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T-Levels: How LMI provides real solutions

Although the Government's decision to delay introducing the first T-levels will have brought something of a sigh of relief among many in the sector, with the decision only affecting the first two pathfinder routes, the stay of grace could be seen by providers not so much as a reason to put off implementing a T-Levels strategy, but rather as a welcome opportunity to make sure that they really are ready for them when they come in. After all, in planning terms, 2020 is still not that far away.

How do we begin planning for T-Levels?

The starting point for T-Level planning must be to look again at the intended purpose of the new system. The Post-16 Skills Plan described the new qualifications as being:

> *A dynamic, high-quality technical option, which is grounded in engagement with employers, fits soundly with the rest of the system and is responsive to the changing needs of the economy.*

This is the basic T-Level proposition – a streamlined and simplified qualification system that teaches the skills that best serve the needs of industry and employers, in order to improve productivity and increase growth.

With that foundation in mind, there are a number of important considerations that you as a provider will need to consider in your T-Level straregy:

- Firstly, since T-Levels are meant to respond to the needs of your local economy, the routes you do need to reflect employer demand. This begs the following question: How can we make sure our T-Levels reflect local employer demand?

- Secondly, because each T-Level must have a work placement attached to it for it to be a valid qualification, the question arises: How can we determine which industries and employers we should be engaging for work placements?

- Thirdly, ultimately T-Levels can only work if young people come to see them as a viable and valuable qualification that will help them get sustainable employment. Which raises the question: How can we engage potential students with the new T-Levels?

How can we make sure our T-Levels reflect local employer demand?

If the fundamental point about T-Levels is that they should reflect the specific demands of your local economy, the starting point must be to first identify what those specific demands are. In order to do this, there is a two stage process: Firstly, the 15 T-Level routes must be mapped to related occupations, and secondly, these T-Level occupations can then be mapped to local economies using Labour Market Insight (LMI). By taking this approach, we can then achieve the following two objectives:

- We can compare demand between different T-Level routes in a region

- We can look at the occupational demand within each T-Level route in a region

On the first point, the graph on the right shows a comparison of projected annual openings in three routes in the Solent LEP Region. As you can see, there is likely to be far greater demand in business and administrative, and health and science, than in the digital route.

But we can also delve into each of these routes to get a better sense of demand for the occupations that the T-Level relates to. The graph below shows this for the digital route, looking at projected demand for the six occupations that are related to the route, once again in the Solent LEP Region:

