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Support for Industry Placements

Provider and employer views on new placement models and approaches

Research report

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Helena Takala, Joy Williams, Kate Alexander, Bertie Wnek and Becci Newton (IES)



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The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For over 40 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 30 multidisciplinary staff and a network of international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet. For further details please visit: www.employment-studies.co.uk

Contents

List of tables	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction and policy context	8
1. Methodology	10
2. Provider information and views on progress, barriers and challenges	11
2.1. Provider profiles	11
2.2. Provider views on progress against CDF targets	12
2.3. Use of new models and approaches by providers	13
3. Route-level changes	14
3.1. Digital	14
3.2. Construction	15
3.3. Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing	17
4. Changes to all routes	19
4.1. Two employers	19
4.2. Work-taster activities	22
4.3. Part-time work	24
4.4. Recording of placements in hours	27
4.5. Onsite placements for SEND learners	27
4.5.1. Placement accessibility	29
5. Conclusions and recommendations	32

List of tables

Table 1: Barriers to learners completing industry placements	11
Table 2: Number of models adopted.....	13
Table 3: Number of learners with SEND supported on placements.....	29

Executive Summary

In October 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the Institute for Employment (IES) to conduct further research on Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) to explore providers' and employers' views on updates to the T Level industry placement models policy. New models were announced in a policy update in May 2019, which took the form of a framework of new approaches. Some related to specific T Level routes (Digital, Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing) and others to all placements (concerning learners' part-time work, counting placements in hours rather than days, and the use of two employers to meet required placement hours).

Providers participating in this research broadly welcomed the updated policy. Many expressed a view that the new models and approaches were helpful to their efforts to source and match placements at the increased scale they were working at, and to reach the required number of hours (315+) for placements. Providers generally thought that while substantial challenges remained, the new models and approaches had, in line with policy, made a difference either to their ability to source placements or to placement accessibility for their learners.

Of the new models, the two most well-received and widely utilised were: the two employers and learners' part-time work options. On the first of these, where previously, the full placement (315+ hours) was to be completed with one employer, placements can now be split between **two employers**. In the qualitative research, CDF providers said they had mainly used this model as a response to placement breakdown rather than as a planned approach from the outset. This was in order to minimise the additional administrative burden involved in managing two placement employers "unless absolutely necessary". In some cases, however, providers implemented a 'flip or switch' model from the outset for two learners to move between two employers and this worked well. Employers reported that they appreciated being able to offer shorter duration placements which also had the benefit that they could offer a larger number of placements.

Converting learners' existing **part-time work** to placements was seemingly the most successful of the new models. Providers saw the main benefits as expanding their employer networks and making placements more accessible to learners reliant on the income from part-time work. However, in practice, most learners' part-time work was not sufficiently occupationally relevant to qualify (e.g. retail is offered as an Apprenticeship only route). Accordingly, this model was typically used in Catering & Hospitality and Hair & Beauty; industries that providers find relatively easy to source in, rather than those that are challenging, such as Digital or Construction.

Of the new models and approaches that were applicable to all learners, the guidance on **work-taster activities** was less well-received although could still be useful. Providers had included a variety of different activities under this category that targeted individuals and cohorts of learners. Individual work-tasters, such as job shadowing, were not widely used as quality-assurance of each short experience was seen as an ineffective use of

staff resources. Consequently, most providers using the model delivered activities to groups of learners.

Three of the new models were applicable to specific T Level routes. Of these, the Construction model – which involves the inclusion of **Commercial, Community and Charitable projects** – was the most positively received by providers in the qualitative interviews. Some providers reported that they already used such projects as part of study programmes and thought that these projects were beneficial to learners in terms of developing technical and other skills, such as project management and planning.

The second of these specific models focused on the Digital industry and enabled **Digital placements at route-level rather than pathway-level**. This was also relatively well-received. Nonetheless, in the first instance, most providers aimed to find a good match between the employers' needs and the learners' skills and interests. Only after attempting this did providers utilise the model to find more general Digital placements. The providers interviewed generally said that this route remained challenging to source for, often because of a lack of suitable employers in the local area, but that the new model had made some difference. Employers taking part in interviews liked the additional flexibility of this model.

In contrast to Construction and Digital approaches, the new model enabling the use of **skills hubs and employer training centres** (for Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing routes) had not been widely used by many providers in the qualitative research. In most cases, providers were not aware of any hubs or centres in their surrounding area. Accordingly, this model was reported as not making much difference to sourcing for these routes.

On placement accessibility, around a third of providers reported that they were seeking to place learners with special educational needs and disabilities under CDF. The new approach enables **learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to spend up to 105 placement hours** in providers' partial on-site work environments. In the qualitative research, providers reported that the prospect of 210 hours with an external employer was too much for many SEND learners. This concern aside, providers were mostly positive about using their onsite facilities for these learners and so, welcomed this update to policy.

Providers placed a strong focus on the quality of placements. Compared to CDF year 1, many had further formalised their processes for quality assuring placements. They were particularly concerned about quality-assurance for the most used models and approaches – the opportunity to spread the placement over two employers; to use part-time work towards placements, and the option for route-level, rather than pathway-level Digital placements.

The report concludes with a small number of recommendations stemming from these findings:

- Providing more guidance on the rarely and the moderately used models. This includes more information about skills hubs and training centres that would be in

scope for Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing route placements, and exemplars of Commercial, Community and Charitable project models for the Construction route.

- Further clarification and consideration of further updates to policy, on areas viewed as not permissible currently such as: sourcing placements at other providers' premises and which activities from existing study programmes can be counted towards industry placements during CDF.
- Provide further examples of where two-employer placements have been used to good effect for groups of learners e.g. the 'flip and switch' model.
- Consider the use of IT support departments on other providers' premises for the Digital route.
- Further exploration on the perceived barriers to offering placements to a wider set of learners with SEND and/or learning disabilities/difficulties (LDD) (accessibility) and to develop specific guidance on employer engagement for these placements.
- Gather more detailed provider feedback on what an appropriate number of internal hours could be for SEND learners with different conditions.

Introduction and policy context

T Levels are new vocational qualifications that represent a significant change in the Department for Education's vision for vocational education in England. A core component of these new qualifications will be a 315+ hour industry placement, which enables technical skills to be developed in the workplace. To help providers build capacity for delivery ahead of the roll-out of T levels from September 2020, the Department established the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) to operate in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

In 2018, IES was commissioned by the Department to evaluate the first year of the CDF and its associated support package to providers. The evaluation found evidence, firstly, that the CDF in line with policy aims had allowed providers to build capacity and staff skills in preparation for T Levels. Many CDF providers had employed industry placement coordinators to build capacity for employer engagement and to establish a link between employers and curriculum areas. Through these new staff members, CDF providers were beginning to standardise quality assurance processes, such as regular workplace visits.

