexibility granted to them by the Department, some also had some concerns about how best to allocate their CDF year 1 to: staff resources e.g. through changes to staffing such as new recruitment, and adapting existing roles; developing their employer contacts and sharing information with local employers about the forthcoming changes; or mainly on meeting the target number of placements and the 315+ hours duration. Some providers in the first round of interviews, particularly sixth forms, described how they had been building capacity in their organisation with less focus on achieving the planned number of placements. Additionally, some of the providers said they had been advised by the Department and the Intensive Support team that should they not meet their target they might not be funded for CDF year 2.

Sufficiency of CDF funding

Overall, the providers welcomed the level of funding provided by CDF as it supported them to build capacity ahead of T Level roll out and many reported that the funding had been sufficient for this in CDF year 1. A few providers indicated that CDF was well

funded. Those holding these positive views that CDF year 1 was adequately or well-funded could, nonetheless, have concerns about future funding levels – most immediately focused on CDF year 2 which expects the scale of delivery to increase to 20% of the cohort, as well as longer term into T Level delivery (see section 6.1.6).

In contrast, others had found delivery more resource-intensive or requiring different strategies in addition to those they planned, and for these reasons they believed funding was inadequate. There were no particular types of provider holding these views, although some (notably those in receipt of smaller funding pots) described how the funding had placed constraints on the sourcing methods they could use, specifically this concerned constraints on having a dedicated staff resource for this, and others how rural locations increased the costs of monitoring placements. The construction and engineering routes were highlighted as expensive to deliver by some providers. This was because of the costs of preparing learners, and in some cases, providing coverage for CSCS cards and public liability insurances. Concerns over the adequacy of funding were often intertwined with concerns for the overall level of T Level funding and the number of learners likely to enrol for T Level programmes.

How the CDF was spent

As noted, a key area of CDF spending was on staff resources. The fund enabled a range of roles to be supported. CDF was also allocated by providers to support learners with travel costs and equipment, as well as to purchase hardware and software to support delivery. It could also be used to alleviate employers' costs. Each of these is discussed below. Figure 5 shows their actual spend according to the available management information. It should be noted the reporting categories had been expanded by wave 3 (the end of the summer term). Again, the data were sorted in respect of staff spending (bottom six bars), resources (middle six bars) and learner and employer spend (top six bars). The overall pattern was very similar to the planned spend (see Figure 4).

Figure 5: Actual spend in CDF year 1
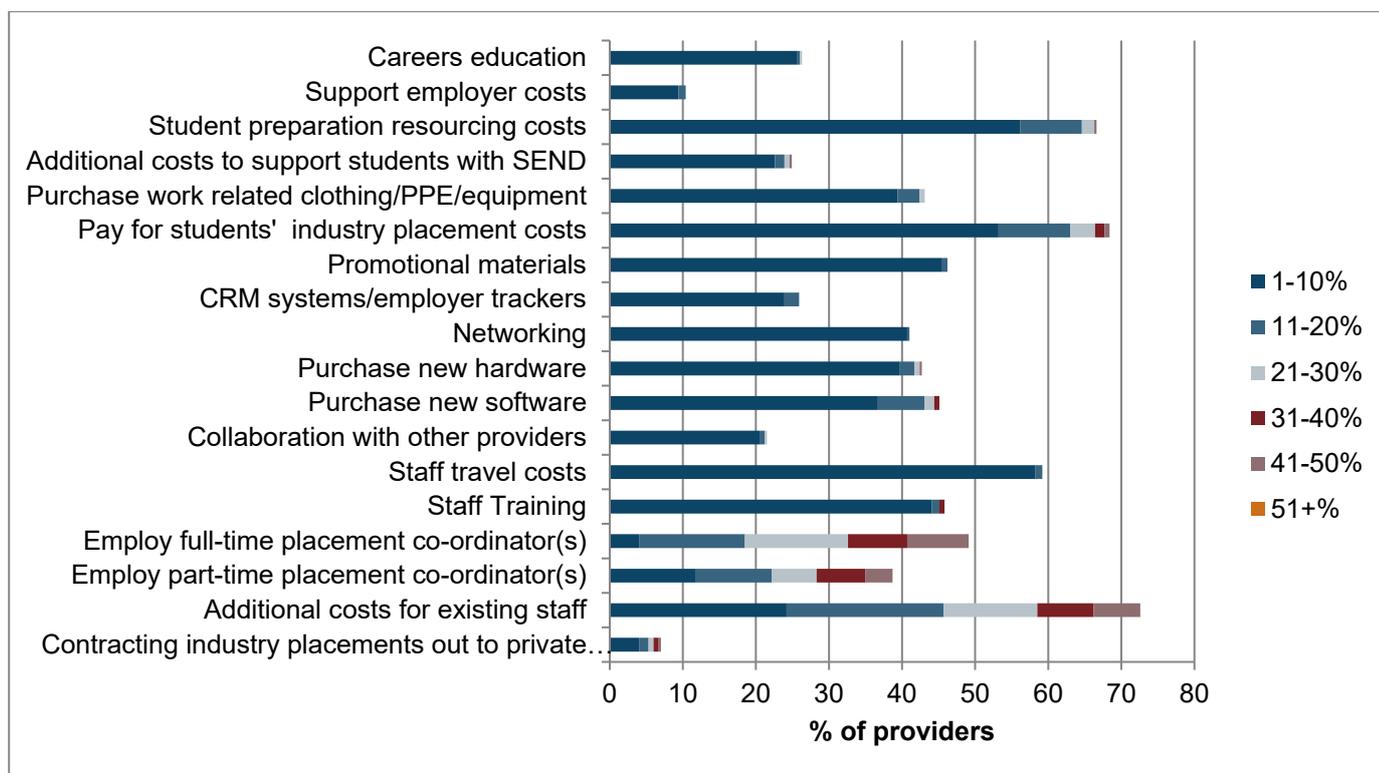
Source: IES 2019, based on ESFA MI

Staffing

Considerable amounts of CDF funding were spent on recruiting new staff to coordinate industry placements and to extending the contracts of existing staff to support delivery. Additionally, staff funding also encompassed the time and travel costs for staff to conduct placement visits. Providers indicated that this staff time was necessary in order to source and organise the placements including due diligence and other preparations, and to monitor learners and liaise with employers when out on placement. Some providers received a small amount of funding (£5-10,000) due to the small number of placements that 10% of their cohort comprised and as a consequence were not able to fund a specific placement coordinator. These providers tended to extend existing staff contracts in order to cover this work, although many believed that using academic staff for these functions was not cost efficient. Providers that received larger amounts of funding reported that this could cover a fixed term placement coordinator role. However, a provider that received a larger amount of funding due to agreeing to source over 200 placements still indicated this was insufficient to allow it to increase on-placement support resources as much as their experience now showed was needed.