Annual Openings for Three T-Level Routes in the Solent LEP Region from 2016-2021

Annual Openings for Digital Occupations in the Solent LEP Region from 2016-2021
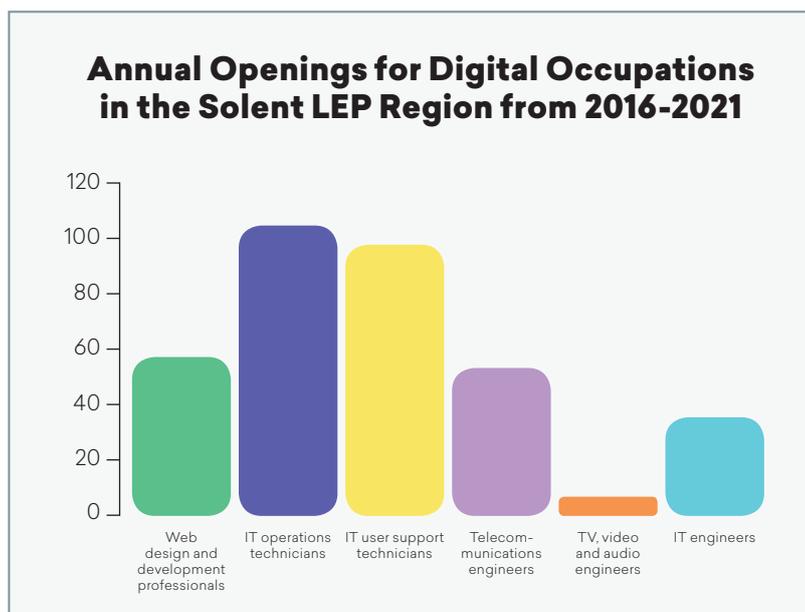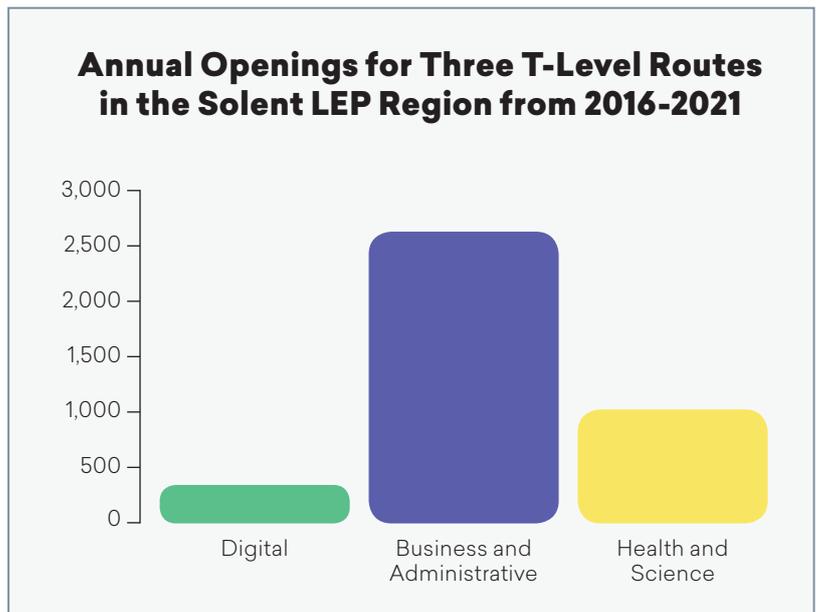
What are the benefits of taking this approach? Firstly, your institution can become far more informed as to how to shape its curriculum. Secondly, this sort of insight can help you connect with other stakeholders in your area to ensure that the region as a whole is being adequately served. And most importantly, it means that your institution will be far better placed to fulfil the goal of T-Levels, which is to provide education and training that is fit for the needs of employers in your area.

How can we determine which industries and employers we should be engaging for work placements?
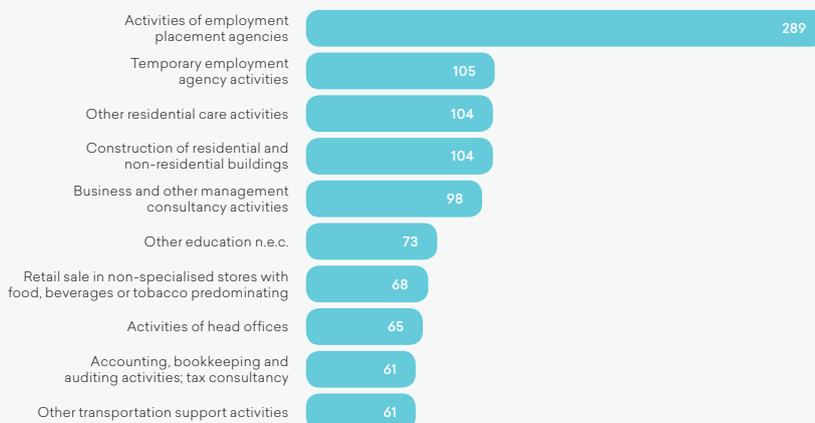
The original recommendations of the Sainsbury Review, were that every T-Level would require each student to complete a "high quality" work placement with a local employer. The Government confirmed at the beginning of 2017 that these work placements would be for the duration of three-months, and pledged an extra £500 million to fund them. Yet this doesn't solve the problem from the perspective of the provider. It's all very well funds being made available, but colleges still have to go out and engage employers to make work placements happen. The question is how.

