Department for Education

# Technical Education Learner Survey 2024

## Technical Annex

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Government Social Research

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# Introduction

This Technical Annex report sets out methodological and technical notes for the 2024 Technical Education Learner Survey. It accompanies two substantive reports – 'Technical Education Learner Survey 2024: progression of the 2nd T Level cohort' and 'Technical Education Learner Survey 2024: progression of Level 4/5 learners'. Both these reports are available at Technical education learner surveys - GOV.UK, alongside previous publications from the study.

The main body of the report focusses on the 2024 survey, carried out in summer 2024. The appendix provides an overview of the study during the period 2021-24.

The Technical Education Learner Surveys research was carried out in conformity with ISO 20252

# Population and samples

The survey was designed and delivered by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) providing policy expertise and questionnaire development guidance, alongside that from the research team and advisory board at DfE.

For the 2024 'post-course' survey, a single questionnaire instrument was used across several different learner groups. For 2021 T Level starters and comparator learners, this was the third wave of data collection. Pre-reform level 4/5 learners were invited to a second interview wave which took place following the end of their course.

For all learner groups, the sample frames were provided by two registers controlled by the Department for Education.

- **National Pupil Database (NPD)**. NPD is a database of pupils in state funded education and higher education in England.
- **Individualised Learner Record (ILR)**. ILR data is collected by providers in the further education and skills sector in England.

Note that learner numbers in these sample frames may differ from other DfE publications due to the timing of the snapshot of the databases and minor differences in definitions. Please refer to the most recently published T Level action plan for official learner figures.

## 2021 T Level starters

The population of interest for the 2021 T Level starters was all those enrolled in the first year of a T Level in the academic year 2021/22, as listed in the NPD or ILR. Given the relatively small size of the cohort, the full population was invited to participate in the first mid-course survey in 2022. For the 2024 survey which took place approximately one year post-course, all those interviewed in the first wave were issued for fieldwork with the exception of a small group who had requested to leave the study and those who had stated in previous interviews that they had not started a T Level or had left within the first year. This is an identical approach to the second (end-course) wave of fieldwork for this group and represents a change in approach between the 2020 and 2021 cohorts of T Level learners; all T Level learners in the first (2020) cohort were issued to Wave 2 and Wave 3 due to the size of the sample, regardless of whether they were interviewed at Wave 1 or not.

A total of 2,371 T Level learners were invited to take part in the third wave of the survey.

- 2021 T Level comparator group

To provide a comparison for the T Level 2021 starters, comparator samples were also interviewed about their learning experiences and short-term outcomes. These consisted of A level learners starting their course in the 2021-22 academic year (all courses) and learners on other level 3 technical courses in the same broad subject areas as those offered for T Levels at the time the sample for the 2021 T Level starters was drawn. While these were not matched samples, it is expected that T Level learners will be diverted from these routes as the programme expands, providing a relevant point of comparison.

The other level 3 technical learner population was limited to subject areas that were broadly comparable to the T Levels offered in the 2021/22 academic year, and learners on apprenticeships were excluded. Learners were sampled if they were studying for at least one substantial technical qualification, in a subject area that mapped onto the technical routes for available T Levels (i.e. Construction, Digital, Education and Early Years, Health and Science). Using the published list of qualifications approved for Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) 16-19 funding in 2021/22[1], qualification types selected were those classed as: 'occupational', 'vocational', 'vocationally-related' or 'other general'. These categories include Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) and Tech Levels. Only courses of 360 hours or more were selected to limit the sample to substantial qualifications – i.e. the same size as an A level – while ensuring sufficient sample sizes.

The mapping used to link Ofqual's Sector Subject Areas (SSAs) to T Level routes was as follows:

- Childcare and Education: SSA 1.5 Child development and wellbeing
- Construction: SSA 5.2 Building and construction
- Digital: SSA 6.1 ICT practitioners
- Health and Science: SSA 1.1 Medicine and dentistry, SSA 1.2 Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine, SSA 1.3 Health and Social Care, SSA 2.1 Science

The A level sample included students from any A level course, taking any number of A levels. Given that the majority of those taking T Levels are expected to have otherwise taken other level 3 technical courses (as opposed to A levels), this group formed a much larger part of the issued sample for the comparison group (80%). A random stratified sample was taken from each learner group (i.e. A level and other level 3 technical). Stratification variables included sex, ethnicity, age, prior attainment and region for both groups, with the addition of broad subject categories for the level 3 technical sample.

As with the T Level cohort, those interviewed in the first wave were issued for fieldwork with the exception of a small group who had requested to leave the study, those who were not enrolled on the course or had left the course prior to completion. In total, 3,189 cases were issued for fieldwork, broadly reflecting the number of productive interviews among this group at the first wave of fieldwork. Of this figure, 2,521 were enrolled on a

level 3 technical course, while the remaining 668 were enrolled on an A level course. There were a number of learners who were enrolled on both A level and level 3 technical courses. Cases were selected for each sample separately, in line with their levels in each population.

## 2021 pre-reform level 4/5 learners[1]

The surveys with these learners provide a baseline measure of the experiences of pre-reform level 4 and 5 learners which can be used for comparisons with subsequent cohorts who will have studied Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). The level 4 and 5 learner group sample was originally defined as level 4 or 5 courses ending in the 2021/22 academic year. Level 4 learners who were planning to continue onto a level 5 course were eligible, as long as their level 4 course was ending within the academic year. However, this period was extended to include courses where the planned end date was earlier (on the basis that the sample drawn from ILR only included cases that were still on a level 4/5 course in 2021/22). This was on the basis that some people end up doing their course in a later period, but the end date flag is not changed.

Qualifications being studied for included Certificates of Higher Education, HNC, diploma, NVQ, HND and foundation degrees (apprenticeships were excluded as covered by another DfE survey). A random stratified approach was taken with disproportionate sampling to ensure that a sufficient number of learners for analysis were enrolled on Digital and Construction subjects.

Stratification variables included qualification type (OfS-registered or other) and subject area as a priority, as well as sex, ethnicity, age and level 4 or 5. In total, 5,167 cases were invited to take part in an initial interview.

In a similar approach taken for T Level learners and comparator groups, level 4/5 learners interviewed in the first wave were issued for 2024 post-course fieldwork with the exception of a small group who had requested to leave the study and those who had stated in previous interviews that they had not started a level 4/5 course. As a result, 1,384 cases were issued for post-course fieldwork (Wave 2). Due to the survey design, the timeframe between the end of their course and the survey follow-up was longer for these learners than for T Level and comparator learners (around two years for level 4/5 learners).