Secondly, the evaluation of CDF year 1 found that while the implementation of industry placements had broadly been successful, employer engagement remained challenging. Providers had found it particularly difficult to source placements for the Creative & Design and Digital T Levels routes due to a lack of suitable employers in the areas local to providers. In addition, placement length had made it challenging to source placements in sectors where Micro and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are prevalent, such as Construction and Digital services.

Lastly, the evaluation also gathered views of participating employers and those who were undecided about offering placements. Where employers had taken part, many reported positive benefits such as staff skills development and an improved understanding of young people and the future workforce. Where they had chosen not to offer placements, a common reason was that they did not have the capacity to supervise learners and to offer high-quality placements.

When the industry placements policy was first developed, it stipulated that all placements should be a minimum of 45 days or 315 hours long, occupationally specific to the learner's industry pathway, and take place with an external employer. Evidence from providers¹ and employers² had suggested that more flexibility was required in order to enable more placements to take place. In response, the Department announced a new

¹ Evaluation of the Industry Placements Pilot (2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-industry-placements-pilot>

² Employer engagement and capacity to support T Level industry placements (2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-engagement-and-support-for-t-level-industry-placements>

placement models framework in May 2019 which it set out in guidance. Changes allowed:

- Placements to be split across a maximum of two employers;
- Learners' part-time work to be counted towards the placement, if it takes place off campus, is occupationally specific and a set of learning objectives are agreed;
- Work-taster activities (for a maximum of 35 hours) to be counted towards total number of placement hours, as long as they are relevant to learners' chosen pathways;
- The placements to be recorded in hours rather than days;
- Onsite facilities to be used for learners with special educational needs and disability (SEND) (for a maximum of 105 hours) and for the full duration for learners in Young Offender institutions or other custodial settings;
- Learners on Digital T Levels to take route-level placements rather than placements only relevant to their occupational specialism/pathway;
- Learners on Construction T Levels to work on Commercial, Charitable or Community projects next to external industry professional(s) (for a maximum of 105 hours);
- Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing learners to start their placement in an established Skills Hub or employer's Training Centre (for a maximum of 105 hours)³.

The announcement was made towards the end of CDF year 1 when the main evaluation was nearing completion. Therefore, in autumn 2019, the Department requested that IES extend the research to enable it to understand reactions of 13 providers, as well as some employers and learners, to the updated policy. This report presents findings from this additional research which took place in early 2020.

The next chapter covers the methodology used for this research (qualitative research with providers and employers and analysis of management information). The second chapter provides information about the CDF providers, their use of the new models and their perceived barriers and challenges in delivering industry placements. The third and fourth chapters are about the changes announced in the policy update and the providers and employers' views on these. Lastly, the conclusions discuss the messages coming through from the research and make recommendations for how the industry placements policy could be improved.

³ 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

1. Methodology

As agreed with the Department, the method for gathering this feedback comprised:

- Depth qualitative telephone interviews with 13 providers focusing on the route specific changes to Digital, Construction, Engineering & Manufacturing, as well as the general policy changes.
- Depth telephone interviews with 6 employers to discuss how the updated policy have impacted their ability to offer high quality, meaningful placements.
- Online focus group specifically for providers on the Digital and Creative & Design routes.⁴
- Analysis of the monitoring information (MI) pertaining to the updated policy in winter 2019/20 i.e.. within the timeframe for this research. This included quantitative analysis of the data from 309 providers and thematic analysis of qualitative responses. Where providers reported that they made use of more than one of the new models, the qualitative feedback has been disaggregated where possible and reported alongside the findings from the qualitative research.⁵
- Providers submitted a further set of MI to the Department in spring 2020 which it analysed at a point too late for the research team to verify and include the quantitative data in this report. Instead, where Department analysis showed that the two sets of MI analysis showed different trends, the earlier qualitative evidence gathered from providers is relied upon in the report and no quantitative data is reported. There were two cases of this: the first concerned the overall frequency of use of the new models by providers and, secondly, the level of use of the Commercial, Community and Charitable projects for the Construction route.

This research is predominantly qualitative; this means that while it can provide robust and detailed insights into implementation from multiple perspectives, it should not be understood to be fully representative of all CDF provider experiences.

⁴ While 52 employers offering digital or creative placements were invited to participate in online focus groups on two different dates, only 1 employer participated in total – this feedback has been included in the employer interview analysis.

⁵ The qualitative MI findings for each model are based on the following number of responses: Industry specific models (digital) – 31; Industry specific models (community and charitable) – 25; Industry specific models (training centres and skills hubs) – 18; Multiple employers – 134; Work tasters – 87; Occupationally relevant part-time work – 134; On-site placements – 57

2. Provider information and views on progress, barriers and challenges

2.1. Provider profiles

More than half (52%) of the providers who submitted MI returns for the research team’s analysis were general FE and tertiary colleges. The next largest group were academies (16%), followed by local authority schools and sixth-form colleges (16%) and independent learning providers (8%). There was a shift towards more academies and local authority schools and sixth-forms being involved from 2018/19 to the 2019/20.⁶ 36% of new providers were academies and 30% were local authority schools and sixth-form colleges, compared to just 6% of providers that were general FE and tertiary colleges this academic year.

As part of MI reporting, providers were asked the extent to which different barriers to learners completing industry placements affected their outputs from CDF year 2. Providers were asked to estimate the proportion of learners affected by these barriers – within pre-set bandings ranging from 25% of learners to over 75%. These results are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Barriers to learners completing industry placements - % of providers reporting

Proportion of learners affected (pre-set bandings)	Financial barriers for providers (%)	Financial barriers amongst learners (%)	Reluctance from learners to travel (%)	Reluctance or resistance from family members (%)	Lack of local transport provision (%)	Barriers resulting from SEND (%)
over 75%	2.6	8.7	8.1	1.6	4.9	1.9
up to 75%	2.6	13.9	18.1	2.9	9.1	2.6
up to 50%	8.7	31.1	29.8	9.4	17.8	4.9
up to 25%	27.2	31.4	36.6	53.4	37.5	38.2
Don't know	4.2	1	0.6	6.5	1.9	8.4
None	54.7	13.9	6.8	26.2	28.8	44
Total	309	309	309	309	309	309

Source: CDF Monitoring Data, January 2020

Notably, providers estimated that learner barriers were the most important reasons industry placements were not completed with 55% reporting there were no barriers from their perspective. Accordingly, 18% of providers estimated reluctance from learners to travel to be a barrier for up to 75% of their learners; and 14% estimated learner’s

⁶ The MI segmented providers into those that have received CDF funding since 2018/19 and those that received it for the first time this academic year, 2019/20.

financial situation to be a barrier for the same proportion of learners (up to 75%). A lack of local transport provision was estimated to be a barrier for up to three-quarters of learners by 9% of providers.

