



## **T Levels and social care nursing careers**

Practice examples of the use of Health T Levels to support progression into health careers in adult social care, including nursing.

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## Foreword from the Chief Nurse Adult Social Care

Social care is a rewarding and vital part of nursing professional practice, offering a unique and multi-faceted opportunity to support people to live well in their own homes and communities. Rooted in compassion and commitment, it focuses on helping people and their families achieve the best possible health and wellbeing, while living lives that are meaningful to them.

Social care nursing is much needed and highly valued. It calls for dedicated, hard-working professionals motivated by making a real difference. It is truly a career for life, with opportunities to work across many sectors and roles, supported by lifelong learning and professional development.

The T Level in Health provides a practical and accessible starting point for nursing careers across all fields of practice. It equips learners with the fundamental knowledge and skills to understand and support people's basic health needs, while building confidence through real-world experience of the purpose of social care and person-centred practice - qualities that are essential for anyone considering a career in the sector.

This report shows how a T Level in Health when combined with placements in social care offers invaluable insight into how people live gloriously ordinary lives, often alongside complex health needs across all aspects of the adult lifespan. This experience provides a strong foundation for a future career across health and social care, grounded in understanding, empathy, and person-centred care.

I welcome this report and the practice examples featured in this report demonstrate the creativity and commitment of organisations across the sector in creating meaningful opportunities for young people to progress into health-related careers in social care. They help learners understand how social care supports independence, dignity and choice, opening the door to careers in nursing and other regulated professions rooted in social care practice.



**Professor Deborah Sturdy**

Chief Nurse Adult Social Care, Department of Health and Social Care.



## Executive summary

This report examines how the adult social care (ASC) sector is engaging with the Health T Level to achieve two objectives:

- Support progression into health careers within ASC, including nursing.
- Promote understanding of social care among students, regardless of career destination.

### Key findings

- **Opportunities:** Health T Levels provide a practical route for young people to gain insight into ASC through industry placements. These experiences often spark interest, challenge stereotypes, and lead to employment, apprenticeships, or higher education. Collaborative approaches between colleges, ASC providers, NHS trusts, and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) have proven effective in designing structured placements and promoting diversity.
- **Impact:** Providers have used placements as springboards into ASC roles and further study, with 92% of students one of the example cohorts progressing into employment, apprenticeships, or higher education. Case studies show that well-supported placements can raise the profile of ASC and attract younger talent to an ageing workforce.
- **Challenges:** Barriers include the perception of T Levels as NHS-focused, limited ASC content in the curriculum, lack of clear placement guidance, funding and capacity constraints, high withdrawal rates, and widespread misconceptions among schools, families, and providers and systems leaders.

### Conclusion

Health T Levels offer significant potential to strengthen the ASC workforce pipeline and improve sector visibility. However, success depends on addressing misconceptions, improving curriculum alignment, providing clear guidance, and ensuring sustainable funding. Continued collaboration across education, health, and social care systems will be critical to unlocking these benefits.

## Introduction

Social care is rarely an early career choice for registered nurses, with most newly qualified professionals opting for NHS roles rather than positions in the private or independent sector where the majority of social care nurses work. To address this, Skills for Care, funded by DHSC, is increasing the visibility of social care within pre-registration nursing education and as a career destination of choice.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) data (2025) shows that 75% of nurses joining the register for the first time are under 40, representing 38% of the UK nursing workforce. In contrast, only 1% of registered nurses in adult social care are under 25 (Skills for Care, 2025). Given that T Levels offer a pathway into health careers for young people, engaging with this qualification is essential to meet future workforce demand. This need is amplified by the high proportion of ASC registered nurses aged 55 and over, many of whom are expected to retire within the next decade (Skills for Care, 2025).

## What are T Levels

T Levels were introduced in England in 2020 as a new technical qualification for students aged 16-19. The ambition was to improve technical education and provide a high-quality alternative to A-Levels and apprenticeships following the Sainsbury Review (Sainsbury, D. 2016).