[1] An additional group of level 4/5 learners who were initially interviewed for the study in 2023 were also initially invited to 2024 fieldwork. However, it was decided to halt fieldwork for these learners as the main interest were in the pre-reform group. A total of 58 of these level 4/5 learners completed the 2024 surveys. Weights were also developed for this group. As data for these learners were not the focus of either of the 2024 reports, however, they have not been detailed here. Further information about these learners, and data collected in the first wave of data collection in 2023, can be found here gov.uk/government/publications/technical-education-learner-survey-2023.

# Fieldwork and response

The 2024 survey was operationalised with a sequential online-telephone fieldwork design. Learners were offered two possible modes of data collection:

- **Web** (or **CAWI**, Computer Assisted Web Interview) involves completing an online survey without the assistance of an interviewer.
- **CATI** (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) is an interview carried out by a trained interviewer over a phone call.

Web was the primary mode given its cost-effectiveness and familiarity with the target group of respondents. Web was also the primary mode in the 2022 and 2023 surveys. CATI was the secondary mode, beginning once learners had been given sufficient time and reminders to complete the survey via web.

Learners who had not completed by web were called by telephone interviewers, who encouraged them to take part online in the first instance. In this way, telephone interviewers acted as an active reminder, to push those who needed more active persuasion to engage with the study. The interviewers also enabled completion by supporting learners who had difficulty accessing the survey via web on their own (e.g. by providing them with the survey URL and log in details). Interviewers attempted telephone interviews if the learner appeared unable or reluctant to complete via web, or if they had not done so a week after the first call.

The CATI mode was implemented to ensure greater population coverage and to limit potential bias in the data collection process. CATI does not require internet access, so enables data collection amongst learners who have low IT literacy, do not have internet access, or do not have a device that could be used to complete via web. Telephone interviewers play a crucial role in supporting these study participants who do not have the means to complete via web, as well as those with specific communication support needs.

As in the previous surveys, a targeted design approach was implemented. To optimise sample representativeness whilst limiting costs, telephone interview resource was prioritised for cases with socio-demographic and course characteristics associated with lower likelihood of participating in the web phase of fieldwork, based on a logistic regression. Further details around this approach can be found in the ‘CATI prioritisation’ section.

Targeting was also implemented via the value of incentives (details are discussed in the Incentives section).

## Fieldwork stages

Mainstage fieldwork for the 2024 'post-course' wave of the Tech Ed Study lasted just over twelve weeks, starting on 2nd May 2024 and ending on 30th July 2024. A pause to fieldwork occurred as a consequence of the 2024 UK General Election, which was called on 22nd May 2024. The resulting pause took place between 23rd May and 8th July. The sequential design meant that this wave had different phases. Level 4/5 pre-reform learners were also interviewed slightly later than the remaining sample groups:

- 22nd April – soft launch of fieldwork – c. 200 cases invited to complete a Web questionnaire by email
- 2nd May – All T Level learners and comparator groups invited to complete a Web questionnaire by letter and email
- 22nd May – CATI fieldwork started for the first batch of cases (Web unproductive cases considered to be the least likely to complete online)
- 23rd May – fieldwork pause (including CATI fieldwork)
- 8th July – fieldwork restart (including CATI fieldwork), level 4/5 learners invited to complete a Web questionnaire
- 30th July – fieldwork closed for T Level starters and comparator groups
- 19th August – fieldwork closed for level 4/5 learners

## CATI prioritisation

To prioritise cases for CATI, following the start of fieldwork, unproductive cases were assigned into batches based on modelled likelihood of responding via the Web. Each learner group was modelled separately, given different response expectations, analytical priorities identified during the planning phase and a need for flexibility during CATI fieldwork. This represents a change in approach compared to previous waves of the study, in which learner groups have been included within the same modelling exercise. Those who had never received Free School Meals (FSM) were more likely to be included in the highest priority T Level and level 3 technical batches while those without Special Educational Needs (SEN) were also more likely to be included in the highest priority T Level and A level batches. Level 3 technical learners living in more deprived Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), as well as those who had been enrolled on a subject related to Construction or Health & Science, were more likely to be included in the highest priority batches. For all three learner groups, the modelling exercise identified that male respondents were less likely to respond at the web phase. These batches were then prioritised by the Telephone Unit (TU) when contacting sample members who were yet to complete the survey online.

## Communications

For all learner groups, communication with participants happened via three different routes: letters, emails and text messages. This was done to maximise the chance of successfully reaching and engaging as much of the sample as possible.

Invitation letters were posted in advance of the start of fieldwork so that they would arrive on the first day of fieldwork, coinciding with the invitation texts and emails. Learners received three batches of reminders over the fieldwork period, arriving on different days of the week to maximise the chance of learners engaging with the reminders. Each batch included a postal reminder, email and text message, and contained a different message designed to motivate learners to participate. The same letter and text templates were used for all learners, regardless of learner group or voucher eligibility. Textfills were used to ensure that each learner received a personalised, tailored message. For the letters, pre-printed documents were used so that A level learners received the Pathways branding, whilst the other learner groups received the Tech Ed branding. For the email templates, there were separate Pathways and Tech Ed templates with the different branding used in each. The template wording was otherwise the same, again with textfills so that learners received a tailored message.

## Incentives

For all learner cohorts, a similar incentive strategy to that used in the 2023 survey was implemented: learners who were previously eligible for FSM were offered a £10 shopping voucher due to concerns about their response rates to other surveys. Those enrolled on level 4/5 courses and those studying a subject related to Construction were also offered a £10 voucher. All other learners were offered a £5 shopping voucher.

## Survey response

Across CAWI and CATI fieldwork, the ‘post-course’ wave of the study achieved a final overall response rate of 38.1% for T Level, A level and level 3 technical learner groups (2,120 productive interviews), out of those issued for 2024 fieldwork. Of these productive interviews, 99% were fully productive (2,103), while a further 17 were defined as ‘useable partial interviews’, meaning the respondent completed the interview up until the data linkage section before exiting. For pre-reform level 4/5 learners, a final overall response rate of 47% was achieved (650 productive interviews). Of these productive interviews, 99.5% were fully productive (647), while three were defined as ‘usable partial interviews’. Data for all 2,770 productive interviews were included for analysis purposes.

Variation in response rate could be seen by subject type across different courses where applicable. T Level learners enrolled on Education and Early Years courses were more

likely to take part in the study, while this was also true for level 3 technical learners when compared to those enrolled on Construction, Digital or Health and Science related courses. Some additional variation in response rate also exists between the 2020 and 2021 cohorts due to changes in Wave 2 sampling approach (refer to 'Populations and Samples' for further detail).