By contrast, providers' financial standing and learners' SEND barriers were not estimated to be barriers for the completion of industry placements. More than half (55%) of providers said their financial standing would not affect learners, while 44% said the same about barriers resulting from learners' SEND and 7% said no learners would be affected by learners' reluctance to travel.

2.2. Provider views on progress against CDF targets

Providers receiving CDF funding had placement targets set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). These targets increased from 10% of eligible cohort of learners in the first year of CDF to 20% in 2019/20. The monitoring information shows that the average (mean) target for placements in 2018/19 was 70 and 140 for 2019/20.

In the qualitative interviews, providers were asked to describe their progress against these targets. The majority stated that the programme remains 'challenging', mainly because of the higher target numbers and a perception that there had been a reduction in CDF funding from year 1. However, in general, providers were content with the progress they were making.⁷

A small group of providers described feeling positive about their ability to reach the 20% targets. They credited this to the good progress they had made building internal and external capacity since the CDF started. In particular, they attributed their success to having developed many new employer relationships over the preceding 18 months.

Many providers thought that the jump in the expected numbers coupled with persisting challenges they faced with employer engagement, limited local labour markets and/or a rural location made the project 'difficult'. These providers were concerned about target numbers increasing further. Some wanted more flexibility on the number of placement hours, while others wished to develop a clearer understanding of the rationale behind the 315+ hours so that they could justify this to employers, learners and parents.

In the interviews, providers were asked to discuss the key challenges they faced in reaching their targets⁸. The most commonly mentioned challenge centred on employer engagement and learners' part-time work. Other challenges included the length of the placement (reported to cause challenges to both employer and learner engagement);

⁷ There was variation in how positive/negative providers were about their ability to reach the targets but it was not possible to analyse these differences further due to the small number of qualitative interviews.

⁸ A more thorough exploration of perceived barriers and challenges to delivering the industry placements policy can be found in the main CDF evaluation report (publication upcoming).

limited size of local labour markets; accessibility of placements in rural locations; and embedding placements into existing timetables.

Many providers reported that the lack of national awareness about T levels was affecting their ability to source placements and they hoped for more awareness-raising campaigns, particularly among employers. Some providers also thought there that financial support should made available to employers, as they said many employers cited resourcing as a barrier. Providers also suggested using extra finances either to fund employer incentives or to remove employer barriers, such as the costs involved in upskilling staff to line manage a young person, and staff resources required to supervise learners.

2.3. Use of new models and approaches by providers

Three-quarters of providers had made use of between one and three of the new models (Table 2). The MI included data on how well the models worked to improve accessibility and employer engagement with multiple employers being seen as most effective in this regard.

Table 2: Number of models adopted

Number of models	% of providers
1	25.2
2	24.3
3	25.6
4	13.3
5	8.4
6	1.9
7	1.3
Total	309

Source: CDF Monitoring Data, January 2020

3. Route-level changes

3.1. Digital

Learners on Digital T Levels are now able to take route-level placements rather than placements only relevant to their particular specialism or pathway.

This model was described by providers in the MI as working well. Many noted that employers and learners now had much broader options for placements and this approach made it far easier for providers to secure placements due to a widening scope of employer engagement. However, providers said that Digital remained a challenging route to source for as many employers were SME or micro-businesses that do not have the capacity to take on learners because of the impact on productivity. So while the new approach had helped with employer engagement, there was a limit to how much it could achieve, depending on the structure of the local labour market.

Providers here noted that this model:

- Gave employers more flexibility, as they had far more say in who they would take on for a placement.
- Provided learners with a broader understanding of the industry, a wider and more transferable set of skills, and more knowledge of their suitable career path.

An employer working in the IT industry described how having placement learners on a broad-spectrum placement had been beneficial to their way of managing placements. This way, they could identify staff teams who were keen to provide a supportive industry placement rather than be tied to a particular team or department linked to learners' courses or interests. The placements that they had delivered had worked well to develop industry-specific skills and helped the learners gain confidence in the workplace.

Providers commented as part of the qualitative research that this change had made some difference to their ability to source placements, but that the route remains challenging due to a lack of suitable employers in their local labour markets. Some providers expressed the view that "any flexibility helps" in sourcing for the Digital route. Where providers had used the new model, it had been applied to all learners.

While the new model allows for more general Digital placements, most providers still wanted to find a good match between the employers' needs and the learners' skills and interests. This was because they wanted to maintain learner engagement and offer a meaningful learning experience as opposed to offering something that was too generic. However, due to the challenges they faced in finding relevant employers, providers reported that while they would like to offer all learners something that matched their interests, this was not always possible. In practice, they sometimes had to start with what employers needed and ask them to emphasise aspects that learners wanted to develop.

It was clear from the interviews that providers wanted to offer good learning experiences to their Digital learners under the new model. Views were split on whether the new model allowed for this. Some providers were confident that the placements under the new model were of good quality; this was because of the combination of internal quality assurance checks and ensuring that learners had pre-set learning objectives regardless of whether or not the placement was at route or pathway level. Others that had not yet activated this model were not convinced that this approach would be very popular with Digital learners since many of them are set on specific career, such as programming.

A general FE college in the north of England adopted the new model because there were not many Digital employers in their local area. The industry placements team started contacting large employers that had an IT support function, such as the local NHS trust and schools, where the learners could complete a placement in digital support services.

Employer engagement remained a key challenge for the Digital route. The college had to increase employer engagement to meet their CDF targets, which had taken a lot of time and resource. Also, many Digital employers had not previously engaged with the education system and they had to be educated about the benefits of long-term work experience.

The new approach was offered to all learners. They ensured quality through skills matching. They asked employers to write a project brief, which was used to skills match them with learners. Digital is a broad area and they found that this was the best way of matching learners with the right opportunities; some of their learners were good at coding, others in web design, and so on.

They resolutely thought the placements offered good learning opportunities. They thought any industry experience in the areas was good for their learners because what they found is that their Digital learners were more likely to lack in the softer skills even if they were advanced in their technical skills. They benefited a lot from an external placement because it was an opportunity to improve their confidence and resilience, and also their networking and time-keeping skills.

3.2. Construction

Learners on eligible Construction courses can now work in small teams next to industry professionals on commercial, charitable or community projects for a maximum of 105 hours.

This model had been used in some form to positive effective by many of the providers in the qualitative research. Some of these providers reported that they already used commercial, charitable or community projects as part of their Construction study programmes. In these cases, using the model was a natural extension of what they were already doing and there was less of a barrier to adopting it than, for example, with the skills hubs (chapter 3.3).

Providers using this approach highlighted:

- Its utility in terms of skills development – in terms of technical and practical skills, health and safety, and specific work roles such as team leader.

- That it provided a rapid way of placing learners allowing more time for sourcing external placements; and this could play a role in overcoming the impacts of seasonality in the industry.