T Levels offer a two-year focused qualification, combining classroom learning with industry placements in an employment setting for a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days). Initially there were two T Levels relevant to careers in nursing: these being the T Level in Health and the T Level in Healthcare Science introduced in September 2021. The T Level in Healthcare Science is being withdrawn, with final registrations taking place September 2025.

## Aims of the scoping exercise

This report focuses on the Health T Level and has two primary objectives:

- Assess its potential to support progression into health careers within ASC, including nursing and other regulated roles.
- Examine how the qualification promotes understanding of social care, regardless of students' ultimate career destination.

## Key findings

Our network of locality managers found limited use of Health T Level placements within ASC settings and few examples of the qualification being used to attract nursing or other regulated professionals into the sector. Feedback suggests this is largely due to low awareness among providers and a perception that Health T Levels are primarily relevant to NHS careers rather than social care.

This report draws on evidence from two care providers, an Integrated Care Board (ICB), and a further education college that have successfully used Health T Levels to raise awareness of ASC roles. It identifies opportunities, challenges, and case studies to inform future engagement and workforce development strategies.

You will find a selection of these case studies in the [appendices](#) that will be referred to throughout the course of the discussion.

## Opportunities

This section explores how ASC providers, education partners, and system leaders are engaging with the Health T Level and how early lessons can inform future workforce development. It draws on consultations, sector insights, and practice examples rather than formal research to identify practical opportunities for strengthening the pipeline into social care careers.

### **Creating a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers**

The Health T Level provides ASC providers with a valuable opportunity to connect with young people early in their learning journey. Industry placements offer authentic exposure to care work, often sparking interest and reshaping perceptions of the sector. While a direct nursing pipeline is not yet evident, placements have led to students progressing into part-time, bank, or permanent ASC roles. These experiences act as “spark points,” building confidence and inspiring longer-term aspirations in health and care careers.

With 33% of ASC registered nurses aged 55 or over and only 1% under 25, T Levels present a clear opportunity to address workforce gaps and support succession planning. As [Case study 4: NHS Devon ICB](#) notes, “many organisations are struggling to find the workforce they need. In the case of health and social care, demand for services has risen faster than the number of available staff at all levels.” Placements also help providers strengthen retention by offering students insight into the sector and creating pathways into employment or further study, including apprenticeships and nursing degrees.

Collaborative approaches between colleges, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), NHS trusts, and ASC providers have proven effective in designing structured placements that meet curriculum goals and reflect real-world practice. These partnerships also promote diversity, challenge stereotypes, and raise the profile of social care as a professional career.

In addition, [Case Study 1: Clifton Homecare](#) highlights the valuable care that can be provided by T Level students during their placement, helping providers to fill more immediate gaps in the workforce as well as potentially remaining in the sector longer-term.

### **Strengthening retention**

Beyond recruitment, T Levels can enhance retention by providing students with realistic insight into ASC and enabling providers to engage future talent. Placements often act as a springboard into:

- Employment within the organisation (bank or permanent roles).
- Further study, including registered nurse and nursing associate degree programmes.
- Apprenticeships as part of workforce planning.
- Support with university applications.

Specific strategies include using placements as “working interviews,” encouraging students to apply for roles post-placement, and linking apprenticeships to recruitment and workforce planning.

Investment in learning and development is a proven driver of retention. Skills for Care (2017) found that 94% of employers with turnover rates below 10% had invested in staff development and reported positive outcomes.

### **Student destinations**

Analysis of one of the example cohorts of Health T Level students in Boniface & Whalley, (2025) shows that 92% of students with known destinations progressed into employment, apprenticeships, or higher education.

Of 318 students they found:

- 58% entered higher education.
- 27% gained employment (12% in NHS and social care-related roles).
- 5% started apprenticeships (4% in health-related professional qualifications such as Nursing and Paramedic).
- 10% had other destinations.

Employment roles included healthcare support worker, care worker, student nursing associate, and clinical support, with most students employed in NHS and social care settings such as hospitals, residential care, and local authorities.