Providers strongly asserted that increased levels of staffing were required in order to be able to source and support placements. However due to funding uncertainties, these roles were offered as fixed term contracts – whether undertaken by existing or new staff. There were no notable differences on this point between those providers that had been involved in the Pilot and those new to placements in the CDF, nor by provider type.

Hardware, software and marketing

Providers stressed the importance of new software to deliver placements at scale. This issue was raised during the pilot phase and there was momentum around installing new systems by the time of CDF year 1. Accordingly, this featured as a major spend area alongside the purchases of hardware. The MI showed that 109 providers spent 1-10% of their CDF on software, 19 spent 11-20%, and 6 spent between 21-40%. The types of system purchased included placement tracker software packages, careers management software that they had purchased to help digitise learner progression worksheets as well as customer-relationship management (CRM) software to manage employer relationships. The spend on CRM was recorded separately from software in the MI. This showed that 71 providers spent 1-10% of the CDF on CRM while 6 spent between 11-20%.

New hardware included laptops and tablets for the industry placement coordinators to use off-site when monitoring placements, or to loan to learners to use on placement. The MI showed that 118 providers spent 1-10% of their CDF on this; 8 spent between 11-30%; and 1 spent 41-50% on new hardware.

Additionally, some CDF was also spent on marketing materials and promotional events such as careers fairs for industry placements, employer networking events and some on staff training. The MI recorded that 135 of providers spent 1-10% of their funding on promotional materials and 2 spent 11-20% of their CDF. Most providers, 160, did not spend on marketing materials.

Covering learners' costs

Providers were taking different approaches to this, for example, some advertised the availability of financial support for learners as part of their marketing materials about the industry placements. There was an example where a provider offered each learner entering a placement £80 as a contribution towards their costs[6]. Others said that they did not broadcast the availability of funding but relied on staff to identify those learners that required additional support such as travel costs, personal protective equipment (PPE), criminal record checks through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), and

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[6] From the provider's account it was not clear if they used discretionary funds or the CDF for this

construction site safety cards through the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS). Their reasons concerned adequacy of the funding pot they had available as well as a wish to avoid using funding where it was not needed. A further group discussed equipping learners as a cost they funded for employers.

There was broad consensus that learners should not pay the costs of placement attendance and therefore providers offered coverage of travel and subsistence costs. There was mixed practice about whether the CDF or additional learner bursary funding was relied upon in respect of learners' costs.

Meeting employers' costs

Providers reported that employers perceive administration and bureaucracy as barriers to offering placements. This reinforces findings from the Pilot phase. A majority of providers in the research sample had decided not to attempt to tackle this through funding, although a small group had sought to alleviate these concerns by using some of their CDF budget to cover employer costs. Some of these had allocated some of their CDF funding to cover employers' staffing costs related to supervising the placements though more focused on employers' direct costs. There was an example where a provider offered a £50 incentive to employers offering placements, with the hope that this would encourage them to complete and return 'the paperwork'. While these monies were accepted by the employers concerned, it did not have an effect on their propensity to return the paperwork. Overall, more providers were comfortable covering employers' direct costs than offering any form of incentive. For others, even the need to cover these costs had not materialised.

Some providers held strong views that supporting employers financially was not something that they should do to encourage industry placements because this could result in a 'race to the bottom'. A pilot provider that had paid for some employers' liability insurance in 2017/2018 decided not to advertise this in CDF year a *'otherwise it is a slippery slope and they will ask for more'* (Pilot provider, general FE and tertiary). Providers holding these views believed that employers should be persuaded to host industry placements because of the benefits to their organisation, rather than for their financial gain. However, amongst this group were some who believed they might fund employers' costs in the future in order to create more opportunities for SEND learners in their cohorts. By incentivising employers to offer placements for this SEND learners, providers also believed they could build employers capacity in this regard for the future.

Others supported employers through funding the direct costs of hosting learners such as: checks and certificates (DBS, CSCS, employer liability insurance); equipment (PPE, suitable clothing); and supervisory support for learners in the workplace (employers' staff costs). Some of these providers focused this support on small employers, while others were more led by the stated concerns of employers. It was notable that some of the

costs, such as DBS, CSCS, equipment or PPE, were also lines of spending where providers focused their funding on learners. This suggests that supporting the direct costs of placements are seen as important in creating the conditions for uptake.

Employers' views on the resources required

As part of the interviews with employers, the resources involved in delivering placements were discussed. There were two key groups of employers in this analysis: those already engaging in placements and those considering them and 75 discussed their views on this theme.

Across the group, there were three main positions. One cluster described how the resources were as they expected, another group noted that the resourcing model worked well from their perspective. The final group described that quite a high level of resource was required. These groups were explored to see whether route played a role however this did not produce clear messages that could be included in the evaluation. The common factors in the experiences of the employers are discussed in the sections below.

Resourcing as expected

This group mainly comprised employers who were offering placements with a few who were considering doing so in future. Some did not go into much detail but were content that the resourcing was not (or would not be) unduly onerous and did not extend beyond the level they would expect for this group. This included employers with established apprenticeship programmes; early careers support teams and some who had experience of supporting learners in this age group. Being able to build on existing experience and structures was a common factor in their experience.

Some described their approaches in more detail, which included productive meetings with providers at the outset which had set expectations appropriately and enabled them to put clear plans in place. Others described the actual resource required from induction including risk assessments and checks such as DBS to on-going supervision and mentoring. They saw these activities as part of their duty as hosts to young people on placement.