The new approach had gone some way to solve challenges providers face in the Construction route. Previous waves of research have shown that a considerable challenge for the route is the prevalence of SMEs and seasonality of the work, which both make it difficult for employers to commit to long-term placements. A key benefit of the approach from the provider perspective was that it lessened the immediate burden on construction employers to commit to the required number of hours. Other difficulties remained despite the new approach. For example, some providers reported that the lack of CSCS cards remained an issue for them despite the new approach.

Many providers in the phone interviews thought that these types of projects could be beneficial to learners for practical skill development. Projects had already been useful for learners on bricklaying, carpentry and joinery courses, as well as for painting and general renovation skill development. Some providers reported that opportunities for stretch and challenge could be greater than on external placements because the projects were small and offered opportunities to manage an element of work. Providers noted that the number of learners placed with each project had to remain small so that these skill development opportunities were not diluted and, so that the experience was as close to a 'real' work environment as possible.

Moreover, many providers had previously used these types of project in study programmes. Those with this prior experience thought that the model was a useful way of helping learners achieve the required placement hours and delivered a meaningful experience that gave learners new skills. Once working relationships with long-term projects were established, these could provide almost guaranteed placement hours in an industry where the seasonal nature of work presents a challenge for sourcing. An added benefit of the approach was that it was a quick way of initially placing learners to build knowledge, skills and confidence, before sourcing external placements later in the term.

In the qualitative research there were also providers who had no existing relationships with relevant commercial, charitable or community projects. While these providers welcomed the updated policy, it was taking time to initiate because they had to establish new connections with construction firms, charities or local authorities. Providers in the MI reported that this model worked well for similar reasons to those taking part in interviews: these projects allowed learners to develop wider employability skills and exposed them to greater levels of responsibility. The model had increased employer engagement by encouraging more to get on board since many were happy to involve learners in community and charitable work which was seen to be 'giving something back', and beneficial to the community.

Some providers raised concerns for example, pointing to the short-term nature of projects, which would mean increased workload in trying to find new ones each year. Others were mistakenly concerned that they would have to provide supervision from their own teaching staff, which they said would not be feasible, however, the policy does not

intend for the project placements to be supervised by teaching staff. Lastly, a number of providers wanted more clarity over how this work in practice if it became a large part of Construction T Level delivery, specifically:

- Who would be responsible for the projects – the college or the employer?
- Who would pay for building materials?
- Does/could the maximum of up to 105 hours include project planning time?

A general FE college in the Midlands found this model had been a great addition to the models. The college had delivered community projects with their construction employers before and did so again for industry placements this year. Construction learners were, at the time of the interview, renovating a local boxing club.

The strategic lead for industry placements thought these projects offered learning experiences that were just as beneficial as classroom teaching, if not more so. When he went to see the learners, they had a system in place where every day a different learner acted as the site manager. He described that as 'really positive to see' because that way, learners also picked up team management skills and they would also see what it is like to work on a project from start to finish.

Another positive benefit of the projects was that learners could feel they were contributing to their community. 'That sense of achievement is great to witness in 16-18 year olds.'

Because they have worked with community groups and charities before, they thought they could find other similar projects going forward. These organisations had the staffing to take on projects like the renovation project, so there was likely to be demand.

3.3. Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing

Both Construction and Engineering & Manufacturing learners can now start their placement in an established skills hub or an employer training centre for a maximum of 105 hours.

This approach was not widely used according to MI and none of the providers taking part in the qualitative research had used this model. In most cases, this was because providers did not know of a skills hub or training centre in their area to work with. Nonetheless, the model generated interest amongst providers.

Those reporting experience of using skills hubs and employer training centres in the MI indicated the model:

- increased the likelihood of a successful, external placement because the hub-based time gave employers the assurance that learners had developed appropriate behaviours and skills.
- for learners it improved chances of success on placement by building up their confidence, ensuring a smoother transition into the workplace.

In the MI, 12% of providers reported that they had made use of this model. Providers described the training centres as increasing the likelihood of a successful placement by

giving employers assurances that learners had a positive attitude and the appropriate behaviours, and also by improving their chances of success on the industry placement by building up their confidence: this also had the effect of ensuring a smoother transition into the workplace. Lastly, the training and skills hubs had the positive effect of showcasing to learners the opportunities for career progression more clearly, which improved accessibility in some cases by encouraging the recruitment of more women.

However, because they had not used the model, providers during the interviews could not say it had made a difference to sourcing quality placements. The general sense amongst these providers was a lack of awareness, even confusion about this new model, as they lacked any awareness of the hubs and training centres. As such, they could say it was “a bit niche”. Several providers specifically mentioned that they would like more guidance on the exact definitions of skills hubs and training centres, and generally more advice or case studies on how to use this model.

As the employer training centres were not well known, providers did not know what they would offer that would be different from their own simulated environments which support learners at level 2 and below. A handful of providers were resistant to adopting the hubs or training centres approach on the basis that they did not want to outsource the development of learner skills to other organisations. These providers said they would prefer to run industry placements internally and to use the CDF funding to develop long-term relationships with employers.

When prompted to think about whether the principal behind the updated policy was good, providers on the whole found it difficult to say as they had no prior contact with skills hubs or employer training centres. Some thought that the rationale was a sound one but that the practical application of the model would depend on the types of employers they worked with; it was viewed, for example, that larger employers would have more resource and interest in developing the new model. A provider said that the programme would have to be structured, perhaps around rotations for different Engineering specialisms, as having this structure in place would help protect quality.

4. Changes to all routes

4.1. Two employers

The 315 hours can now be split across a maximum of two employers where before the whole placement was to take place with a single employer.

Across the provider interviews this was a well-received and commonly implemented model. There were two main ways that providers had used it: first, as a response to placement breakdown and secondly, as a planned approach to enable learners to have varied experiences and engage more employers.

Providers who had used the two employer model noted:

- it could help alleviate the risk of placement breakdown by allowing another employer to take over the placement hours.
- It could assist with sourcing in particular industries such as Digital, Creative & Design and Construction where SME/micro employers and those involved in project-based working find it difficult to commit to the full placement hours.

Interview data suggested it was common for providers to have used this model following placement breakdown. In these cases, the model was used on a case-by-case basis where there were issues with travel, lack of development in tasks over time or concerns about placement quality. Providers welcomed the updated policy because it ensured that learners could complete the required placement hours and have a good quality experience overall, even where the first part of the placement had not been successful.

When considering splitting placements from the outset, providers were concerned about the additional administration involved in sourcing, checking and monitoring associated with dealing with two employers. This pre-planned approach had therefore not been widely adopted. Where providers had split placements, they had done so at employers' request, as opposed to offering this option to all learners. This again was because of the administrative burden associated with two placements if applied at scale.