### **Collaborative approaches**

Collaboration across local systems has been central to success. Colleges, ICBs, NHS trusts, and ASC providers have worked together to design placements, share induction processes, and provide mutual feedback—creating structured experiences that meet curriculum goals and reflect real-world care practice. These partnerships also promote diversity and inclusion, with placements attracting young people from varied backgrounds and bringing fresh perspectives to ASC teams.

### **Encouraging diversity and new perspectives**

T Level placements attract young people from a range of backgrounds, broadening the diversity of the ASC workforce and enriching team dynamics. Providers found that students' energy and curiosity reinvigorated teams and encouraged reflection on practice. For students, these experiences offered professional role models and confidence in their own ability to contribute meaningfully to care work.

### **Promoting social care careers**

Placements have been used to challenge stereotypes and showcase social care as a professional, rewarding career. Providers have shared success stories and case studies through T Level networks and events such as T Level Week, highlighting the breadth of roles and qualifications available within the sector.

### **Challenges**

Despite positive examples, several barriers limit the wider use of Health T Levels in adult social care (ASC). These challenges fall into five main areas:

#### **Limited social care focus**

The Health T Level curriculum is widely perceived as NHS-oriented, with little explicit reference to ASC roles. Occupational maps published by Skills England list nursing under health and science pathways, while social care nurses are not identified as a distinct occupation. This lack of visibility reinforces misconceptions that T Levels do not align with ASC careers.

## Skills England's occupational maps show where technical education can lead

Explore Skills England's occupational maps by selecting a route below:



Source: Skills England 2026

Consultees identified steps that have been taken to redress the balance and support a greater social care focus. For example:

- Work by NHS Devon ICB to adapt the T Level outline content to increase the relevance to and visibility of ASC in the content delivered.
- Inclusion of ASC providers and Skills for Care within collaboration to develop T Level programmes locally.

### **Lack of clear guidance**

Providers reported uncertainty about what constitutes a “good placement” in social care, including student roles and responsibilities. Clear national guidance would help smaller organisations deliver consistent, high-quality experiences.

[Case study 4: NHS Devon ICB](#) outlines various delivery models for T Level industry placements but notes that success varies by context, making direct comparisons difficult. They stress that collaboration is key: early engagement with colleges and active employer involvement are essential for effective placements.

Ensuring the curriculum matches current practice remains a challenge, as T Levels require regular updates to reflect evolving industry standards and ensure students gain relevant skills. Consultees highlighted the need for close work with the awarding bodies responsible for the Health T level’s technical qualification (NCFE for current Health T Level and Pearson for the next version) and industry partners to refine content and prepare students for both adult social care roles and progression into higher education. Our sector insights highlighted several resources used to support placement activity (see [Appendix 2](#)).