Resourcing worked well

All employers in this group were delivering placements and speaking from experience. They did not differ greatly from the 'as expected' group other than seeming a little more positive in their responses. Again, most were building on existing experience of supporting young people of a similar age. In addition, the interviewees had offered support and felt the level was reasonable.

Supportive factors in these views were a busy business environment in one case that meant there was always something the learner could help with, and second, having tasks that needed doing that were suitable for the learners. A key common factor for these employers was that their learners were engaged, and their attendance and soft/employability skills were both good. These employers believed learners were well prepared. One mentioned that the current model took account of the resources required although did not describe exactly what they meant by this.

It was notable that one of these employers had supported a learner with SEND. Their experience in offering workplace adjustments to accommodate disabilities had meant they were confident to do this.

Resourcing level was high

This group comprised over half of the employers who gave comments on the theme of resourcing and included a mix of those already involved in delivery as well as those considering getting involved.

Employers who were involved in delivery described the time needed for planning, induction, setting up tasks and on-going supervision. They saw the level of this as quite high, which may suggest their expectations had not been appropriately set at the outset or that they had less prior experience to build on. Some could see the investment they had made this year would pay dividends in terms of hosting placements in future. There were some factors that had made it harder, which included learners being inexperienced in the technical skills required, as well as learners not attending as they should have and not communicating with the employer about this. Some employers contacted providers for information although would have preferred that the provider had been in touch first. Similarly, peaks and troughs in the flow of work could mean there was limited time to dedicate to learners or that employers struggled to find things for them to do. Employers had not particularly resolved this although considered whether the placement model could work more flexibly in future. Most did not hold negative views of their overall experience: it appeared that they had viewed this year as a 'pilot' and experience to learn about what would be involved.

Those employers who were undecided about offering placements anticipated that it was likely to be resource intensive. This included industry representatives speaking on behalf of employers. The perceived level of resource that would be required was a constraint to these employers' involvement. Their concerns included health and safety and importantly, safeguarding so their views could stem from the duty of care that would be involved for them. They were also driven by concerns for providing a high quality experience to learners and to add value to their curriculum experiences. The issues they mentioned were not insurmountable, but it was clear they felt they needed to give due consideration to them before agreeing to take part. Industry level advice as well as

understanding how it worked for other employers could help these employers. Smaller businesses particularly reported they needed some funding, in the form of recompense for the time involved, in order to offer placements.

Discretionary bursary fund

There are many existing demands on the 16-19 discretionary bursary fund, and in recognition of the costs for learners involved in placements the Department allocated additional bursary funds to the CDF providers at the beginning of the academic year. This aimed to enable providers to support learners' additional costs in respect of attending the placement. The aim was to directly support the learner, rather than to support provider or employer activities, to ensure that no learners were unable to take part because of cost.

Not all providers were attentive to the rules around the discretionary bursary fund, for example a provider reported that they had allocated money from this fund 'universally' for all learners on placement to ensure that they were 'not out of pocket'. Others did not delineate between the sources of funding they were drawing from, CDF or discretionary bursary fund. Some reported that the CDF was to support travel and subsistence on placement and the discretionary bursary solely for college-based activity. Another provider described that they had already used their allocation of the discretionary bursary fund on their learners before the placements started and so additional placement costs were being funded through CDF. There were indications that not all providers had fully understood the guidance on the additional bursary fund. For example, some discussed internal restrictions including a one-hour travel restriction or not being able to provide 'universal' bus passes for different routes/bus companies. This does not form part of national policy although there is likely to be benefit to offering providers further input on the guidance for CDF year 2.

Generally, providers were spending the additional funds on:

- Travel, where additional bus fares or taxi travel was required
- Food/meals, where a student would usually be eligible for free meals while on the provider site this eligibility continues when off-site on placement
- Equipment/clothing – for some providers the cost of PPE for eligible learners came for the discretionary bursary fund, but this also included essential clothing and uniforms that learners required for certain employers

A provider described how they had used their allocation of the discretionary fund and so had to top-up with CDF in order to provide SEND learners with on-placement support. In this case, a support worker was supporting learners who had mobility issues. In this example, two learners with additional support needs had been placed with the same

employer so that the support worker could be shared between them in order to save money.

Overall, providers believed the ability to alleviate learners' costs while on placement was a crucial support to delivery, was effective, and as such believed this should continue, through CDF and the additional bursary funds. Some expressed concerns however that the current level of funding was not sufficient to enable SEND learners on placements, and called for additional support funds to better enable this group.

Views on future funding arrangements

In both rounds of interviews, some providers said they were not aware of the future funding arrangements, both for CDF year 2 and when T Levels are rolled out. This resulted in leadership teams being uncertain about the sustainability of decisions they were making for CDF monies. Their concerns surrounded the long-term affordability of industry placement coordinator roles, and some of the items they considered or had funded, such as employer liability insurance and hot-desking spaces. In respect of Coordinators, many of these roles were fixed term. With these staff having built up expertise in CDF year 1, providers were not only concerned for whether the post could be retained; they were equally concerned that funding would enable them to retain those new staff they had recruited. Concerns about CDF year 2 funding levels dissipated towards the second round of interviews, by which time funding was being confirmed.

While reassured about the adequacy of funding for CDF year 2, some providers' uncertainties about T Level funding continued. This appeared to concern the overall funding pot for T Level programmes rather than funding for the placements per se. For example, a provider that will deliver T Levels in 2020 was concerned that the increase in scale of staffing support required for T Level delivery would not be matched by the funding. There were also concerns that once T Level funding becomes absorbed into providers' general running costs, additional money for travel and staffing would be squeezed out. Other providers anticipated that they might find it more difficult in future years to sustain staffing levels and increase employer engagement and learner supervision, pay for travel and subsistence and equipment, as well as increase teaching hours while also scaling up the number of placements they delivered.

Some also highlighted that their costs for these activities would vary by course or route, for example in the Education and Childcare route work placements are already a key feature of courses that could be built on to create industry placements in T Levels, whereas in Digital for example, more intensive development work and relationship management will be required.

7. Support for providers

The industry placement pilot year offered considerable support to those providers taking part. A group of 15 of these providers experienced relatively intensive support from The Challenge on project management, sourcing and/or learner preparation. The six providers operating without this support received account management from staff within the Department. This level of support was invaluable during the pilot phase and helped to generate lessons that fed into the guidance now available to providers.

