



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Department for Education Implementation of T Level Programmes Consultation:

Icon Response

05 February 2018

Icon, The Institute of Conservation, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the [Department for Education's Implementation of T Level Programmes consultation](#). We commend the government's focus on "developing home grown talent" in order to become a "highly skilled country." We believe that consultation across sectors will contribute to a strong technical education system that can provide industries with the skills required as well as encourage equality of opportunity.

Icon is a membership organisation and charity which brings together those with a passion for the care of cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. We represent nearly 3,000 individuals and organizations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others committed to improving understanding of and access to our cultural heritage.

We have considered the consultation questions in light of our specialism. Accordingly, our responses are particularly relevant to the Institute for Apprenticeships' proposed Creative and Design occupational map. We are currently involved in developing standards for Trailblazer Apprenticeships within the heritage sector.

Question 7: Do you agree with the proposed approach integrating the work placement within the T level programme? Yes/No. please explain your answer. If no, what would be a preferable approach?

Yes.

Practical work experience will be crucial to achieving the aims and purpose of the T levels. Within the heritage sector there has been a decline in the technical and traditional crafts skills that are necessary to conserving our cultural heritage.¹ We believe that the proposed T levels can contribute to addressing skills gaps and shortages in the sector but only if they include practical work experience within the sector.

Question 11: How can we support students to access work placements relevant to their course in areas where there are no employers to offer work placements nearby?

Financial support should be offered to cover students' travel and accommodation costs.

¹ <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2017/heritage-and-the-economy-2017.pdf> ; <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/national-infrastructure-development-and-capacity-2015-33-assessment/national-infrastructure-development-and-archaeological-capacity-shortages.pdf/>

We also recommend providing a database of employers offering work placements that is searchable by postcode. This could facilitate the discovery of work placements in the nearest location possible.

The likelihood of appropriate work placements being found nearby will presumably be determined by how specific the offered courses are. A combination of different specialisms could lead to a wider choice of placement host types. For example, a student studying a T level under the proposed Creative and Design occupational map and Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions pathway could find a placement within a local authority museum, heritage site or archive.

If the government wishes to eliminate the risk of no work placements being available in close vicinity to students, it could consider the degree of specialisation that a path offers. However, specialisation will be valuable for students' employability and paths should not be too general. We consequently recommend that the Department for Education consults with industries on the range of employers that can cater to specialist paths.

Question 12: Do you agree with our suggested approach to providing students with financial support whilst on a work placement?

Yes.

Financial support to cover additional expenses incurred during work placements is necessary to removing economic barriers to undertaking T levels. This will be important to ensuring the socio-economic diversity of T level students.

Question 13: What are the common barriers / challenges for employers to host work placements and how can we support employers to offer work placements?

Lack of Funding - Icon learned through an evaluation of its Heritage Fund Training Bursary Programme that there is little appetite from employers to fund work placements.² In particular micro and small businesses, which form a considerable portion of the cultural heritage conservation sector, can be poorly positioned to fund placements. Technical skills are predominant in these businesses; large institutions, such as museums or historic houses, increasingly commission private conservation practitioners to undertake work on their behalf. Private practices are consequently ideally placed to offer training in technical skills. T level students could in return help to address the pressing need for practical conservation skills to be passed on to younger generations. However, it is imperative that employers are not expected to offer financial support for students during their placements as this could impede small businesses from realizing their considerable potential to teach technical skills.

Time Limitations - Managing and overseeing students requires a considerable investment of time. This has an impact on supervisors' ability to carry out the daily duties of their employment or business. Human resources within the cultural heritage sector are already overstretched with reduced budgets leading to increased workloads.³ Conservation practices can comprise only one member of staff, while in museums a single conservator may look after an entire collection. The importance of the collections and objects that conservators care for adds to pressures of time management, as neglect could lead to irreversible change in cultural heritage. Administrative support from the Department for Education or the provider will be necessary in allowing hosts to focus on what they do best: providing training in their specialist area. Furthermore, the time

²https://icon.org.uk/system/files/public/CareersandTraining/icon_training_bursary_scheme_evaluation_executive_summary_final_oct_2015.pdf

³ Creative & Cultural Skills and Historic England, 2013. *The Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage Skills Survey*. Available online at: <http://blueprintfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/1384949416-The-Historic-Environment-and-Cultural-Heritage-Skills-Survey-FINAL2.pdf> [accessed 2 February 2018].

commitments required from employers to host work placements will need to be outlined and agreed before the start of the placement in order to avoid unexpected obligations.