**Table 1: Survey response by course and subject**

| Course and subject | Response rate (%) | n |
|---|---|---|
| T Level | 43.6 | 1034 |
| Education and Early Years | 46.8 | 308 |
| Construction | 43.1 | 159 |
| Digital | 43.9 | 257 |
| Health and Science | 40.8 | 310 |
| Level 3 Technical | 32.1 | 810 |
| Education and Early Years | 37.6 | 106 |
| Construction | 17.6 | 21 |
| Digital | 31.1 | 164 |
| Health and Science | 31.3 | 557 |
| A level | 41.3 | 276 |
| Level 4/5 (pre-reform) | 47.0 | 650 |
| Digital | 47.1 | 49 |
| Construction | 38.2 | 29 |
| Health and Science | 50.6 | 169 |
| Other technical | 47.4 | 209 |
| Other non-technical | 45.2 | 194 |

Looking at key socio-demographic characteristics of the students, the survey data appears to be balanced overall, although the response rate varied between subgroups of the population of interest. The response rate was also higher amongst students who identified as Asian or belonged to 'White' ethnic groups. Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) were more likely to take part in the study compared with those without SEN. Learners who had never received free school meals were more likely to take part compared with those who had. A higher response rate was achieved for students in the 2.5% most deprived LSOAs.

**Table 2: Survey response by learner characteristics**

| Socio-demographic characteristics | Response rate (%) | Issued (n) |
|---|---|---|
| Sex | | |
| Female | 42.1 | 4320 |
| Male | 36.2 | 2624 |
| Ethnic group | | |
| Asian | 42.2 | 900 |
| Black | 39.6 | 409 |
| White | 39.9 | 5061 |
| Mixed | 35.3 | 241 |
| Other | 35.4 | 130 |
| Unknown | 37.4 | 203 |
| IDACI | | |
| Pupils in most deprived 2.5% of LSOAs | 43.1 | 248 |
| Next 5% most deprived | 39.9 | 491 |
| Next 5% most deprived | 42.3 | 473 |
| Next 5% most deprived | 40.9 | 438 |
| Next 10% most deprived | 40.4 | 826 |
| Next 10% most deprived | 39.9 | 739 |
| Least deprived 62.5% | 39.1 | 3695 |
| Free School Meals | | |
| Unknown | 33.3 | 54 |
| FSM ever | 44.6 | 1671 |
| Not FSM ever | 38.4 | 5219 |
| Special Education Needs | | |
| Unknown | - | 0 |
| Not SEN ever | 40.0 | 6580 |
| SEN | 37.6 | 364 |

## Interview mode

As well as having the ability to complete the survey online, some respondents were contacted later in the fieldwork period via telephone to complete a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI).

Web was the most popular mode of completion during fieldwork. Of the productive cases, 2,688 (97%) had completed the survey online, while 82 (3%) had completed the entire survey on the phone with an interviewer. Of those that completed the survey online, 180 (7%) had received at least one call from a telephone interviewer before doing so.

# Data processing, weighting and statistical testing

## Data processing

As far as possible, the interview conducted over the telephone included the same questions in the same format as the web version. However, due to the use of fed-forward data in text fills there were a small number of differences. There was also some variation between the Web and CATI instruments relating to the use of interviewer instructions which were designed to aid comprehension of the questionnaire as required.

Coding of open-ended responses and 'other specify' answers was carried out by specialist coders and answers were back-coded into the original code frames where appropriate.

In the published tables and report, percentages are rounded to zero decimal points. As a result, figures may not sum to 100%. All reported base sizes exclude those who refused to answer or selected the option 'don't know' unless these options were considered to be of particular interest (e.g. if it was of interest to know the proportion who did not know the answer to a particular question). Figures based on a sample size of less than 30 are not represented in tables.

## Weighting

All data presented in the Technical Education Learner Surveys 2024 tables and reports are weighted to reflect the population of each cohort unless otherwise specified. Unweighted bases are provided in tables and charts. Weights were calculated for each learner who had responded in 2024 (Wave 3 for T Level learners and comparator groups and Wave 2 for the level 4/5 learners). Across all learner groups, only those that took part in Wave 1 were invited to take part in 2024. Learners' weights from Wave 1 were used to adjust for any selection bias or non-response bias arising from the previous wave.

A weighting strategy was devised based on the responding profile of the longitudinal respondents. Variables from the sample frame, primarily those used for Wave 1 weights, were considered alongside survey outcomes from the former wave that were likely to be associated with key variables.

As discussed, to adjust for non-response bias, response was modelled using logistic regression weighted by the Wave 1 weight, with the dependent variable indicating whether someone responded to the survey or not. Stepwise logistic regression was used to fit the model. This was repeated for each learner group.

A non-response adjustment was generated from the inverse of the model's estimated probability of response for each pupil. The distribution of this adjustment factor was examined, and the largest adjustment factor was trimmed. This adjustment was then multiplied by the starting weight (Wave 1 weight) and subsequently scaled back to the number of respondents. The resulting Wave 3 weights (for T Level, A level, and level 3 technical learners) and Wave 2 weights (for level 4/5 learners) were checked for efficiency and residual bias. The variables included in the final non-response models can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3: Variables included in non-response models**

| Model | Variables | Design effect | Efficiency | Variable name in dataset |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| T Level | FSM status, SEN status, educational attainment score quintile, whether the participant was enrolled in the past year | 1.10 | 91% | WtTL_C22_W3 |
| A level | Sex, FSM status, educational attainment score quintile | 1.28 | 78% | WtAL_C32_W3 |
| Level 3 Technical | Sex, FSM status, whether the participant was enrolled in the past year, teaching format (i.e. online, in-person, or hybrid), participants' perceived level of challenge relating to the course | 1.28 | 78% | WtL3_C42_W3 |
| Level 4/5 (cohort 1 pre-reform) | Sex, age, interaction term of sex and age, region and teaching format | 1.17 | 85% | WT_L45_Pre_W2 |
| Level 4/5 (cohort 2) | Overall satisfaction, whether the industry placement was completed, next steps after course finishes, sex, age, subject groups (digital, construction, health and science, other technical and other non-technical), and grouped qualification type (for L4/5) | 1.36 | 74% | Wt_post_L45_C52_W2 |

## Statistical testing

Statistical testing was carried out for the 2024 data tables to test the relationship between variables in each cross-tabulation.

The test does not establish whether there is a statistically significant difference between any particular pair of subgroups (e.g., two specific subject groups). Rather, it seeks to establish whether the observed variation between groups is likely to have happened simply by chance or whether it is likely to reflect some 'real' differences in the population.

The p-value reported in the tables indicates whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the outcome and the variable it has been cross-tabulated by. A p-value is the probability of the observed result (e.g. a difference between two subgroups) occurring due to chance alone. A p-value of less than 5% is conventionally taken to indicate a statistically significant result ($p<0.05$) - i.e. that it is unlikely that the result (e.g. difference between subgroups) is likely to have occurred due to chance alone.

Statistical testing was applied to all findings in the 2024 reports at the 5% confidence level, taking account of the complex sample design. That is to say, there is less than a 5% probability of the difference between groups arising by chance if there was no difference in the population. Where differences were not significant at this level this is stated in the text.