Given this prior experience and the guidance now available as a result, the Department put in place lighter-touch support mechanisms in CDF year 1. As such it provided support to all providers from the ESFA field teams and where need was identified, more intensive support on delivery from the AoC and The Challenge (see Chapter 1). NAS also supported employer sourcing and brokerage.

7.1. Anticipated support needs

Reflecting back to the outset of the CDF year, most providers indicated that they had anticipated little need for support. At the interim stage, some of their commentary suggested that they believed their internal processes would be sufficient to marshal the necessary momentum to deliver the placements numbers they had committed to. However, it was clear that the strength of this belief had waned considerably after they had been involved for some time. By the second round of interviews, which took place between April and July 2019 when a great deal of sourcing had been achieved, levels of confidence had risen for many.

It was apparent that for many sourcing the requisite number of placements had been a challenge in the early phase which was attributed at that point to a lack of interest amongst employers. Similarly, gaining the commitment of learners to take part was also a significant early challenge since they did not receive prior notification of placements for the most part. In many ways, the situation with learners was more challenging as once providers had established a placement with an employer, to then not be able to put forward a learner who was committed to it, was a reputational risk.

Overall, there was a mixed picture of progress towards placement targets. While there were few indications that it was easy to achieve, some providers were well on the way to achieving their target and some had exceeded it. A few providers said that there had been insurmountable barriers to achieving their target number of placements – although there were not clear messages on whether additional support would have changed this. These were often those who were identified for intensive support. Some of these wished this support had come sooner in their delivery experience.

As CDF year 1 progressed it seemed that providers grew in awareness of the materials produced as a result of the pilot phase. This could result from attending national or regional workshops, or their contact with ESFA and/or AoC and The Challenge. Many stated a wish that they had known about these resources earlier. This suggested a need to promote the existing materials, guidance and the messages from the pilot evaluation more strongly.

Overall, these starting points as well as usage of different forms of support indicated that providers could be clustered into three groups:

- highly confident with a firm belief in their capability (pure light touch support);

- moderately confident but with some support needs (light touch plus); and

- less confidence/feeling the placements were a struggle to deliver alongside a desire for more substantial support.

This aligned well with the support model established by the Department. The largest number of providers accessed light touch, or 'light touch plus' support mainly via the ESFA and to a degree from NAS, while a small group were able to take up intensive support offer from the AoC and The Challenge – although notably all providers were able to access national workshops and resources organised by AoC and The Challenge.

7.2. Support from the ESFA field teams

The ESFA field teams provided support and guidance to providers on their monitoring returns. These could be requests for clarifications, or more information. Providers could make proactive approaches to their ESFA contacts should they need.

Accordingly, most providers indicated that the form of support they received from the ESFA field teams was feedback on their monitoring information (MI) returns. Some said this amounted to just minor queries. In some cases, the ESFA had required more detail which providers had supplied; they also adjusted the level of detail they gave in subsequent reports. A few providers – those who were most confident - did not conceive of this as support. This type of experience typified the 'pure light support' provider cluster.

Other providers had been more proactive in seeking ESFA support and had phoned through to them with queries and questions. These were content with the responsiveness and timeliness of the ESFA and believed that the support had been helpful. There were some issues where the ESFA has not known the answer according to providers, although the nature of these was not clarified; and sometimes a perception that ESFA responses on some queries were slow to come through. However, neither of these was seen as particularly problematic.

This group of 'light touch plus' providers appeared to form more of a relationship with their ESFA contact. Queries and the flow of discussion were more regular and more detailed, and ESFA contacts shared the experiences of other providers as well as provided a steer on guidance documents that might help. Overall the level of this support well matched to light touch plus support group's needs although a small number indicated that they would have liked a bit more contact – these did not appear to be aware that they could proactively approach the ESFA.

7.3. Views of the national AoC workshops

The AoC offered a series of 'national workshops' at the start of the CDF year, to which all providers were invited. In addition, at a later stage and in collaboration with The Challenge, the AoC introduced regional peer learning workshops, which were part of the intensive support model; these are discussed below. The workshops offered to all providers were designed to disseminate learning from the pilot phase and covered key topics such as how to approach employers, how to prepare students, and how to engage other stakeholders such as parents and how to manage and monitor placements, employers and learners. It should be noted, however, that where providers attended both types of workshop (regional and national) they did not particularly distinguish between them during interviews.

The workshops collectively attracted almost 500 provider staff according to data supplied to the Department. Attendance at the national AoC events was accordingly high amongst the providers interviewed and feedback suggested that they were considered very useful. There was only one example where a provider had not attended due to the location of the workshops being too distant to make attendance viable. The most confident providers (pure light touch group) who had attended particularly appreciated being directed towards the guidance and materials that were generated during the pilot phase; this was valuable since not all were aware that there had been a pilot. Some providers wished they had been aware of these resources sooner. More broadly, providers appreciated information about different software that might support placement delivery, as well as input on specific issues such as employer engagement and learner motivation. While some of these mentioned that the workshops did not generate particularly novel insights or lead towards specific solutions, opportunities to share experiences with their peers were appreciated. The chance to meet and share experiences with pilot providers was highlighted as particularly valuable. For some providers, the peer learning extended beyond the workshop as they made use of the networks that the workshops enabled to form.

> '[As a result of the workshop] we visited pilot colleges in London and in Devon to speak to their staff. The event was useful for showcasing

the tracker and other materials that were developed by The Challenge'.

Providers in the 'light touch plus' and 'more intensive needs' clusters found in the research held very similar views to the pure light touch group. However, these also mentioned the value of the workshop sessions which enabled them to 'grapple' with the issues raised and which they encountered, as well as the supportive and informative role played by the AoC and The Challenge facilitators for example, on the pitfalls to avoid. The workshops could act as a morale boost for those in this group who had not anticipated the challenges they were experiencing. It was reassuring to them to understand other providers were in a similar position.