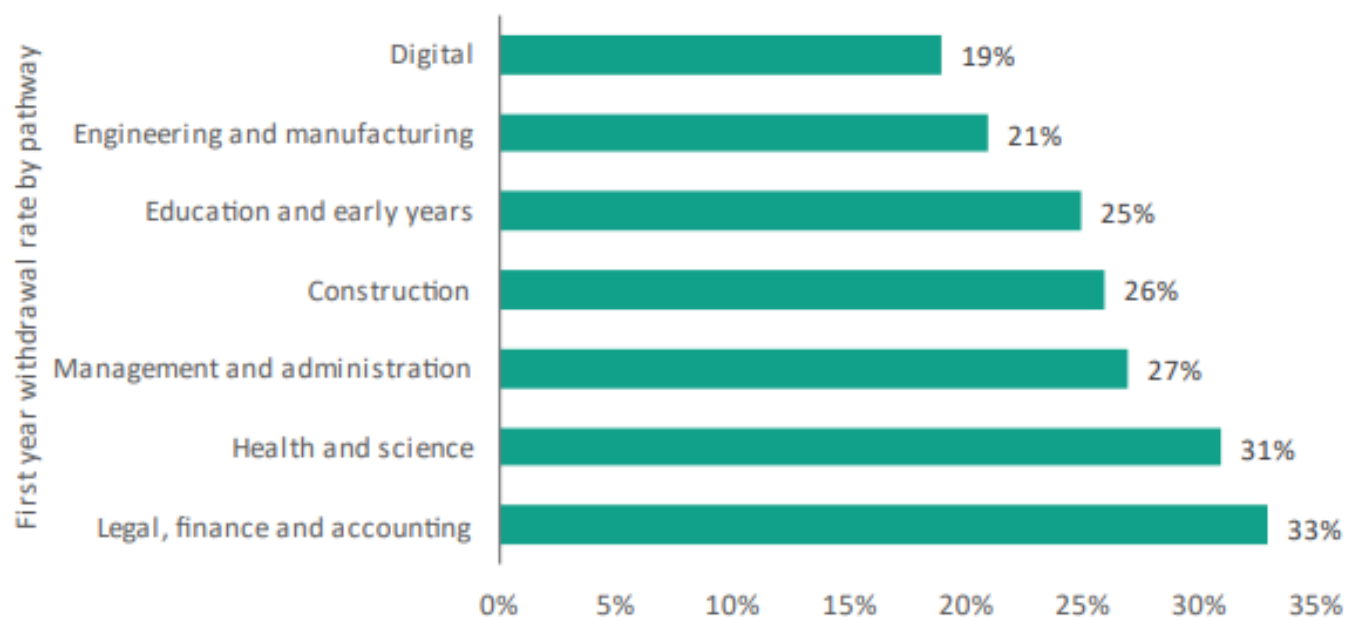
### **Capacity and funding**

Placement availability remains a major constraint. Providers struggle to balance operational pressures, staff shortages, and high sickness rates with hosting students. Second-year placements often require clinical settings, which some ASC providers feel unable to offer. Funding shortfalls exacerbate these issues, as costs for supervision, induction, PPE, and training often exceed available support. Funding examples of costings to support T Level placements can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

By contrast, in one area in the Midlands, our locality managers heard anecdotally in November 2024 that there were providers ready to accept T Level placements, but they were waiting for colleges to take up these opportunities. Devon ICB also gave the example of being among those who piloted the funded role of a [T Level Industry Placement Coordinator](#), which was a catalyst for their ability to coordinate placements.

### Student withdrawal and retention

Health and science T Levels have one of the highest withdrawal rates (31% in year one), with disadvantaged and female students more likely to leave early (Maris, R. et al, 2024). Even when students complete the qualification, many pursue NHS careers due to better pay and conditions, limiting ASC retention.



- Various employers told us they had offered placements, but that all students had gone on to take up careers in the NHS. One homecare provider, Clifton Homecare ([Case Study 1](#)) shared their experience that staff tend to leave soon after gaining their qualification as they do not provide nursing care jobs, despite caring for people with medical needs such as peg feeding, ventilation and tracheostomy.

- Other providers shared concerns that the branding of T Level in Health, combined with more favourable terms and conditions, would lead to students seeking employment in the NHS rather than social care after completion of their T Level.

Interestingly, this challenge around retention was not cited by either of the providers we consulted. This may be due to the proactive steps they had taken to use placements as a springboard to work in the ASC sector.

### **Misconceptions and low awareness**

Consultees highlighted widespread misunderstanding of T Levels among key partners:

- Many schools, teachers, and families lack awareness or hold misconceptions about T Levels and the value of ASC careers, discouraging interested students.
- Some colleges do not give equal visibility of ASC placements within T Level programmes.
- Sector insights suggest many ASC providers are unaware of T Levels or have not been approached to offer placements. Feedback from 13 providers showed most were willing but uninformed; only one was actively offering placements.
- Initial confusion existed around university acceptance, though progress has been made (e.g., Plymouth University now accepts T Level students onto nursing courses).
- Employers expressed concerns about hosting younger students and the need for additional steps such as risk assessments.

Consultees agreed that collaboration, clear guidance, and practical resources are essential to dispel misconceptions and support effective use of Health T Levels in ASC.