To produce comparisons at the category level (i.e., between two categories), additional testing was undertaken for the pairwise comparison of all categories of the crosstabulation variables. For this pairwise testing the outcome variable was reduced to a binary measure (i.e. reduced to a variable with only two categories).

# Appendix: Technical Education Learner Survey – Overview (2021-24)

The Technical Education Learner Surveys ('Tech Ed Study') evaluate the ongoing technical education reforms in England, which aim to deliver high-quality learning experiences and support progression into desirable destinations. Between 2021 and 2024, the Tech Ed Study followed several cohorts of learners across multiple waves of longitudinal data collection, to understand their views on and experiences of their programmes, and to obtain timely information about their short-term post-course destinations and activities.

This appendix provides an overview of the first four years of the study, pulling together top-level findings and key methodological details from the data collection undertaken to date. Detailed information is available in published reports for each of the years 2021-24 (links are provided in the Published reports section).

## Population overview

An outline of the courses covered in the study is provided in Table 4. Further details about the individual learner groups and cohorts who were interviewed as part of the study are provided in the Cohorts and learner groups section.

**Table 4: Course descriptions**

| Course | Description |
|---|---|
| T Level | The T Level became available in England as an alternate option for further studies in academic year 2020/21. It is a level 3 qualification. The course lasts for two years. The average age of learners on starting the programme was 16 years old. |
| T Level Transition Programme | The T Level Transition Programme became available in England in academic year 2020/21. It was introduced as a preparatory one-year level 2 course for learners who wanted to progress onto a T Level, providing additional study time and preparation. The average age of learners on starting the programme was 16 years old. |
| Level 4/5 | Level 4 and 5 programmes are Higher Technical Education options after the completion of a level 3 course that offer further vocational training. The average age of learners on starting the programme was higher than for the other learner groups in the study. Courses usually last for 1-2 years full-time, with part-time study options available. |
| Level 3 technical | These programmes include Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) such as BTECs. Using the published list of qualifications approved for Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) 16-19 funding in 2021/2221, qualification types selected were those classed as: 'occupational', ‘vocational’, 'vocationally-related' or 'other general'. These categories include Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) and Tech Levels. Only courses of 360 hours or more were selected to limit the sample to substantial qualifications – i.e. the same size as an A level – while ensuring sufficient sample sizes. The sample was drawn to be representative of the level 3 technical learners on these courses at the time and there are some key differences in subject profile between the T Level and level 3 technical learner groups (in particular, Health and Science learners make up a notably higher proportion of the level 3 technical learner sample). Average age of learners on starting the programme was 16 years old. |
| A level | These are subject-based level 3 qualifications. Average age of learners on starting the programme was 16 years old. |

## Cohorts and learner groups

The main focus of the study has been **T Level (TL) learners.**

Table 3To enable comparison between these T Level cohorts and learners enrolled on comparative courses, a sample of **A level learners** (all courses; AL) and **level 3 technical learners** (VL3) studying the same technical routes as those offered for T Level were also included in the study. In addition, three cohorts of **Transition Programme learners** (TP) were interviewed at the end of their programme. Finally, **level 4 and 5 learners** (L4/5) were surveyed to understand their experiences in the context of new reforms being rolled out.

The T Level routes and pathways covered by the study can be found in Table 5, while **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**6**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** sets out brief descriptions of all the learner groups included in the study.

**Table 5: T Level routes and pathways**

| T Level route name | Pathway courses |
|---|---|
| Construction | Design, surveying and planning for construction (from 2020)<br>Building services engineering for construction (from 2021)<br>Onsite construction (from 2021) |
| Digital | Digital production, design and development (from 2020)<br>Digital business services (from 2021)<br>Digital support and services (from 2021) |
| Education and Early Years | Education and Early Years (from 2020) |
| Health and Science | Health (from 2021)<br>Healthcare science (from 2021)<br>Science (from 2021) |

**Table 6: Learner group overview**

| Learner group | Description |
|---|---|
| 2020 T Level starters | T Level learners that started the programme in September 2020. This was the first year the T Level became available in England. The '2020 T Level starters' are therefore the first cohort of T Level learners in England. |
| 2020 TP starters | T Level Transition Programme learners that started the programme in September 2020. This was the first year the T Level Transition Programme became available in England. They are therefore the first cohort of T Level Transition Programme learners in England. |
| 2021 T Level starters | T Level learners that started the programme in September 2021. This is the second cohort of T Level learners in England. |
| 2021 TP starters | T Level Transition Programme learners that started the programme in September 2021 (the second cohort of TP learners in England). |
| 2021 level 4/5 learners (cohort 1; pre-reform) | Level 4/5 learners scheduled to finish a level 4/5 learning programme in the academic year 2021/22. Level 4/5 subjects were categorised into groupings aligned with the HTQ subjects available in the first two years of delivery: Digital (from 2022/23), Construction, and Health and Science (from 2023/24). Most learners did not fit into an equivalent category and were on programmes classified as 'Other technical' subjects or 'Other non-technical' subjects. These subject groupings were defined ahead of the first wave of fieldwork for level 4 and 5 learners to enable comparison with existing T Level routes. Therefore, they do not necessarily match directly on to current subject groupings. |
| 2021 other level 3 technical starters | Other level 3 technical learners (not T Level learners) that started their programme in 2021. |
| 2021 A level starters | A level learners that started the programme in 2021. |
| 2022 TP starters | T Level Transition Programme learners that started the programme in September 2022. This is the third cohort of T Level Transition Programme learners in England. |
| 2022 level 4/5 learners (cohort 2) | Level 4/5 learners starting in the 2022/23 academic year, rather than courses which were ending in the same academic year (a change to the approach for L4/5 cohort 1). |

## Sampling

As already noted, **a census approach was taken for the two T Level cohorts**, due to small numbers of learners in the population. This was also the case for the three cohorts of **Transition Programme learners**.

The **comparator group of A Level learners and level 3 technical learners on other technical courses** comparable to those offered for T Levels were not 'matched' with the T Level learner population. However, it was expected that T Level learners will be diverted from these routes as the programme continues to expand, and that these learners would therefore provide a relevant point of comparison. When sampling level 3 technical learners on other technical courses, the population was limited to only subject areas that were broadly comparable to the T Levels offered in 2021/22, and learners on apprenticeships were excluded. Learners were sampled if they were studying for at least one substantial technical qualification, in a subject area that mapped onto the technical routes for available T Levels (i.e. Construction, Digital, Education and Childcare, Health and Science). The A level sample included students from any A level course, taking any number of A levels. Given that the majority of those taking T Levels were expected to have otherwise taken other level 3 technical courses (as opposed to A levels), this group formed a larger part of the issued sample for the comparison group (80%). A random stratified sample was taken from each learner group (i.e. A level and other level 3 technical). There were a number of learners who were enrolled on both A level and level 3 technical courses. Cases were selected for each sample separately, in line with their levels in each population.