Providers taking part in interviews reported that placement splitting was (or would be if they were to implement it) more in demand in Digital, Creative & Design and Construction routes. This was because as employers in these industries were more likely to be micro-sized or SMEs – the types of employers who find it difficult to commit to the full placement hours. Providers who took part in the Digital and Creative & Design focus

groups noted that this approach had been useful for learners on those routes because of the prevalence of project-based working in those industries⁹.

However, providers saw potential benefits when learners could swap or 'flip' their placement employers with another learner. A handful of providers used this approach with groups of learners, which allowed them to achieve economies of scale that would not be possible if this was done for individuals. These providers reported that switching placements invigorated the learner and increased their engagement. For example, a provider had placed a number of learners in placements in a hospital and another group of learners in a care setting. Half-way through the placement the groups swapped so that they all experienced both settings as part of their placement. Other examples included a provider swapping groups of Education & Childcare learners between a nursery and a school setting and another that swapped Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care between a 'pet day care' centre and a veterinary practice.

Where providers had implemented this approach, they reported no issues or challenges apart from the resource required to ensure the quality of each placement. A provider noted that communication with both employers needed to be clear to make the running of the placements smooth for all parties. Providers generally aimed for a 50/50 split between the placement employers but this was not always possible – if the placement was split because of breakdown or, if there were practical considerations among employers about when and where to fit in learners. But, overall, providers were attentive to the need for the placement to be long enough to offer a meaningful experience for the learner. A provider estimated that this required a minimum of 100 hours with employers.

Providers in the phone interviews were mindful to ensure that split placements should still offer quality learning experiences for learners. They ensured this quality was achieved through the established means: due diligence checks of prospective employers; setting of employer expectations early about the types of tasks learners were required to take on to meet learning objectives; and through regular reviews when placements are ongoing. A provider said that in the future, they hoped to explore if their Creative & Design and Digital learners could focus on developing a particular skill with each employer, although this would require a lot of planning.

In some cases being able to secure a placement of fewer than 315 hours from the outset was a way of engaging employers that might otherwise have said that they did not have capacity to host a placement – a small number of providers reported that this had made it easier to source placements in Digital, Creative & Design and Business & Administration routes. Another provider hoped that Engineering & Manufacturing employers might be more willing to host shorter placements that were more engaging for learners.

⁹ Project-based working was reported to be common for employers in the Creative & Design route by those providers who took part in the focus group but it was not possible to determine whether this was a larger pattern due to the small number of providers present in the focus group. A more thorough exploration of the challenges and successes in the Creative & Design route can be found in the main report.

Because providers thought the administrative burden on the industry placement team associated with two employers was greater than for one placement, they were unsure about whether or not it had made sourcing easier. Some said the impact had been limited because the numbers of learners affected by the change were small; others said it had not made it easier to source but it had made it easier to reach the full expected hours.

The use of this model was prevalent in the MI: according to providers, this was because the model substantially eased the burden on employers offering placements and increased their flexibility. Several reasons were given for this:

- Short placements are generally far easier to accommodate for employers, especially for small businesses in small economic areas who do not have the capacity to make large time commitments.
- They gave employers the flexibility to choose whether or not to progress with a placement depending on whether the learner was suitable.
- They gave the employers a chance to take in a wider range of learners.

Employers taking part in the research thought that planned shorter placements could be beneficial to learners and could make it easier for them to host learners on placement. Nonetheless, these employers were all hosting learners to complete their full placement hours. However, they all thought this new model would be beneficial to them because it would allow for shorter placements that would be easier to accommodate for practical reasons. An employer could see it as potentially beneficial in terms of cross-fertilisation of ideas and business practices, if learners were working for two firms then they would be able to have a wider exposure to real world businesses.

A land-based college had made use of the model to some success. Their industry placements team found that it was helpful in the case of a placement breakdown when the learner still needed to reach the required minimum placements hours. It was also useful for learners who wanted to experience different workplaces to get a rounded experience in industry. However, the team did not offer this routinely, as they thought the main drawback of this model was that it doubled the amount of work for the college – as they had to manage two sets of sign-up, quality assurance and monitoring.

They had used the approach for learners taking animal management. For example, they had learners who did their first placement at a 'pet day-care' centre and the second one at a veterinary practice because they wanted experience working with a wider variety of animals. They had also used this approach in Digital where an employer had not been able to offer the full placement hours. The split between the employers tended to be 50/50.

How they explained this to the second employer depended on the reason the learner left the first placement. If the placement ended early because the employer was not able manage the extra supervision, or because of health and safety limiting what the learner could learn, it was believed not to be necessary to tell the employer that the learner had started another placement. In situations where the learner was looking for a rounded experience over two employers, they usually told the employer what tasks they did in the first placement, to avoid the learner repeating similar tasks, whilst still working towards the same set of learning goals.

4.2. Work-taster activities

Work-taster activities can now be counted towards the placement for a maximum of 35 hours.

This update to policy had generally been welcomed by providers and employers. Providers in the qualitative research had included a variety of different activities under this category that targeted both individuals and cohorts of learners. Typical examples included:

- Career insights; talks from employers and industry representatives; site visits;
- Shadowing and ‘traditional’ work experience activities at an employers’ premises;
- Induction activities at the learners’ placement employer.

Around half of the providers interviewed had used work-taster activities. They highlighted:

- These added value by delivering occupationally specific and general work-readiness activities which better prepared learners for external placements.
- They offered chances for learners to test different occupational pathways prior to choosing their placement specialism leading to improved chances of success.

Providers using work-tasters were evenly split between those offering them to groups of learners and those that offered them on a more ad hoc basis to individual learners. When delivered to groups of learners, it was to make effective use of staff resources. They were delivered by subject area as it was seen to provide additional value by allowing for occupationally specific activities.

If providers delivered to groups of learners not by subject area, it was because typically activities were about general work-readiness. One provider offered placements to Year 12 learners and they had found that work-taster activities useful in preparing these learners who were less likely to have work experience. Some providers had used the activities to offer learners careers advice and guidance about different types of roles available in large companies and pathways in different sectors. The remaining group of providers had offered work-tasters, typically job shadowing, to a handful of learners who had asked for it or who staff thought needed extra guidance on career paths.

Individual work-taster activities most commonly consisted of shadowing and other ‘traditional’ work experience activities. The approach had also been useful for some providers where work-taster activities had been used to allow learners to experience different types of roles in their chosen industry to decide where they wanted to focus their placement on. A provider had found work-taster activities useful in enabling Business & Administration learners to experience different types of administration. As a result, learner retention on the route has improved.

Of those that had not delivered work-tasters this year, the key concern was resourcing. Finding meaningful and high-quality activities and completing checks on employers was seen as a creating an administrative burden on staff. This was particularly so as many of

these providers said they would want to offer the activities to all or most of their learners rather than on an individual basis, so that the whole cohort had the same opportunities.