#### **Examples of steps taken to address misconceptions**

- Celebration and promotion of success stories, such as a former student who, after completing their placement at Clifton Homecare, progressed to a paramedic degree and won a Rising Star Award.
- Highlighting social care as a career pathway during T Level network meetings.
- Collaboration with local provider leads in Devon to help raise the profile of social care among schools and colleges.

- Persona and Clifton Homecare have collated a series of case studies to demonstrate the impact of T Levels on individual students and their career trajectories (some of which are highlighted in this report). They felt that by exposing students to the breadth of roles within social care they have positively influenced students' career choices, with some reconsidering careers in social care after their placements.
- Our sector insights highlighted activities undertaken in Sussex during T Level week (2-6 December 2024), including one of Skills for Care's locality managers presenting to T Level students about social care careers.

## Summary

This report explored how the adult social care (ASC) sector is engaging with the Health T Level to support two aims: progression into health careers within social care and broader understanding of the sector among students.

Findings show that Health T Levels provide a practical route for young people to gain insight into ASC and, in some cases, progress into employment, apprenticeships, or higher education with an interest in returning to the sector. While evidence of a direct nursing pipeline is limited, early examples suggest T Levels can act as a stepping stone.

Placements also raise awareness of ASC among students and educators, challenging misconceptions and promoting collaboration across health and care systems. Case studies demonstrate that structured, well-supported placements and curriculum adaptation can make ASC more visible and attractive.

However, challenges persist: the perception of T Levels as NHS-focused, limited ASC content in the curriculum, funding and capacity constraints, high withdrawal rates, and low awareness among schools and providers. Addressing these issues through collaboration, clear guidance, and investment will be critical to unlocking the full potential of T Levels for workforce development.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Case studies

### *Case study 1: Clifton Homecare*

#### **Organisation background**

Clifton Homecare is a family run, independent domiciliary care provider based in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. Established in 1983, the organisation delivers high-quality, flexible care enabling clients to live independently at home while maintaining control and choice. With a long-standing commitment to professional development and sector leadership, Clifton Homecare has become a regional advocate for integrating T Levels in Health within adult social care (ASC) workforce development.

#### **Engagement with T Levels**

Clifton Homecare decided to engage with T Levels after identifying the need to attract and develop younger talent to address an ageing workforce and sustain long-term workforce resilience. Analysis of local and national trends revealed declining interest in ASC careers among young people, prompting the organisation to explore T Levels as a structured route to inspire interest in care roles and support clear progression into Nursing Associate (NA) and Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship (RNDA) pathways.

The organisation's leadership recognised that engaging with T Levels aligned closely with its ethos of learning and continuous improvement. As Managing Director Caroline Cosh explained, student placements 'provide an ideal opportunity to engage potential future talent in existing workforces.'

### **Examples**

A student, who completed placements with Clifton Homecare between 2021 and 2023 as part of his Health T Level at Blackpool & Fylde College reflected:

“Due to placement my future career goal of becoming a Paramedic has been re-affirmed – I know I definitely want to work in the community and not on a hospital ward. The placement gives you a good opportunity to see people in a real-life setting, not in a clinical setting.”

A tutor from B&FC described the value of the partnership: “Providing our T Level students with a social care placement alongside a clinical placement has been an invaluable addition to their programme of learning. Exposing students to the broad range of settings, service users and professionals has meant that our students have developed a concrete understanding of how health and social care interrelate.”

Students also reported improved confidence, communication, and understanding of person-centred care. One commented: “I now understand more about stoma and catheter care and how to support people to eat well and stay healthy. I’ve learnt how the social care sector contributes so much to the community.”

### **Opportunities**

Clifton Homecare’s experience demonstrates how T Levels can benefit both learners and employers:

- Several students have progressed to paid roles within Clifton Homecare or to higher education programmes such as Paramedic Science and Nursing.
- Hosting placements has enhanced the visibility and reputation of social care in the local community and among education partners.
- Welcoming younger people into a traditionally older workforce has brought new energy and perspectives.
- Joint planning with colleges and NHS Trusts has fostered shared understanding and aligned placement design with learning outcomes.