Among **level 4 and 5 learners** attending courses in the relevant academic year (demonstrated in Table 5), for each cohort a random stratified approach was taken with disproportionate sampling to ensure that a sufficient number of learners for analysis were enrolled on Digital and Construction subjects.

For all learner groups, the **sample frames** were provided by two registers controlled by the Department for Education.

- National Pupil Database (NPD). NPD is a database of pupils in state funded education and higher education in England.
- Individualised Learner Record (ILR). ILR data is collected by providers in the further education and skills sector in England.

# Fieldwork

## Fieldwork design

The 2021-24 Technical Education Learner Surveys were designed and run as sequential web-first surveys.

For the years 2022-24, learners were offered two possible modes of data collection:

- **Web** (or **CAWI**, Computer Assisted Web Interview) involves completing an online survey without the assistance of an interviewer.
- **CATI** (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) is an interview carried out by a trained interviewer over a phone call.

In the first year (2021) learners were also offered a **PAPI** (Pen-and-Paper Interview) mode, which requires the study participant to complete a paper survey sent in the mail and return it in a pre-paid envelope. A pilot carried out as part of 2021 fieldwork showed, however, that only a very small minority of learners used the PAPI option (4% of those who completed a survey), and this option was dropped from subsequent surveys.

Throughout the study, the approach was continually reviewed and revised in line with emerging evidence, including analysis of response patterns and feedback from telephone interviewers. For example, in the initial wave of fieldwork, telephone interviewers reported problems with answer phones and the role of parents in facilitating or barring cooperation in the study for their children. Interviewers' feedback was integrated for the following stages of fieldwork with the elaboration of a protocol on how to deal with answer phones and a new communication strategy targeted at parents.

Across all waves, the study included a **targeted design approach**: telephone interview resource was prioritised for cases with socio-demographic characteristics associated with a predicted lower likelihood to take part on web based on early stages of fieldwork. This enabled the fieldwork budget to be used on the less well-represented group of learners, optimising sample representativeness.

## Fieldwork stages

As set out in Table 7, fieldwork included several waves across multiple years, covering different learner groups. T Level learners and comparator groups were invited to take part in three interview waves, while level 4/5 learners took part in up to two interviews. Three cohorts of Transition Programme learners were invited to a single interview at the end of their course between 2021 and 2023.

**Table 7**: **Technical Education Learner Survey 2021-2024 cohorts – summary**

| # | Course entry year | Cohort name | Cohort acronym | Study type | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 2020 | T Level (Cohort 1) | TLC1 | Longitudinal | W1 | W2 | W3 | - |
| **2** | 2020 | Transition Programme (Cohort 1) | TPC1 | Cross-sectional | W1 | - | - | - |
| **3** | 2021 | T Level (Cohort 2) | TLC2 | Longitudinal | - | W1 | W2 | W3 |
| **4** | 2021 | Transition Programme (Cohort 2) | TPC2 | Cross-sectional | - | W1 | - | - |
| **5** | 2021 | Level 4/5 (Pre-reform; Cohort 1) | L45C1 | Longitudinal | - | W1 | - | W2 |
| **6** | 2021 | Level 3 Technical | VL3 | Longitudinal (comparator) | - | W1 | W2 | W3 |
| **7** | 2021 | A Level | AL | Longitudinal (comparator) | - | W1 | W2 | W3 |
| **8** | 2022 | Transition Programme, third cohort | TPC3 | Cross-sectional | - | - | W1 | - |
| **9** | 2022 | Level 4/5 (Cohort 2) | L45C2 | Longitudinal | - | - | W1 | -[2] |

[2] These learners were initially invited to 2024 fieldwork. However, it was decided to halt fieldwork for these learners.

## Survey response

**Table 8: Technical Education Learner Survey 2021-2024 cohorts – response rate by wave (% with completed interview out of issued at each wave)**

| # | Course entry year | Cohort name | Cohort acronym | Study type | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 2020 | T Level (Cohort 1) | TLC1 | Longitudinal | 61% (W1) (of 1,326)[1] | 47% (W2) (of 1,244)[2] | 36% (W3) (of 1,318)[3] | - |
| **2** | 2020 | Transition Programme (Cohort 1) | TPC1 | Cross-sectional | 49% (W1) (of 881) | - | - | - |
| **3** | 2021 | T Level (Cohort 2) | TLC2 | Longitudinal | - | 44% (W1) (of 5,386) | 65% (W2) (of 2,163)[4] | 44% (W3) (of 2,371)[5] |
| **4** | 2021 | Transition Programme (Cohort 2) | TPC2 | Cross-sectional | - | 31% (W1) (of 2,838) | - | - |
| **5** | 2021 | Level 4/5 (Pre-reform; Cohort 1) | L45C1 | Longitudinal | - | 27% (W1) (of 5,167) | - | 47% (W2) (of 1,384) |
| **6** | 2021 | Level 3 Technical | VL3 | Longitudinal (comparator) | - | 32% (W1) (of 8,134) | 55% (W2) (of 2,404)[6] | 32% (W3) (of 2,521) |

**Table 8**: **Continued**

| # | Course entry year | Cohort name | Cohort acronym | Study type | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **7** | 2021 | A Level | AL | Longitudinal (comparator) | - | 33% (W1) (of 2,033) | 58% (W2) (of 651)7 | 41% (W3) (of 668) |
| **8** | 2022 | Transition Programme, third cohort | TPC3 | Cross-sectional | - | - | 38% (W1) (of 5,220) | - |
| **9** | 2022 | Level 4/5 (Cohort 2) | L45C2 | Longitudinal | - | - | 39% (W1) (of 4,600) | - |

[1] A census approach was taken, inviting all learners enrolled on the new T Level courses.
[2] All those originally invited to W1 were issued at W2, except those who reported at W1 that they had dropped out, those who reported they had not started a T Level, and those who had opted out of future contact altogether or had passed away.
[3] The sample approach was similar to that applied at W2 but also included those who had left their T Level course early.
[4] Unlike for TLC1, the issued sample included only those who took part at W1. Exceptions were similar to those applied for W2 for TLC1, i.e. those who reported at W1 that they had dropped out, those who reported they had not started a T Level, and those who had opted out of future contact altogether or had passed away.
[5] As for W2 with TLC2, the issued sample included only those who took part at W1. Exceptions were similar to those applied for W3 for TLC1, i.e. the issued sample included those who had left their course early.
[6] The principles for selecting sample for issuing at W2 and W3 for the VL3 learner group were similar to those applied for TLC2.
[7] The principles for selecting sample for issuing at W2 and W3 for the AL learner group were similar to those applied for TLC2.