7.4. Support from NAS

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) offered several forms of support: it led work to engage large national employers who pay the apprenticeship levy on the placements agenda, as well as to lead outreach to smaller employers through regional relationships including those facilitated through contact with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These activities aimed to produce employer contacts to be passed onto providers. In addition, NAS developed case studies that would provide further information to employers about industry placements and what they entail. However, establishing employer engagement at this scale, and particularly establishing and working through local and regional relationships also took time and considerable effort. This meant it took time for the support to be productive in terms of providing employer contacts for providers.

Depending on their confidence level, providers in the interviews were more or less reliant on NAS-generated contacts to meet their placement targets and this affected their perceptions of the effectiveness of the support. Some providers had quite high expectations that were not met. As noted in chapter 4, often providers mentioned that the number of employers passed to them was low, that employers did not seem on board with the placements concept, that significant work was required to convince them to take part, and/or that employers' location was too far from providers' footprints to make placements viable. It was apparent that the expectations of these providers exceeded the service that NAS was able to deliver.

NAS stakeholders offered some insights into providers' mismatched expectations of support they could offer. These indicated that providers had assumed that NAS held a database of employers who were ready to engage with placements whereas NAS needed to lead the same type outreach as providers did to establish links, particularly at the regional level with SMEs.

There was feedback from both sides that the model had not operated as hoped. This indicated that work to better set expectations for how NAS would help would be valuable. In addition, systems to communicate with NAS on how relationships with employers were subsequently developed would have alleviated some concerns amongst NAS about how their work was received and acted upon. Understanding more about providers' existing employer engagement capability could help focus this support on those who most needed it as the most confident providers were often those with significant employer engagement expertise who did not need to rely upon NAS-generated leads.

7.5. The intensive support experience

While the Department anticipated that many providers would find the support from ESFA, the workshops and NAS sufficient, it was also aware some might need additional support. It worked with ESFA, AoC and The Challenge to design this additional support and aimed to offer it to around 80 providers who were most in need of support, selected by ESFA based on the monitoring returns. The programme was intended to be customised depending on providers' needs during an initial assessment, with predominantly telephone support set in place to agree and take forward action plans, and visits in some cases. There was a delay of around two months to the commencement of this support, which meant providers were further forward in delivery than originally planned for. The delivery of support was due to commence in November but additional requirements for quality assuring the monitoring forms meant that referrals from ESFA started to be received by AoC and The Challenge in January. By this point, the monitoring returns suggested less demand than anticipated and therefore the intensive support as originally intended was delivered to around 40 providers, and a wider group were invited to take part in peer learning workshops to help providers to find ways forward on current delivery challenges.

An analysis of the intensive support logs kept by mentors from The Challenge showed that the key issues that providers in receipt of this intensive support wanted help on were:

- securing host employers - providers' sourcing challenges were exacerbated by the predominance of SMEs in the labour market with providers' accounts indicating that small employers reported constraints to their involvement, as well as the make-up of the local labour market (employer size and industry) and overlaps in the footprint with other providers.
- gaining learners' commitment to undertake placements - the prevalence of working part-time meant that many learners felt unable to take-up placements, particularly where families in some way relied upon their income. Linked to this, parents could be unwilling for learners to undertake unpaid placements.
- resourcing and timetabling – this concerned retrofitting placements into study programmes at a late stage and staffing levels, particularly where the scale of

placements was relatively small and thereby the funding pot did not allow providers to create dedicated industry placement staff posts. An associated issue was 'change' programmes within providers including organisational restructuring which meant there was not a stable context into which to bring placements.

In response to these issues, The Challenge staff signposted providers to resources from the pilot phase and led action-focused telephone support to encourage providers to try new approaches, building on lessons already learned. This resulted in:

- on employer engagement – drawing on existing relationships e.g. from apprenticeships, and outreach through marketing, networking and holding events. The Challenge also encouraged providers to engage employers with the curriculum to increase understanding of the skills FE learners possess and are gaining through their studies. The intensive support logs suggested some providers considered using employer incentives.
- on sourcing – encouraging self-sourcing amongst learners which could generate new employer contacts.
- on engaging learners and parents – offering information events to increase understanding of the benefits of placements.
- on staffing and resources – where funding permitted, providers were encouraged to increase their CDF spend on staffing, but more broadly, to engage senior managers as well as staff with the placements agenda and T Levels.

These actions were documented in action plans which were then monitored across the course of the intensive support.

The intensive support logs contained information on outcomes achieved. These recorded how providers appreciated the support they received, increased in confidence in implementing placements and, crucially, increased the number of placements providers were achieving. The mentoring and trouble-shooting elements of the support appeared most important to outcomes.

Case study: Staffing issues in a small independent provider

The issue: The provider was unable to meet their CDF target of 10 IPs due to under resourcing. They were offering IPs at a loss as their CDF budget was spent on hiring one member of staff, with other staff working to secure and support placements as an 'add on' to their usual roles. The lead staff member in the provider felt unsupported by the senior leadership team (SLT) - their centre head left during the CDF year, leading to problems engaging with ESFA and intensive support.

Support given: The Challenge offered concrete support in the form of resources, liaising with ESFA, facilitating peer-support and organising a workshop on best practice for

employer engagement. The Challenge also encouraged the provider to put in place formal strategies for employer engagement, curriculum planning and marketing.

Outcome: Over the course of the intensive support the provider set-up an employer engagement team that met quarterly. This helped share the placements workload more evenly, improved SLT buy-in and overall support in the organisation. By the end of support the provider felt much more positive and had sourced 7/10 placements for the next academic year.

Source: The Challenge, Intensive support log

A small number of the interview sample was purposively selected because they had received the original intensive support from the AoC or The Challenge; some of these took part in follow-up interviews in the second round of fieldwork. This group indicated that the intensive support methodology and approach worked well and was appreciated, was well configured and effective in respect of the offer preliminary phone calls which would be followed by one-to-one support. There were views that the support was coming at a time that would help providers plan for CDF year 2, which was seen as valuable, although some providers would have liked support earlier.

> 'Although it hasn't surfaced anything that is necessarily new, it has been really useful in providing us with a sense check for what we're doing, direction, prioritisation and encouragement. The support has consisted of two phone calls, each an hour long'.