In some cases, providers could foresee using this model once they are offering placements as part of the 2-year T Level programmes enabling general work-taster activities during the first year followed by external placement in the second. However, during CDF, delivering quality work-taster activities at scale was either something they did not have the resource for, or they did not see the value in investing in above resourcing needed to source the placements proper.

Some providers in the qualitative interviews saw the main benefit of the model as helping learners narrow down ideas for their placements through increasing learners' understanding of what can be expected in certain industries. Others said it had helped them achieve the required number of placement hours. There were also accounts of employers offering placements on the back of work-taster activities; there was limited evidence on this but generally the numbers of learners who had achieved a placement this way were modest.

There were other benefits, too: a provider saw work-tasters as an opportunity to build relationships with employers if they were hesitant about taking learners on. Some providers explored with Construction companies if they could take learners on for a small amount of hours under work-tasters before committing to a full placement; this is because some micro-sized employers and SMEs in the industry found it difficult to commit to longer placements.

There was evidence in the qualitative sample that the guidance was interpreted in differing ways. Some providers spoke of induction activities at the employer as being part and parcel of the placement, whereas others counted these as part of work-taster activities. A couple of providers perceived that a barrier to the wider implementation of the new approach was that their vocational study programmes already included activities such as careers insights and talks from industry professionals. Their impression was that existing provision from the study programmes could not be used towards the CDF hours (just as existing work experience hours in childcare, for example, could not count towards industry placement hours). However, this is allowed under current guidance and so was likely be a misinterpretation of the ESFA rules by these providers.

There were differing accounts among providers about whether or not there was demand for this approach among employers. A provider said because it was closer to traditional work experience, it was easy to 'sell' to employers because they understood it. Another provider said there was not demand among employers because it reminded them of work experience. This was said to be because of the way providers marketed the placements, which was to highlight the benefits the learner can bring to the employer, rather than employers doing them a favour.

Generally, providers said that individual work-tasters are more relevant in industries where learners can demonstrate the right skills and behaviours straight away, such as Construction and Hair & Beauty. It was also seen as relevant for industries with many

different pathways the learner can choose from, such as Business & Administration. Providers also reported having used this approach to offer additional opportunities to learners on Health & Social Care, Digital and Engineering & Manufacturing routes.

In the MI, providers that had used the new model noted its benefits. Work-tasters enabled employers and learners to get a sense of whether the placement was right for them. Learners they could see if they liked the industry and if it worked logistically, while employers were given the chance to assess a learner's suitability and capability before committing to the industry placement themselves. They noted that work-tasters could improve the accessibility and quality of placements by:

- Breaking down barriers between employer and learner.
- Motivating, engaging and building the confidence of the learner before they start the placement.
- Allowing employers to tailor their placements to each individual learner.
- Allowing the learner to gain an understanding of the industry and its expectations and to develop their knowledge of the role more broadly.

Employers who were interviewed had not taken part in work-taster activities this year. They were open to hosting some in future as long as they were easy to accommodate and did not take too much resource. Some businesses already offered job shadowing to new employees and they could see something similar working for placement learners. Employers could see this as beneficial for their ability to take on placement learners going forward. An employer said work-tasters would have to be considered on the basis of whether or not they were meaningful for the learner; on a busy week, they might not be able to offer much time to a learner.

A general FE college in the Midlands had offered work-taster activities to groups of learners, by curriculum area. The 35 hours was on offer to every learner but in practice there was variation in the take-up by route because learners were offered different activities depending on the study programme they were on.

The activities have involved site visits and employers going to college to do mock interviews. Employer feedback from these activities had been good and they had taken a handful of learners on placements on the back of work-tasters.

The main benefit of this model was that it helped many of their learners achieve the required number of placement hours. It had also made placements more accessible to learners by making them more workplace-ready. They expected the work-tasters to have an even bigger impact next year when they would have more time to plan and deliver activities.

4.3. Part-time work

Learners' part-time working hours can now be counted towards the placement on the condition that the work is occupationally specific, takes place off campus and that a set of appropriate learning objectives is agreed prior to the placement starting.

Several providers in the MI cited this model as the most successful of all. Including part-time work in placement hours improved the accessibility of the placements for learners who work. Perspectives captured during the interviews confirmed the benefits of this approach, which centred on:

- Increased accessibility of placements to those learners who rely on their part-time income in order to sustain their studies, or because they contribute to family income.
- Extended providers' employer networks and helped them improve the quality of learners' part-time work through the addition of learning objectives into roles.

Providers said that the increasing accessibility of placements was a crucial factor in disadvantaged learners' experiences. This was important because learners' part-time work was one of the two most commonly mentioned factors that providers said made the industry placement programme challenging. In the MI, providers said that the new models also increased the number of employers involved in the delivery of placements for the college, since relationships between learners and employers had already been established. In addition:

- Part-time work increased the flexibility of the employer and learner to manage suitable hours that work for them and to personalise the placement more significantly.
- Part-time work allowed providers to increase the engagement of employers with the aims and objectives of the learner. This could be useful to prompt the employer to up-skill the learner in ways they would not otherwise have done. In turn, the employer benefited from the learner's classroom learning.

All the providers interviewed had used the model regarding part-time workers. It was typically used in Catering & Hospitality and Hair & Beauty – industries where 16-18 year olds were likely to have existing part-time work. Less frequently, it was used in Education & Childcare, Business & Administration, Construction, and Agriculture & Animal Care.

While the change was welcomed, many providers reported that in practice most learners' part-time work was not occupationally relevant enough to qualify for a placement and the impact of the updated policy was therefore limited. Providers typically described the impact as making a difference to the overall numbers but not making a difference in routes they find challenging, such as Digital. This was because learners' part-time work was concentrated in routes that providers did not find unduly difficult to source for, such as Hair & Beauty.

All of the providers interviewed expressed commitment to placement quality under this model. Providers said they used the same quality assurance checks as they would with any other employer, and they were mindful of the fact that learners should do additional tasks to their everyday role in order to reach their learning objectives. This involved conversations with employers explaining the purpose of industry placements and setting their expectations early of the types of tasks they were looking for the learner to do. Providers also took into account learners' views on areas they would like to develop in.

Providers did not have policies around whether learners should complete the whole of the placement with their part-time employer, or if they should have another placement running concurrently. In most cases they expected the learner to finish all the hours with the part-time employer and would find another employer only if there were concerns that the learner would not reach their learning objectives staying in the placement. This was because one placement was easier for providers to administer than two.

The main challenge providers had experienced when implementing the model was that some employers had been reluctant to engage with an education provider at the workplace and they preferred to keep the learner doing the job they were employed to do. Where these conversations with employers took place, they were reported to be challenging and took up a lot of resource. But, on the whole, providers said this represented only a minority of employers and that most responded well to the idea of industry placements. Indeed, many employers had been pleased to find out that the young person they employed was interested in progressing in the industry and they had been happy to support their development.