When looking at the figures in Table 8 it is important to note that there were differences in the fieldwork design across waves and cohorts that impacted response levels. For example, for the second cohort of T Level learners, only those interviewed in the first wave were issued for fieldwork at subsequent waves. This represents a change in approach between the 2020 and 2021 cohorts of T Level learners: among 2020 starters, due to the smaller sample size, all T Level learners were issued to subsequent waves regardless of whether they were interviewed at Wave 1 or not[3].

Across learner groups and cohorts, the issued sample sizes were also slightly larger at the post-course (W3) than at the end-course (W2 for TL, VL3 and AL groups) waves. This is due to the fact that learners who had said at the initial wave (W1) that they had left their course were invited to take part in the post-course wave, but not at the end-course wave. In addition, the incentivisation strategy was changed over time, drawing on insights from earlier waves (as discussed in section on Incentives).

As demonstrated in Table 8, response was consistently higher among T Level learners than other learner groups, especially the first T Level cohort. Some sub-groups of learners have been consistently more likely to respond than others. These include learners enrolled on Digital courses, as well as those on Education and Early Years courses and female learners. Note that there is significant overlap between the latter two groups (the vast majority of Education and Early Years learners were female).

Conversely, a number of sub-groups have been consistently less likely to respond across multiple waves of fieldwork. These include male learners and those enrolled on Construction courses. Again, note the significant overlap between these two groups (the vast majority of Construction learners were male).

## Communications

For each wave of fieldwork, communication with participants happened via three different routes: letters, emails and text messages. This was done to maximise the chance of successfully reaching and engaging as much of the sample as possible.

- **Invitation letters** were posted in advance of the start of fieldwork so that they would arrive on the first day of fieldwork, coinciding with the invitation texts and emails.
- Learners typically received three batches of **reminders** over the fieldwork period, arriving at different days of the week to maximise the chance of learners engaging with the reminders. Each batch of reminders included a postal reminder, email and text message, and contained a different message designed to motivate learners to

[3] Across all cohorts and learner groups, those who had opted out at an earlier wave were not issued at a later wave.

participate. From 2022 a **postcard format** was used for one of the reminder mailings.

- Textfills were used to ensure that each learner received a personalised, tailored message; for letters, pre-printed documents were used so that **A level learners received the Pathways branding, whilst the other learner groups received the Tech Ed branding**.
- For **email** templates, there were separate Pathways and Tech Ed templates with the different branding used in each, to reflect the academic focus of A level courses. The template wording was otherwise the same, again with textfills so that learners received a **tailored message**.

## Incentives

Incentives were offered to learners after completing the survey, in the form of a conditional shopping voucher. These were designed both as an acknowledgment for the time and effort invested by the student in completing the questionnaire, and as a way to increase response rates. Incentives were usually delivered to the respondents' email address, though respondents could also request to receive a postal voucher.

The exact incentive strategy varied across fieldwork waves. An outline is provided in Table 9. As demonstrated, learners who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) were prioritised for incentives across waves. This was due to consistently lower response rates seen among this group of learners on other surveys.

**Table 9: Incentive strategy overview**

| Year | Incentive strategy | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 2021 | £10 for learners eligible for FSM;<br>£5 for everyone else | |
| 2022 | W2 (TLC1): same strategy as 2021.<br><br>W1 (TLC2, AL, VL3, TPC2, L45C1): incentive experiment (RCT): either no voucher (no FSM learners in this group), £5 or £10. | Experiment findings: As expected, response rate increased in line with the value of the incentive being offered. The response rates for learners in the £10 groups were 44% for FSM learners and 45% for non-FSM learners. For the £5 groups, this was 35% for FSM learners and 37% for non-FSM learners. Response rate was 25% for learners who did not receive any incentive. |
| 2023 | W1/2 (end-course survey – TLC1, AL, VL3 (W2); TPC33 and L45C2 (W1)):<br>£10 for learners eligible for FSM, TP and L4/5, and Construction learners;<br>£5 for everyone else.<br><br>W3 (post-course survey – TLC1):<br>£10 for learners eligible for FSM;<br>£5 for everyone else. | Response among the L4/5 pre-reform group (L45C1) was lower than hoped for at W1 (27%); these learners were therefore prioritised for a higher incentive at W2.<br><br>TP response had fallen between cohorts 1 and 2 (from 49% to 32%) and cohort 3 learners were therefore offered a higher incentive than the first two TP cohorts. |
| 2024 | £10 for learners eligible for FSM, L4/5 learners and Construction learners;<br>£5 for everyone else. | |

## Topics covered

Each interview covered different topics, depending on the context of the interview and whether the learner was still enrolled on their course or not. Learners were interviewed annually in most cases (refer to 'Fieldwork Stages' for more detail and any exceptions). A summary of topics in each interview wave can be found in Table 10. The topics set out here were asked of all learner groups unless otherwise specified.

**Table 10**: **Technical Education Learner Survey 2021-2024 – interview content**

| **Initial interview** (1 year into course; Wave 1 – TL, comparators and TP, L4/5) | **End-of-course interview** (Wave 2 for TL and comparators; Wave 1 for L4/5) | **Post-course interview** (Wave 3 for TL and comparators; Wave 2 for L4/5) |
|---|---|---|
| Learner characteristics and experiences including:<br>• Reasons for choosing programme<br>• Detailed socio-demographics not included in administrative data<br>• The format of delivery<br>• How manageable and challenging they found course<br>• Time spent on work experience/industry placements (except A level learners)<br>• Satisfaction (overall, and with various aspects including work experience / industry placement where relevant) | Experiences and short-term outcomes including:<br>• The format of delivery<br>• How manageable and challenging they found course<br>• Time spent on work experience/industry placements (except A level learners)<br>• Satisfaction (overall, and with various aspects including work experience / industry placement where relevant)<br>• Employment situation during the course, and programme funding (L4/5 only) | Short-term outcomes and reflections on the course including:<br>• Progression into employment, further study and other destinations<br>• Course / work special-ism and whether this matched general field of course<br>• Learner perceptions of factors that have contributed to progression into employment, further study and other destinations<br>• Whether aspirations changed over time and why, whether course has enabled work-re-lated progression (L4/5 only) |

# Key findings

The following sections provide an overview of key findings for each of the learner groups at their respective interview waves.