2020 Provider, General FE and Tertiary

> 'We are receiving intensive support action plan. It is good to have the trouble-shooting conversations and these been useful and reassuring. We do get a push on how many will achieve 45 day[7] placements but for us it is not just about that, it is the quality of experience for students and employers.'

2020 Provider, Sixth Form College

More providers were able to attend the regional workshops as a result of the changed intensive support approach. As noted earlier, those interviewed who attended both types of workshop did not particularly discern between them, other than that some had been regional. As with the national workshops, the opportunity to network with peers and share experiences of delivery were highly valued. The same patterns of feedback came

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[7] Policy guidance subsequently changed to minimum 315 hours and an average of 350 hours

through: that providers wished they had known about the guidance and resources sooner, and that depending on their confidence level, different aspects of the workshop experience were valued.

> 'It would be difficult to say which was better, the telephone support or the meetings (workshops), because they offer distinct things – one specific to your college, the other is about sharing experiences with others. Both have been good and useful. I wouldn't change anything about the support.

> Intensive support provider

7.6. Overall views of support

Generally, providers believed the support had been adequate and reasonably well configured. The accounts of some suggest there could be demand for support that was more proactive e.g. if ESFA were to contact them on a regular basis rather than responding only to calls, and slightly more intensive in some cases – more heavily signposting resources and materials stemming from the pilot year for example.

It was clear from their commentary that opportunities to share experiences with other providers were really helpful and many noted doing this through pre-existing local networks in addition to contacts made at the AoC workshops.

Overall, providers were satisfied with the light touch support delivered by ESFA, and the intensive support delivered by The Challenge and AoC and less satisfied with the support from NAS. The qualitative research indicated that these views of effectiveness were influenced by providers' confidence in their capability to deliver and, in the case of NAS, the degree to which they were reliant on NAS to generate employer contacts to help achieve targets.

7.7. Providers' support for employers and learners on placement

Support for employers

Most engaged employers said that they found the information and support they received from the providers sufficient. Many had initial meetings to discuss expectations and the process to set-up and operationalise the placement, which were followed by review or progression meetings on site with the learner during the placement. In addition, several employers were in regular contact with their provider via e-mail to update on progress during the placements and had received supporting information and documentation

regarding the placement, for example, in relation to safeguarding, and expectations regarding attendance and punctuality. When there had not been any unexpected issues or concerns, employers seemed content with a limited degree of contact, but most said that they had a named contact person to turn to, had there been any need for it.

Generally, the engaged employers were satisfied with the guidance and help they received from providers throughout the placement. During the set-up phase some employers particularly welcomed materials stating what was expected of them in hosting a placement and the types of skill areas that learners were studying during their courses. Employers also discussed the support throughout the placement and the mid and end-point review process. Most employers had a named contact at the provider with whom they could communicate about the learners' attendance and progress, and some described helpful support from the provider to cease a placement where it was not working well (e.g. due to non-attendance).

The areas where employers suggested improvements could be made were:

- better preparing the learners for the industry

- having sight of the learners' curriculum in order to provide meaningful experiences and dovetail this with the workplace tasks where possible

- having material about the placements to present to staff about the requirements and value to the organisation.

There were a number of engaged employers that reported they would have liked to have a better understanding of the learners' curriculum at the outset of the placement in order to best understand what the learner would be covering in their course and their skills and abilities so they could relate this to their workplace. They felt that this information would have enabled them to provide the most suitable tasks, integrate tasks with what the learner was learning, and overall enhance the quality and meaning of the placement.

Support for learners

It was typical for the learner to have a named supervisor while on placement to provide regular mentoring and support, oversee their work, and liaise with the provider about their progress. Generally, employers reported that a member of staff from the provider attended the workplace on one of more occasions to review the learners' progress, as well as being in contact via telephone to check on the learner on a more frequent basis. Several employers also noted a log-book had been issued in order for them and the learner to document and review their progress. There were a small number of cases where the employer felt that the learner was not sufficiently supported by the provider.

Learner travel was supported by providers, in many cases by making use of the additional Bursary Fund. Respondents to the provide survey also highlighted other ways that they were supporting learner travel:

- Car sharing and exploring the feasibility of shuttle/mini buses for multiple placements with the same or nearby employers, also exploring sharing travel costs with other providers. Although some providers reported that this would be expensive due to the small numbers in a wide rural area;

- Use of technology (video calling) to aid communication between employer and provider and provider and learner;

- Pay for taxi travel;

- Set up an employer hub on provider premises for the employer to work from and supervise leaners on placement;

- Travel training for learners not used to or confident on public transport.

8. Conclusions

This concluding chapter summarises provider and employer views on the impact of these industry placements during CDF year 1 and lessons for the future.

8.1. Benefits

Both employers and providers were able to articulate the benefits of the industry placements in CDF year 1 and these are reported here.

Employer views: benefits of placements

Employers were asked to reflect on their experience of the placements, and the perceived benefits to both their organisation and to the learners. Employers believed a number of benefits had resulted from the placements for their organisation, many of which linked to the motivations for engagement discussed earlier. These included:

- A means to support young people and the local community: some employers noted that the placements had offered them the chance to mentor young people and strengthen their links with their local college and young people in their community.

- Developing staff: there were several examples of employers who reported that their staff had valued being able to supervise and mentor the learners, and in the process had honed their management skills.

- Recruiting new staff and apprentices: some employers reported that they had employed the learner as a result of their performance on the placement. They valued being able to assess the skills and attributes of a young person prior to employing them or recruiting them as an apprentice. It was not uncommon for a successful placement to have led to employment or Apprenticeship opportunities for learners. For example, one employer said:

  'Every now and then you find one who is gold and it's a low risk way
  to decide if they're any good'

  Employer, Business and Administration, Fewer than 5 employees.

- Understanding young peoples' perspectives: some organisations had valued having the input from young people about their organisation and its products and services with a view to generating improvements and attracting a younger market.

- Increased workforce diversity: For example, one employer reflected on the new dynamic that the young person created, and that their addition to the team helped to create a new energy and open-mindedness in the organisation.

- Developing the understanding of the industry among the future workforce: one employer in an industry where attrition following recruitment is quite high believed that earlier engagement with young people considering a career in their industry would increase their understanding of the nature of the work and could increase the retention of future candidates.