An employer that was interviewed had taken on their existing part-time employee as a placement learner. Their experience of the placement had been positive. It had not been too burdensome to convert the part-time job into a placement and had mainly involved someone from the college coming in, explaining what the expected learning outcomes were and asking the employer to read and sign paperwork. The employer was mindful to offer the learner tasks that were relevant to their Business & Administration study programme. The learner wants to become a flight attendant, and so the employer made sure they did as many front-of-the-house tasks as possible to practice customer service skills. For this reason, the employer believes the experience has been beneficial for the placement student. The learner was completing all their placement hours with the part-time employer.

A general FE college in the south of England found that of all the new models, the model enabling relevant part-time work to be used for placements had made the biggest difference in their numbers. The industry placements team had converted several part-time jobs to placements. However, despite its positive impact to their overall numbers, these placements still only represented around 10% of the cohort of eligible students for placements. This was mainly because many of the jobs 16-18 year olds had were not of good enough quality or a good match to the study programme.

To ensure quality, the placements team carried out normal due diligence checks and met the employers face-to-face. They always sent employers a job profile where they formalised the tasks, which was signed by the employer, learner and parents. Employer expectations were set in advance regarding the types of tasks learners need to do to meet learning objectives.

The team also had regular contact with the learner and the employer to make sure everything was going as planned. If a learner reported that they were not given relevant tasks, or they were at risk of not meeting their learning objectives, the team carried out more frequent visits.

4.4. Recording of placements in hours

The policy now allows placements to be formally recorded in hours (e.g. a minimum of 315 hours, not 45 days).

Most providers interviewed as part of the qualitative research reported that this was a positive change. It was seen as making the placements more customisable to the learners' needs, for example to those learners with existing part-time work as well as those with English and maths lessons in the timetable.

Key benefits were noted as:

- Responding to the preferred working hours in different industries – increasing flexibility for employers involved in project-brief type working arrangements.
- Responding to employers' preferences and supporting their ongoing productivity – e.g. allowing employers an hour to start the day before the learner arrives on placement.

Where providers used the new model to offer industry-appropriate shorter or longer working hours, it was for Catering & Hospitality, Health & Social Care, Hair & Beauty and some Digital and Creative & Design placements where learners were engaged in project-style working. Other industries were reported to generally follow regular working hours.

Providers reported that the numbers of learners who were carers, parents or who had other exceptional circumstances outside their studies were generally low and therefore this model was not widely used to benefit this group of learners. Some providers appreciated the change as they said it made placements more accessible.

Employers who were interviewed did not hold a consistent view of this model. Those employers who operated on a 9-5 basis did not see the benefit in learners being able to work atypical working hours – only to start later in the day to allow preparation time by the supervisor. Those businesses that had longer business hours said it would not make a big difference to them what hours learners worked and that they would be happy to accommodate for shorter or longer working days if this would benefit the learner.

4.5. Onsite placements for SEND learners

The policy update announced that partial onsite facilities can be used for SEND (with, or without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)) learners for a maximum of 105 hours of their placement.

Previous findings on the experience of learners with SEND on placements suggested that spending the full duration with an external employer would prove too much for the learner and might present risks in respect of safeguarding. As such, providers saw the benefits of using their own on-site facilities for SEND learners for 105 hours (a third) of the placement as:

- A safe space for SEND learners to build confidence and skills before entering the workplace.
- Improving the accessibility of Industry Placements for SEND learners because their improved work readiness improved chances of success in external placements.

As such, providers were mostly positive about using onsite facilities for the internal placements and welcomed this update to policy. In the MI, they noted that partial on-site placements were beneficial for SEND learners (such as catering facilities, administrative support departments, and simulated work environments), providing them with a good opportunity to build up their confidence and skills before moving further afield. They improved accessibility by developing the work readiness in learners in readiness to move into an employer. Many providers noted that without it some learners would not have accessed an industry placement.

Providers gave a number of specific reasons for this:

- The secure and experienced environment was good for practising work-related routines and tackling difficulties associated with work activities.
- SEND learners could gain an understanding of the industry and its expectations in a safe environment.
- They provided an alternative work environment if the external placement is unsustainable.
- The onsite placements can be tailored to the learner more easily.

Only a small number of providers in the qualitative research had applied the approach so far and, in those cases, there had not been any challenges in implementation. Those placements had taken place in the IT support services and the Engineering department. Most other providers were exploring doing internal placements next year. They were planning for these to take place in onsite canteens, salons, finance, HR and IT support.

Nonetheless, it was commonly viewed by providers in the qualitative research that even the prospect of 210+ external hours was too much for SEND learners with high support needs or who lacked the confidence to be placed outside their college. Some providers thought half or two-thirds of the placement would be more appropriate. Others said it should be assessed on a case-by-case basis or that there should be a minimum for external, not internal hours.

It should be noted that during interviews providers discussed supporting learners with conditions as varied as dyslexia, autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities and mental health conditions. Because of the varied nature of these conditions, providers found it difficult to estimate the number of internal hours that would be appropriate for all SEND learners. Instead, it was viewed that the figure should vary based on the level of need required by the learner, which would vary depending on the condition.

Some providers in the qualitative research were resistant towards onsite facilities. The reasons for this varied. A provider said they already had learners and apprentices

working onsite and that they did not have the capacity to internally place more learners. Another provider did not need this approach as they had a successful model for placing learners externally that they had put in place before the new guidance was published. Land-based colleges said their learners are timetabled to work on the agricultural site as part of City & Guilds qualifications and the new model did not fit with the provision.

4.5.1. Placement accessibility

Further insight into the accessibility of placements is provided by the MI. Providers were asked to report on how many SEND learners they were supporting to undertake placements. Around one third of providers reported that they were using CDF funds to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities (Table 3). Of those providers, on average they were supporting around 4 learners.

Most providers interviewed said they were only offering a handful or no placements at all to SEND learners. The typical reason for this was that not many of the SEND learners were undertaking a Level 3 qualification and that the college already had a successful supported internship programme. In addition, SEND learners in some colleges were over 19 and therefore not eligible for CDF funding.

Table 3: Number of learners with SEND supported on placements

Number of learners with SEND	Per cent of providers (all)
0	68.5
1-2	10.1
3-5	7.1
6-10	6.5
11+	7.8
Total	309

Source: CDF Monitoring Data, January 2020

A second group of providers had placed more than a handful (5-10) of their SEND learners. Typically, they had offered the placement opportunity to all the learners and from a relatively large cohort some SEND learners had come forward. These providers said they would have liked to have offered more SEND placements but that either the confidence of the learners or employer engagement had been barriers to expanding the programme further. The placements were either a mix of onsite and external, or they only took place externally.