## **Challenges**

Clifton Homecare identified several practical and systemic challenges in embedding T Level placements within domiciliary care:

- Limited public and school awareness of T Levels and social care careers, leading to misconceptions about the sector.
- The £1,000 per-student incentive did not cover costs of supervision, induction, PPE, or transport (estimated £250–£300 per student).
- Balancing student supervision with fluctuating staffing levels and client needs in a community-based service.

These were mitigated through close collaboration with Blackpool and The Fylde College and NHS Trust partners, proactive communication with families and staff, and careful scheduling to align placements with business capacity. Regular feedback loops with students and clients informed continual improvement.

## **Summary**

T Level placements at Clifton Homecare demonstrate how structured, high-quality placements can both spark and sustain interest in health and social care careers.

Placements nurture a wider appreciation of the social care sector. Even when students' progress into NHS or other health roles, they carry forward an understanding of person-centred, community-based care. As Managing Director Caroline Cosh reflected, these experiences ensure that wherever students' careers lead, they recognise and value the critical contribution of social care to people's lives and wellbeing.

## **Case study 2: Persona Support**

### **Organisation background**

Persona Support is a social care organisation based in the North West that provides flexible, person-centred services ranging from advice and signposting to 24/7 care and support. Individuals can design their own support plans, which may include day opportunities, short residential breaks, or support in their own homes. Specialist services are offered for young people with additional needs, people with learning or physical disabilities, older adults, individuals living with dementia, and those with autism. Persona's mission is to promote independence, inclusion and wellbeing through high-quality, consistent, and compassionate care.

### **Engagement with T Levels**

Persona's engagement with the Health T Level stems from its involvement in the local Integration Board, where T Levels are a key focus of workforce development discussions. Persona recognised the opportunity to influence pathways into the sector and to open gateways for younger people to explore social care as a career.

The decision to engage with T Levels aligned closely with Persona's strategic priorities. With an ageing workforce and increasing demand for care, the organisation saw the qualification to attract new talent and address long term workforce sustainability. Persona also viewed the programme as a means of challenging persistent stereotypes about social care, such as perceptions that it offers limited career progression or is less professional than healthcare.

Before involvement with T Levels, Persona had already built strong relationships with local colleges and had experience hosting students on a range of placement schemes. This foundation positioned the organisation well to integrate T Level students into its services and to act as a bridge between education and employment.

### **Examples**

Persona provides placements for first year Health T Level students, giving them early exposure to the realities and rewards of working in social care. For instance, one Bury College student undertook a placement at Elmhurst, a facility providing

intermediate care and respite for up to 27 people. Her performance and alignment with Persona's values led to the placement being treated as a "working interview." She subsequently joined the organisation's casual bank and, later, secured a full-time apprenticeship within the day service while completing her Level 2 qualification.

The organisation has also drawn on experience from other placement initiatives, such as Kickstart and sector-based work academies, which provide valuable learning transferable to T Level delivery. One Kickstart participant began as a support worker in a summer club and, after impressing the team, was offered a permanent role. Another individual joined Persona through a sector-based work academy and progressed from casual to permanent employment, eventually completing the Rising Stars leadership programme and gaining a Level 3 Team Leader qualification.

These examples demonstrate Persona's ability to identify potential, nurture development, and convert temporary placements into long-term career opportunities within the organisation.

### **Opportunities**

Engagement with the Health T Level has created several opportunities for Persona Support. Offering placements has allowed the organisation to attract younger people into the workforce and to showcase social care as a professional and rewarding career path. Students bring new ideas, energy and perspectives, enriching team culture and contributing to a more diverse and sustainable workforce.

Through its partnerships with colleges, Persona has also been able to influence how social care is represented in the T Level curriculum. This has helped to ensure that students gain an accurate understanding of the sector and its contribution to health and wellbeing. Beyond recruitment, the organisation recognises the wider impact of T Levels in raising awareness of social care among students, families and educators, and in promoting integration between health and social care at a local level.