## T Level learners (and comparator group)

### Course experience

Learners in **the first T Level cohort (2020 starters)** generally reported high levels of satisfaction overall and with different course elements, including the industry placements where they were undertaken. They felt that their course had helped them to develop knowledge, practical skills and understanding of their sector. Most learners found the workload to be manageable and felt that their course was suitably challenging. Additionally, learners reported feeling supported by their school or college in deciding their next step, with nearly four in ten T Level students intending further study (most commonly university). Lack of in-person teaching, a factor associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, was identified as the main barrier to learning, and was associated with lower satisfaction. Covid restrictions are likely to have impacted on learners' access to industry placements – a crucial element of the technical programmes – and may partly explain some perceived outcomes from courses, such as the lowest area of satisfaction for T Level learners being the level of employer contact.

The first cohort of T Level learners reported high levels of satisfaction at the end of their programme, with most learners (71%) indicating they were 'very' or 'quite satisfied' with the programme.

Almost all 2020 T Level starters indicated that the amount of teaching was 'very', 'mostly' or 'quite' manageable (94%) in their second year, similar to their responses at the end of their first year (93%). Only a small group found the amount of teaching to be 'not very manageable' or 'not at all manageable' (6% after their second year and 7% after their first year). 2020 T Level starters also found the work undertaken outside of taught lessons across their two-year programme to be 'very', 'mostly' or 'quite' manageable (92% for second year and 90% for first year).

By the end of their programme, almost all 2020 T Level starters who responded to the survey had completed the required industry placement (95%), compared with 64% of this group at the end of their first year. The placement length for most T Level learners was in line with programme expectations. Of 2020 T Level starters who had completed a placement by the end of their programme, the most common placement length was between 301-400 hours (41%), in line with the minimum expectation of 315 hours for most T Levels. Almost all 2020 T Level starters (90%) reported that their placements directly related to their occupational specialism. This was most prevalent among

Education and Childcare learners (98%), followed by Construction learners (89%) and Digital learners (76%).

For learners in **the second T Level cohort (2021 starters)**, a notable change versus the first T Level cohort was the significant return to in-person teaching in the 2021/22 academic year, with almost all learners from this T Level cohort taught mostly or entirely in person from the beginning of their course. Of 2021 starters, T Level learners were more likely than other level 3 learners to have a high number of teaching hours, i.e. more than 20 teaching hours a week. T Level learners were more likely to have an industry placement and other contact with employers than other level 3 technical learners. T Level placements also tended to be longer than other level 3 technical work placements.

Lack of study materials was the most common barrier to learning for T Levels. This was especially so for learners on some new T Level courses (delivered from 2021/22), including 69% of learners on the new Health and Science route. In other routes, this was reported as a barrier for between 21% and 37% of learners.

During their course, satisfaction with the T Level programme was lower among learners in the second cohort compared with the first. This difference in satisfaction levels was associated with some of the new T Level courses and assessment for the new Health and Science pathway. Satisfaction levels were similar for new providers and those who had delivered T Levels in 2020/21. Learners in the second T Level cohort were less satisfied with their programme than those in the same year group on other level 3 technical and A level courses.

By the end of their course, just under two thirds (65%) of T Level learners in the second cohort were satisfied with their programme, and almost as large a proportion (62)% were likely to recommend it. Satisfaction varied significantly by T Level route: it was highest for Education and Early Years learners (79%) and lowest for Health and Science learners (39%). T Level learners reported that the programme had helped them significantly develop their understanding of how workplaces operate (78%), their knowledge of the occupational area (77%), and relevant practical skills for their subject (77%) and occupation (74%). Education and Early Years learners were the most positive about the development of key outcomes, while Digital learners were the least positive. Most T Level learners in the second cohort (78%) planned to undertake further study, most commonly through a degree (41%) or an apprenticeship (25%). These next steps were similar across T Level and level 3 technical learners.

At the end of their course, most T Level learners in the second cohort found their workload manageable, including the number of taught hours on the programme and the work required outside of taught lessons. A lack of study materials was the most common barrier to learning for T Levels, reported by 42% of all T Level learners, and 65% of Health and Science learners.

### Post-course outcomes

Among **the first cohort of T Level learners (2020 starters)**, almost all completers were in education or employment. The most common destinations were a university degree (44%), paid work (40%), or an apprenticeship (13%). Destinations for T Level completers varied by T Level route. Three quarters of completers had remained in the general field of their T Level, including the majority of those who were currently studying, and over half of learners had remained within their T Level occupational specialism. Notably, three in ten T Level completers in paid work or an apprenticeship reported working for the organisation that provided their T Level industry placement.

Most learners did not significantly change their career plans during their T Level programme. Changes in career plans during the course were most commonly influenced by the T Level industry placement, learning more about the occupation, and advice from teachers and career staff. Almost three quarters of completers aimed to work in their T Level field long-term. Stimulating and interesting work, and a suitable work-life balance, were the most commonly reported important factors in learners' career decision-making.

Reflecting on their T Level experience, about four fifths of T Level completers agreed that their T Level had allowed them to progress to what they wanted to do, and prepared them for their current study, the workplace, and their future career. The industry placement was considered the most important element in preparing T Level completers for what they went on to do, followed by technical knowledge and practical skills. Skills from T Levels were used 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' by 70% of completers who were studying and 57% of learners who were working. Almost three quarters of learners in the first T Level cohort were 'very' or 'quite likely' to recommend their programme to others. Being likely to recommend the course was associated with completing the T Level course, continuing in the T Level general field, being more satisfied with the course, experiencing fewer barriers to learning, and finding the course less challenging.

Among T Level learners in **the second cohort (2021 starters)**, the most common destinations for those who completed their T Level programme about a year after their course were a university degree (44%), paid work (37%), or an apprenticeship (12%). Destinations varied by T Level route. Destinations were similar to the first T Level cohort and to learners on level 3 technical courses in equivalent subjects. Approximately seven in ten (71%) T Level completers had remained within the general field of their T Level. Education and Early Years had the largest proportion who remained in their T Level field (81%, compared with 69% of Construction learners, 68% of Digital learners and 64% of Health and Science learners). For courses in Education and Early Years and Health and Science respectively, the proportion of learners remaining in the field was similar across T Level learners and level 3 technical learners. For Digital courses, the proportion of T Level learners remaining in the field was higher among T Level learners (68%) than among level 3 technical learners (54%).

In terms of career planning and decision making, most T Level completers in this cohort said their ideas about what they wanted to do as a career either stayed the same or only changed a little during their course. Changes in career plans during the course were most commonly influenced by the T Level industry placement, learning more about the occupation, and/or advice from teachers and career staff. The most commonly reported factors influencing career decision-making were 'work that stimulates and interests me' and 'a work-life balance that suits me'.

Reflecting on their experience of the T Level, around seven in ten T Level completers in the second cohort agreed that their T Level had allowed them to progress to what they wanted to do (72%) and prepared them for their current study (71%), the workplace (71%), and their future career (68%). However, T Level completers in the second cohort were more likely to agree their course prepared them for the workplace (71%) than level 3 technical learners on equivalent routes, with differences of 10-15 percentage points. T Level completers were also more likely to agree when compared with A level learners (34%).