Lack of Awareness - The Department for Education and education providers will need to build awareness among employers of the benefit of offering work placements. Information on potential opportunities and partnerships should be made easily accessible.

Question 16: Would employers value a recognition in delivering work placements, for example through a form of 'kitemarking'?

Yes.

This could serve as an additional incentive for employers to offer work placements.

Question 19: Where there are additional occupation-specific requirements that can be delivered or assessed off the job, do you agree that these should be incorporated into T levels? If not, why not?

Yes.

We welcome the proposal to include professional bodies in T level panel discussions on additional requirements that students will need to obtain a job in their chosen field.

The input of professional bodies will be important to embedding professional industry standards at the heart of T level programmes. These standards will ensure students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of them in employment in the field. Knowledge of and adherence to industry standards can facilitate a student's journey to achieving professional accreditation in the future, giving them a competitive advantage in the job market.

Question 22: How can T levels be designed in a way that enables students to progress onto apprenticeships?

The alignment of standards, skills and knowledge between T levels and apprenticeships will be critical to enabling this progression. It will be crucial for students to reach the same baseline at completing their T level to enable a smooth transition. The T level will consequently have to include a strong element of work skills to help learners in effectively managing their time so that they can cope with the rigors of working and studying at the same time.

We recommend that Trailblazer Apprenticeship employer groups are included in the process of designing T levels to ensure consistency across standards and commonalities between core skill areas.

Question 23: How can T levels be built to provide a solid grounding for, and access to higher levels of technical education?

The alignment of standards, skills and knowledge between T levels and apprenticeships will be particularly important to facilitating progression to higher-level apprenticeships. It will be crucial for students to reach the same baseline at completing their T level to enable a smooth transition. The T level will consequently have to include a strong element of work skills to help learners in effectively managing their time so that they can cope with the rigors of working and studying at the same time.

We recommend that Trailblazer Apprenticeship employer groups, involved in developing higher-level apprenticeships, are included in the process of designing T levels to ensure consistency across standards and commonalities between core skill areas.

Question 30: What challenges will providers face if they want to bring in more industry expertise?

The cultural heritage sector is dominated by a focus on the built environment. However, the conservation of moveable cultural heritage (objects) is equally important to our understanding of the past and our identity. Providers offering T levels in the Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions Path may lack awareness of the varied nature of our cultural heritage and the expertise on offer. This challenges their ability to bring in industry experts specialising in *all* types of cultural heritage, including objects and collections.

Providers should work with industry employers to identify the range of expertise needed to provide students with well-rounded training in their chosen paths.

Question 31: Should we seek to further influence which T levels are offered by providers, according to local and national skills needs? Yes/No. If yes, how should we do this?

Yes.

The provision of some T levels may be less attractive to providers than others, considering the required funding for investment in facilities and equipment. Providers' decision to host programmes should consider skills needs and should not be driven purely by financial factors.

There has been a recent decline in the number of higher education conservation courses on offer in the UK, which is increasing sector skills shortages and gaps. We believe that economic considerations, weighing student numbers against costs to acquire appropriate facilities and equipment, has contributed to this decline. A similar situation should be avoided with T levels in order to maximise their potential to address skills gaps and shortages.

T levels should be designed with employers on both a national and local level to ensure they meet the demands of their industries. Further, we urge the Department for Education to work with employers to identify providers with appropriate experience and knowledge of a sector before encouraging their participation in a specific T level. The ability of T levels to address skills needs will be reliant on the high standard and quality of the learning experience.