In terms of strategic planning, the answer to this question is broadly the same as that given on the previous page. That is, a college needs to first understand current and future employer demand for T-Level routes in their area before planning a curriculum around them. Why? Because only where there is demand are there are going to be employers who are – at least in theory – potential partners for work placements.

But there is another dimension to how LMI can be of enormous help, and that is in the realm of employer engagement. We showed on the previous page how data can be used to identify the demand for each occupation within a T-Level route. Due to the way that Emsi data is structured, we can take each one of these occupations, run an "inverse staffing pattern" and immediately identify which industries actually employ them.

Annual Openings for Digital Occupations in the Solent LEP Region from 2016-2021

Industry	Openings
Activities of employment placement agencies	289
Temporary employment agency activities	105
Other residential care activities	104
Construction of residential and non-residential buildings	104
Business and other management consultancy activities	98
Other education n.e.c.	73
Retail sale in non-specialised stores with food, beverages or tobacco predominating	68
Activities of head offices	65
Accounting, bookkeeping and auditing activities; tax consultancy	61
Other transportation support activities	61

So for instance, the graph to the left shows the top 10 industries that employ business and administrative jobs in the Solent LEP Region, as measured by projected job growth out to 2021.

The benefit of employing this method is immediately clear: by following this process, you can see which industries connect to each of your T-Level routes, which in turn greatly narrows down where you begin engaging employers in your area for work placements.

How can we engage potential students with the new T-Levels?

If the whole purpose of T-Levels is to create a skills system that is aligned with local employer need, surely there is huge marketing potential for colleges to show young people how the new qualification can lead them to a good career. In other words, the key is not promoting courses; but rather promoting the link between courses and employment.

We are already working with a wide variety of colleges across the country, helping them showcase the link between their courses and related careers, and also tying these career possibilities to local LMI. This means that they are able to give young people a realistic view of careers in their region, including job demand, salary expectations other similar careers, and can also show them how the college can help them get there.

Potential Careers in the Solent LEP Region for the Digital T-Level

Web design and development professionals	**IT operations technicians**	**IT user support technicians**
Annual Openings 58	Annual Openings 106	Annual Openings 99
Median Hourly Wages £14.12	Median Hourly Wages £14.49	Median Hourly Wages £14.73
Telecomms engineers	**TV, video and audio engineers**	**IT engineers**
Annual Openings 54	Annual Openings 7	Annual Openings 36
Median Hourly Wages £15.33	Median Hourly Wages £16.01	Median Hourly Wages £16.40

This formula is successful for a couple of reasons. Firstly, people don't go to college to do a course, as such. They go to college to do a course that they believe will benefit them in the long run. And secondly, by giving potential students more information about the career realities of their local economy, you can help them feel they are making a more informed decision about their future, so giving them a sharper focus on completing their T-Level. By using LMI to promote your T-Levels as a pathway into a career, you can engage young people and show them the long term benefits of an education at your college.

Our Solutions

T-Level Scan – £5,000
The T-Level Scan gives you an overview of demand for the 15 T-Level routes in your region, including broad qualification level differencing (i.e. below level 2, level 2- 3 and level 4-5).

T-Level Gap Analysis – £10,000
As well as what's included in the T-Level Scan, the T-Level Gap Analysis also includes a supply-side review, identifying how well your current curriculum and completions align with local demand for each route.

Analyst – £15,000-£25,000 depending on coverage
Analyst is our complete data tool, which allows you to get a comprehensive window on occupations and industries in your region. We have also built all 15 T-Level routes into the system meaning that you can use it to do everything that is included in the T-Level Scan and Gap Analysis.

Job Feed – £5,000
Job Feed is an online job aggregation tool, which allows you to see who's hiring in your area right now. It is therefore invaluable for anyone looking to plan who to engage with for work placements.

Career Coach API – £15,000-£25,000 depending on coverage
From our basic Career Coach portal, to our full API web integration platform, we offer two solutions that will help you to engage students around T-Levels, demonstrating key labour market insights on careers they're interested in, and showing them how your T-Levels can get them there.