About two thirds (65%) of T Level completers in the second cohort who were studying at the point of the post-course interview, and half (53%) of those working said they used the skills developed during their T Level 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit'. Learners selected the industry placement, technical subject knowledge and practical skills as the T Level aspects which best prepared them for their current activities.

Just over six in ten T Level completers in this cohort (62%) were 'very' or 'quite likely' to recommend their course to others. This was lower than for the first cohort of T Level learners (72%) and A Level learners (70%).

## Transition Programme learners

Learners in **the first cohort of Transition Programme learners (2020 starters)** had a largely positive experience of their course, with more than seven in ten intending to go on to further study (including just under three in ten intending to go onto a T Level). There was a significant return to in-person teaching in the 2021/22 academic year, with most of **the second cohort of Transition Programme learners (2021 starters)** taught entirely or mostly in person. Just over half of this cohort of Transition Programme learners spent time on work experience, an increase from 2020/21 when work experience was impacted by COVID-19. Most of these learners were satisfied with their work experience. The highest proportion of learners were satisfied with the knowledge they gained of the workplace while on work experience, and the lowest proportion of learners were satisfied with its timing. Learners' overall satisfaction with the programme was high (69%), though slightly lower than for the first cohort (77%). The highest proportion of learners were satisfied with 'teachers' knowledge and expertise' (79%) and the lowest proportion with the 'employer contact' on the programme (46%). At the end of the Transition Programme

course, just over a quarter of learners intended to progress onto a T Level, reduced from just over a third of learners at the start of the programme.

Among **Transition Programme learners in the third cohort (2022 starters)**, 71% were satisfied with their course, similar to 2021 starters (69%) and slightly lower than 2020 starters (77%). Learners were most satisfied with 'teachers' knowledge and expertise' (81%) and least satisfied with the 'level of employer contact' (45%). Over half of learners reported that the Transition Programme had helped them to develop a range of skills, including study and communication skills and confidence. Only a small majority of learners felt that it had prepared them for the T Level course (55%), though this figure was higher among those who intended to progress onto a T Level (68%). At the start of the Transition Programme, 42% of learners in the third cohort intended to progress onto a T Level, however, by the end of the course, this had reduced to 33%. The most common reason for not continuing onto a T Level was preferring to study another course.

## Level 4/5 learners

### Course experience

Almost all **level 4/5 learners in the first cohort (pre-reform group)** found their workload manageable, including the amount of teaching on their programme and work done outside taught lessons. The most commonly reported barriers to learning were family responsibilities, working part-time and lack of in-person teaching. Three quarters were very/quite satisfied with their programme, with three quarters or more satisfied with their teachers' knowledge and expertise, the skills covered for their chosen occupation/subject area, the standard of classroom teaching, and the support received from tutors. Learners were least satisfied with the level of employer contact and careers advice provided. Among this group of level 4/5 learners, three quarters were planning to work as a next step after their programme finished, and just over three quarters of these were planning on staying in their current job. Just under half of learners reported wanting to progress onto further study or an apprenticeship.

Among **level 4/5 learners surveyed in 2023** (the group referred to in this study as the post-reform group), 51% of learners worked alongside their course, while the key reasons for learners choosing level 4 and 5 programmes were an interest in the area (56%), upskilling in the same line of work (35%), and to increase earnings (30%). Relatively few learners took a course to retrain in a different line of work (19%). The key reasons for choosing the subject area were to fit with their intended work area and interest. Education providers tended to be chosen because they were convenient to travel to and offered the subject of interest. Most of these learners found their workload manageable, including the amount of teaching on their programme and work completed outside taught lessons. The most commonly reported barriers to learning were family responsibilities (26%) and working part-time (23%). Among this group of level 4/5

learners, about three quarters of learners were satisfied with their course (77%) and likely to recommend it (73%). Three quarters or more were satisfied with their teachers' knowledge and expertise, the skills covered for their chosen occupation/subject area, the standard of classroom teaching, support received from tutors, and the way learners are assessed. Learners were least satisfied with the level of employer contact (35% satisfied) and careers advice provided (51% satisfied). Most learners reported that the programme had helped them develop significantly in their knowledge of the programme's occupational area (77%) and practical skills needed for their chosen subject (70%) and occupation (65%).

### Post-course outcomes

Among **level 4/5 learners in the first (pre-reform) cohort**, the most common destinations around two years after finishing their course were paid work (60%) followed by further study (23%). One in ten were undertaking both paid work and study. The proportion of learners undertaking paid work was similar to the proportion of learners who had been working immediately prior to their programme (77%). Almost three quarters of learners (73%) had remained within the general field of their course and around seven out of ten learners (71%) said they were fulfilled by their current situation.

Most level 4/5 learners reported that their idea about what they wanted to do as a career had either 'stayed the same' (49%) or 'changed a little' (38%) during their course. The most commonly reported factors influencing career decision-making were 'work that stimulates and interests me' (76%) and 'a work-life balance that suits me' (70%).

More than seven in ten learners (72%) agreed that their course had helped them to progress at work, while the vast majority (82%) who had moved into a new job since completing their course reported that their course had helped them in securing the job to varying degrees.

Reflecting on their course, about three quarters of learners agreed that their level 4/5 course had allowed them to progress onto what they wanted to do (76%) and prepared them for their future career (74%). Around three quarters of learners (76%) reported that they were either 'very likely' (40%) or 'quite likely' (36%) to recommend their course to others.

## Published reports

Reports containing key findings accompanied each wave of fieldwork, with these being published alongside appendix tables. While report structure and content varied according to learner group and interview wave, each publication contained: a summary of key findings, policy background, a description of the study aims and the survey approach, substantive chapters and a set of conclusions. In addition, technical appendices were provided for each report containing information on population profile, fieldwork design and strategies relating to communications and incentives, response, and notes on the weighting approach, among other topics.

Each report can be found on the Department for Education website:

Technical Education Learner Survey 2021

- Findings from the first year of fieldwork for a survey of technical education learners, conducted in the summer of 2021

Technical Education Learner Survey 2022

- Findings from the second year of fieldwork for a survey of technical education learners, conducted in the summer of 2022

Technical Education Learner Survey 2023: Progression of the first T Level cohort

- A report on short-term outcomes, destinations, future plans and course experiences among learners in the first T Level cohort

Technical Education Learner Survey 2023: End-of-course surveys

- Findings from the second year of fieldwork for a survey of T Level and comparator learners and an initial fieldwork wave with level 4/5 learners, conducted in the summer of 2023

Technical Education Learner Progression Survey 2024

- Findings from the third year of fieldwork for a survey of T Level and comparator learners, and from the second wave of fieldwork with level 4 and 5 pre-reform learners, conducted in the summer of 2024

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