- A fresh pair of eyes: one interviewee reflected on the value of a fresh pair of eyes, with the existing staff needing to explain step by step to the learner why they undertake tasks as they do. This enabled them to reflect on and improve their working practices.

Employers also noted a number of benefits resulting from the placements for the learners. These included:

- Developing technical skills

- Developing soft skills, especially regarding confidence, communication and general employability

- Gaining an employer contact to be a reference for future work / education

- Being employed as a result of the placement

- Gaining the skills to apply for an Apprenticeship (with the organisation)

- Learning about the available careers in the industry

- Putting into practice what they have learned in the classroom.

Provider views

In line with policy intentions, for many of the providers the CDF year 1 funding has provided an opportunity to start on their preparations for the roll out of T Levels and get infrastructure in place.

Positive impact of funding

Some providers questioned whether the CDF would continue to support their capacity building while some T Levels were rolled out but before they themselves were delivering. Policy has subsequently confirmed that the CDF will continue in academic year 2020/21. However, at the time of the interviews providers, in particular, were concerned about creating a stable workforce to support industry placements. Many of the providers recognised the positive impact that industry placement coordinators and their teams had made in their progress towards targets and wanted to be able to continue with the same

staff as they built skills and knowledge. For many providers, the CDF had enabled them to recruit people to support the industry placements and these staff were vital to their success.

> 'it is all about the staff, connecting with employers and students'.

<div align="right">Provider, 6th Form College</div>

Understand what employers are looking for

Having dedicated industry placement coordinators and a team to support the development of placements meant that their skills development as they started to understand the messaging that would work with different employers. Many providers welcomed the materials that had been developed as part of the Pilot and had built on this expertise to adapt their messaging to different types of employers and employers on different routes ad understand what employers were looking for from the placements.

Employers use the skills of learners

Some providers had positive feedback from employers that they preferred being able to support few learners over longer time rather than having many cycles of shorter work experience. Mirroring the views of employers, the providers reported that employers could begin to rely on the skills of the industry placement participants and found that they could contribute to their business.

Building progress towards 315+ hour industry placements

Some providers had not met their full target of the number of learners achieving 315+ hours on placement – and in some of these, learners had not achieved the required number of hours. A provider in this situation recognised the great achievement that the learners had made in increasing the numbers of hours on placement over and above what would be expected on the study programme and celebrated this success with their learners. As a Pilot provider they saw that they were making incremental progress over time – moving positively towards T Level roll-out.

Learners develop skills over time

A few providers saw that the industry placements, retro-fitted into existing qualifications, had been an additional burden on learners, especially those with additional responsibilities outside of their studies. They reported that these learners had less time to spend on their studies as a consequence. However, they could see that once placements were an integrated element of the T Levels, this additional burden would be alleviated.

Other providers found that learners who had been able to balance the additional industry placement hours with their qualification and outside commitments had been able to

develop skills that helped them in their studies. A provider that had split their cohort and supported whole classes to take part in industry placements could see the positive impact that the placements had on learners over time. In their research interview, they reported that the industry placement learners' progress on their courses had accelerated due to their placements. This provider did however recognise that they had selected learners to take part who had already gained grade 4 maths and English and had placed them in the same tutor groups so that they could give support and connect the tutor to the placements and to the learners.

> 'These students had to be more organised and they learnt skills by being efficient and effective. They also found that they could use their placements as part of their assignments for their course.'

Provider, 6th Form College

Other providers responding to the survey also recognised the positive impact on learners' attainment.

> 'If the student has had a quality placement and they have responded to the opportunity, the student can develop and progress much faster than the average student.'

Provider, 6th Form College (survey)

> 'All staff need to get behind it and students must be persuaded of the benefits. Where it has worked well, mainly as the students have been committed, it has accelerated students' development on multiple levels: this is the message that we need to deliver.'

Provider, General FE and Tertiary (survey)

8.2. Lessons for the future

In this section of the report, the challenges of delivery industry placements, along with the best practice that has been identified by the participating provider is brought together as lessons for the future. The findings here are summarised in terms of the views of employers and the views of providers.

Employer decision-making and lessons for the future

Employers were asked directly about what would encourage or discourage them from offering more placements in the future. Based on their direct responses and analysis of

responses to other questions throughout the interviews, the following themes have emerged as being important enablers and barriers:

- Information and messaging: making best use of employer motivations and reasons for engagement. Developing case-studies and evidence of effective practice and where placements have worked well to use as collateral. Some employers wanted more digestible guidance information to use when trying to support from colleagues about the requirements and potential value to the organisation. Making clear the links between placements and the wider vocational system to enable employers undertaking other programmes to decide how placements fit with this for their organisation. Some suggested a national campaign to create awareness and support among all stakeholders (e.g. parents, students, employers).

- Brokering: employers would like a longer lead in time and more engagement with the recruitment process (e.g. interviewing candidates) or at least a choice in whether or not to do so; better ensuring learners understand the requirements and commitment required by the placement.

- The model: employers would like more flexibility in determining the model (help to fit in with their wider programme of talent pipeline development);

- Support from colleges: Better preparing the learners for the industry; Having sight of the learners' curriculum in order to provide meaningful experiences and dovetail this with the workplace tasks where possible.

- Resourcing: Further consideration of resources required to supervise a meaningful placement across a variety of industries – are these costs higher in some industries than others (e.g. high in engineering, given the risks involved) – a couple noted the potential of the levy as a support mechanism.

- Pay: provide guidance to employers about paying learners, and also consider the social mobility implications of not paying given what we know about the importance and prevalence of paid work among this group of learners.

- Account management across providers: Large employers covering several college areas were keen to see administrative roles focused on T-Levels to source and run the placements covering the geographies of the employers rather than the providers (e.g. sourcing learners from a number of providers for the employer across multiple sites).

Providers' views on lessons for the future

This evaluation focused on four key themes: employer engagement; funding and costs; delivery; and support. Providers' feedback on lessons for the future are summarised under these headings.