A small number of providers (3) had placed 10 SEND learners or more. In these cases, the onsite facilities had not been widely used. One provider had placed all their SEND learners externally. This provider said the key to their success had been an early start to learner preparation that started in CDF year 1. Another provider said they always tried to place the learners externally first and that they only offered the onsite option if needed, because they wanted SEND learners to have the opportunity to improve their confidence. Through this approach, only two learners had been placed internally this year. Lastly, a

provider said they had placed several learners but that these learners did not have high needs and therefore did not require significant amounts of extra support on placements.

Providers interviewed had a mix of experiences when engaging with employers about placing SEND learners and/or learners with caring responsibilities (or who were in other exceptional circumstances). Some providers had found employer engagement challenging. A provider reported that employers were not confident enough to support learners with SEND. Another interviewee said employer interest varied depending on how inclusive and accessible the workplace was and that accessibility varied significantly between routes (i.e. Construction was not widely accessible).

Other providers had not found employer engagement to be challenging, although in a number of these cases learner needs had not been high and therefore there was less demand for adjustments at the workplace. Some providers said that finding employers to host SEND learners would be easier if the placements were shorter, but that the current length of external placements made it challenging to engage employers. In cases where employer engagement was not viewed as challenging, providers emphasised the importance of setting expectations early about the specific needs of an individual learner.

Employers who were interviewed were all open to the idea of hosting placement learners with SEND. Some noted that the workplace itself would need to be health and safety checked to ensure it was suitable. In some cases, this was assessed to be a barrier to hosting a SEND learner. For example, a workplace was in a listed building that would not be accessible to a learner in a wheelchair. When asked about the placement length for SEND learners, employers did not have strong views either way as long as it suited the learner. An employer said that the model could look much the same as with other learners provided that the learner received the support they needed while on placement.

A general FE college in the north of England had been successful in placing 9 SEND learners off-site. Learners were all from different courses, for example:

Learner A was doing a business course. They had a part-time job at a disability charity, which was an ideal fit for the learner's course and so easy to convert to a placement.

Learner B was on a creative arts study programme. They were on placement at a local enterprise hub for creative and digital sectors. The staff members at the hub had been willing to accommodate a high-needs learner and tailor the placement according to their needs.

Learner C was taking creative media. He gained a part-time job with the local football club at the end of last year, which had been converted a placement that matched with the course.

The main reason for the success was starting learner preparation early. They started preparing learners the year before in CDF year 1. This way, they knew what each SEND learner needed and it had been much easier to find the right placement for every learner.

They covered placement preparation in tutorials, workshops and one-to-one meetings. The strategic lead for placements noted that learner preparation needed to be integrated between curriculum and SEND teams in order to be successful.

As the provider had been successful in placing SEND learners off-site, they had not had to use their on-site facilities as permitted in the new guidance. In future, they may use the model as a 'safety net' to fill the required number of hours. However, the provider would prefer to establish 'project briefs' for learners, rather than placing them in the college facilities.

Providers in the interviews were also asked to consider placement accessibility for other learners. Providers were split on whether placements should be offered to learners with caring responsibilities (or who are in other exceptional circumstances) during CDF. Some thought the changes in the how placements were recorded had a positive impact on accessibility and that this should be encouraged further. Others thought it inappropriate to offer placements to learners with personal challenges in case it added to their stress.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The new models and approaches were broadly welcomed by providers, in the context that employer engagement remained a challenge and so more flexibility was beneficial. It is clear from this research that, in line with DfE's policy, a key issue for CDF providers is ensuring they deliver high quality placements. This was particularly apparent when providers discussed the new models on part-time work, Digital and two employers.

At the same time, providers are concerned about the additional administrative burden that comes with delivering high-quality placements across the board. These concerns appear to be linked to wider concerns about the level of funding and the higher target number of placements in CDF year 2. To resolve these tensions, many providers that contributed to the research had chosen not to use some of the new models to the full extent, at least at this point. This was notable in the discussions around using two employers to meet the required hours (when split from the start) and work-taster activities (when delivered to individuals).

Another broader point to note is that there was considerable variation in the take-up of the new models: the part-time work and two employer models appeared widely used and employer training centres/skills hubs appeared less well used. This suggests that the Department should consider providing more guidance on these less-used models, and on how providers can take them forward in their local areas. In particular there was low awareness of skills hubs and employer training centres that could be utilised for the construction and engineering routes, therefore the Department could help with this. This could be awareness raising and more information about what these hubs and centres are and where they are located.

Providers in this research that were already using commercial, charitable or community projects for construction learners recognised that these could provide a meaningful experience that gave learners new skills. The industry pilots evaluation¹⁰ showed that corporate social responsibility was a strong motivator for employers becoming involved with industry placements and so this policy update could build on this to increase the use of this model for more learners and again, make use of exemplars to share how this could work in practice.

While the model allowing two employer placements was relatively well-used, providers could extend their use of this by using it more frequently for groups of learners in rotation (the switch or flip approach). The qualitative evidence from the provider interviews shows that this approach can lead to an engaging and varied experience for learners, and that using it for groups of learners could overcome concerns about increased administrative

¹⁰ Newton, B, Williams, J, Francis, R, Gloster, R, Buzzeo, J, Byford, M, Spiegelhalter, K, Esmond, B (2018) Evaluation of the Industry Placements Pilot, Department for Education

burden. The recommendation here is for the Department to share good practice case studies of where this approach has been used successfully.

An additional recommendation is that the Department offers further clarification on two areas of CDF rules: a) hosting placements at other providers' premises and b) which activities from existing study programmes can be counted towards industry placements during CDF. These areas of the policy guidance may have received less attention than other more prominent rules and could benefit from highlighting through case studies or awareness-raising. Hosting placements at other providers' premises could be a way of supporting Digital route placements. The evidence in this report shows that Digital route-level placements instead of pathway-level have broadly been welcomed. As often large local employers, FE colleges should be encouraged to be allowed to offer industry placements to other providers' learners in their IT support departments (i.e. non-teaching departments), which could provide useful Digital route placements.

The research has highlighted that around two-thirds of CDF providers are not, at least at this point, offering industry placements to SEND learners, though amongst the third that do there are some very successful examples. This issue requires further exploration of the perceived barriers to offering placements to a wider set of learners to enable specific guidance on employer engagement for SEND placements to be developed.

Disseminating the existing good practice captured in this report would also be useful.

Finally, there was a strong sense from providers that more thought was required regarding the maximum number of internal hours for SEND placements for the policy to be sustainable in the long run. A final recommendation is for further consideration on this component of the policy, which could be based on more detailed provider feedback on what an appropriate number of internal hours could be for SEND learners and whether this differs for learners with different conditions.

In addition to these conclusions and recommendations, providers also put forward ideas for how placement models could be further adapted. These were collated by the research team into a briefing note for the consideration of the policy team at the Department.



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