Employer engagement

For many of the providers, employer engagement was the biggest learning curve. It has been more challenging for Sixth Form Colleges to start to deliver the industry placements as they are less likely to have the existing employer engagement infrastructure that FE Colleges have. Providers have been learning what works well for their local employers on the routes that they are delivering and are aiming to meet those preferences. They became more adept at explaining the purpose of the industry placements and gathered case studies of how the placements had worked for other employers.

Providers found that case-studies and evidence of effective practice have worked well with employers. Providers have also been attentive to the quality of placement to make sure that it does meet the learners' needs.

> 'Ensuring that the expectations from ALL parties are made very clear at the start of the placement, if an employer is unable to fulfil what is expected of them to make the placement high quality another placement must be sourced. Employer engagement is the key to success.'

> Provider, General FE and Tertiary (survey)

Providers anticipated that there will be on-going challenges with employer engagement as they seek to increase the number of learners engaged in industry placements, and as other local post-16 providers start sourcing industry placements for their learners. Providers planned on building on the relationships that they had developed with employers so that they could approach them to host learners during CDF year 2. Many had planned to end the academic year 2018/19 with 'thank you' events for employers who had hosted industry placements. Some providers thought that local relationship-building between them and employers was key to being able to offer sustainable industry placements and that third parties involvement, including NAS or a Local Authorities, would make it more difficult to secure the placements that they needed in the future.

Funding

Many providers found it very resource intensive to deliver the industry placements. Where they met or come close to their targets they attributed this to being able to use CDF to recruit or allocate staff resource to the tasks.

> 'It is important to get the right staff in place early on to manage the placement project.'

> Provider, Further and Higher Education provider (survey)

With this in mind, many providers indicated that they wanted to see the funding levels continue on a par with CDF and to be ring-fenced for T Level activity rather than included in general budgets.

Delivery

CDF year 2 will scale up the target number of learners required to achieve industry placements and providers anticipated that they would be able to put into place the lessons that they had learnt from CDF year 1. They hoped to be able to ask employers that had hosted placements in 2018/19 to be able to host again and host more learners. Many providers felt better able to 'sell' the industry placements to learners and explain, with examples, how they could benefit learners. Providers would welcome more clarity over the roll-out of T Levels – in particular the place of T Levels alongside other vocational qualifications and the future of Applied General qualifications.

A key theme from the provider survey was that the main lesson learned was to start early in the planning and preparation for industry placements,

> 'Plan early and make sure you have the industry placement in the curriculum design ready for September.'

> Provider, General FE and Tertiary (survey)

Support

Some of the issues that the providers experienced during CDF year 1 related to industry placements being retro-fitted into existing qualifications and timetables, often with less time to plan and prepare than providers would have liked. Many providers were confident that with the additional hours and funding that T Levels will bring, they could overcome challenges such as awareness levels (employers, learners and parents), timetabling, learner preparation and support – although they believed that policy has a responsibility to start raising awareness amongst the range of placement stakeholders.

Providers had learnt lessons about learner preparation and support including that regular checks and visits to learners while on placement made a difference to the learners' continued attendance on placement.

> 'We also need to ensure that learners are sufficiently motivated and have a positive outlook to ensure that they are able to be responsive in the workplace, show curiosity and make the most of the opportunities they are being given.'

> 2020 Provider, 6th Form College (survey)

'Preparation of learners is key and this work needs to be planned in prior to September when they are due to start their placement.'

<div align="right">Provider, General FE and Tertiary (survey)</div>

The peer learning elements provided by AoC and The Challenge were well-received and providers have, in addition, worked through their own local networks with other post-16 providers, or identified providers in other areas delivering the same routes that they could learn from. These networks enabled providers to share expertise, knowledge and in some case 'warm' employer leads.

As well as external support provided during CDF year 1, some providers also acknowledged that internal support systems had made a difference to their success in CDF year 1. In particular, a Sixth Form College that took part in the interviews described how the senior leadership team had taken responsibility for the developments towards T Levels and driven the agenda 'from the top'; setting an expectation that the CDF targets would be met and being able to support the removal of barriers such as timetabling. Another provider in the survey described how the support from curriculum teams would be vital for the success of industry placements going forward.

'Curriculum engagement is key for support and will naturally help to secure the student engagement.'

<div align="right">Provider, General FE and Tertiary (Survey)</div>

In summary, the CDF year 1 delivered a wide range of learning about operationalising the placements. In contrast to the pilot phase, the lessons particularly concern issues of scaling up and how national support can be configured to support providers through this process. Providers built their capacity and infrastructure in order that sourcing, matching and monitoring placements as well as preparing and support learners, could enter the mainstream of their practice, and were effective in working towards their targets. The support from national bodies helped to progress their work, and in turn, providers' experiences and the solutions they devised to their challenges has been captured and will feed into future support provision. Moreover, the pilot and CDF year 1 have provided information that has enabled further policy development in the form of additional models of industry placements that have been made allowable. that can be offered in the placement model.

Appendix A: Additional tables

Provider Insights

Achieved interviews

Table A.1 Pathways

Route	Interviews achieved* Phase 1	Interviews achieved* Phase 2
Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care	4	10
Business and Administrative	4	11
Catering and Hospitality	3	6
Education and Childcare	2	7
Construction	5	13
Creative & Design	4	10
Digital	5	8
Engineering & Manufacturing	6	8
Hair & Beauty	4	8
Health & Science	5	9
Legal, Finance and Accounting	4	4

* Columns add up to more than total number of interviews as multiple routes were covered in interviews

Source: IES, 2019

Table A.2 Interview summary

Interview type	Achieved Phase 1	Achieved Phase 2
Provider Type		
Academies, free & studio schools	1	4
General FE and Tertiary	17	36
Local Authority, schools and sixth form colleges	3	8
Other, specialist	4	4
Location		

Coastal	4	8
Metro	5	11
Rural	5	5
Urban	11	28
Pilot Provider	5	2
2020 Provider	8	14
Intensive Support group	4	8

Source: IES, 2019

Provider survey

Table A.3 Survey responses by route

	Provider survey
Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care	9
Business and Administration	28
Catering and Hospitality	19
Education and Childcare	19
Construction	25
Creative and Design	20
Digital	20
Engineering and Manufacturing	23
Hair and Beauty	20
Health and Science	39
Legal, Finance and Accounting	1

Source: IES, 2019

Department for Education