## **Challenges**

Despite these successes, several challenges remain. Aligning placements with operational pressures can be difficult, particularly during periods of staff shortage or high sickness rates. Funding does not always cover the real costs of providing quality placements, including supervision, induction and mentoring.

A further challenge lies in the perception that the Health T Level is primarily geared toward NHS careers, which can make it harder to position social care as an equally valuable destination. There is also a lack of clear national guidance on what constitutes a “good placement” in social care, leaving some providers uncertain about expectations and quality standards.

In addition, some students withdraw from the Health T Level before completion, which can interrupt placements and make it harder to demonstrate consistent outcomes. These challenges underscore the need for continued partnership between employers, colleges and system leaders to ensure the qualification delivers its full potential for the sector.

## **Summary**

Persona Support’s experience demonstrates how the Health T Level can serve both as a pathway into adult social care and as a tool for raising awareness of the sector’s importance. Through close collaboration with education partners, Persona has successfully used placements to identify new recruits, support progression into apprenticeships, and challenge misconceptions about social care careers.

While challenges remain — particularly around funding, curriculum alignment and placement guidance — the organisation’s proactive approach shows that meaningful engagement with T Levels can strengthen workforce pipelines and enhance understanding of social care. The learning from Persona’s experience highlights the importance of clear communication, planning and flexibility, ensuring that both students and providers benefit from the opportunities T Levels can bring.

### ***Case study 3: Bridgwater and Taunton College***

#### **Organisation background**

Bridgwater & Taunton College, located in Somerset, offers a wide range of technical and vocational qualifications designed in collaboration with employers to meet local workforce needs. The Health T Level provides students with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to pursue a career in the health and care sectors. The course combines academic study with extensive industry placements and is aimed at equipping young people with both clinical competence and professional confidence.

#### **Engagement with T Levels**

The college was among the early adopters of the Health T Level, participating in the national pilot programme with a specific focus on the adult nursing pathway. Its decision to engage with T Levels was driven by recognition of a widening workforce gap in health and social care across Somerset, particularly the shortage of qualified nurses and nursing associates. By introducing the Health T Level, Bridgwater & Taunton College aimed to create a clear route into health and social care careers, including apprenticeships such as the Nursing Associate and Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeships (RNDA).

This approach aligns closely with the college's broader commitment to local workforce development. Working in partnership with Somerset Foundation Trust and local social care providers, the college set out to build a sustainable pipeline of young people equipped with the right clinical and care skills to meet regional demand. By integrating practical placements and close employer collaboration, the college has been able to prepare students for progression into both social care and healthcare roles, supporting recruitment and retention across the system.

#### **Examples**

T Levels at Bridgwater & Taunton College are integrated into a wider career pathway approach that connects education, employment, and professional development. Students gain hands-on experience through placements in hospitals, care homes, and community settings, allowing them to apply classroom learning in real-world contexts.

One student, for example, completed their T Level and went on to join a local hospital as a part-time healthcare support worker. After graduation, they successfully transitioned into a Nursing Associate Apprenticeship and are now in their second year of training. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the pathway from T Level to apprenticeship, providing a seamless bridge into regulated clinical roles.

Approximately 40% of the college's T Level students have secured employment in social care roles after completing their qualification, including positions in care homes and community services. Others have gone on to higher education or apprenticeships within health and social care, bringing job-ready skills, professionalism, and a deeper understanding of care environments to their new roles.

### **Opportunities**

Engagement with the Health T Level has created clear opportunities for Bridgwater & Taunton College and its partners. The qualification provides a direct route for students to enter the health and social care workforce, supporting both immediate recruitment needs and long-term workforce sustainability. Students graduate with a strong foundation in clinical knowledge, person-centred care, and communication, making them well suited to roles in both health and social care settings.

The programme has also supported improved retention by offering students a defined progression route from study to employment. Graduates who move into apprenticeships or care roles are more likely to remain in the sector because they enter with realistic expectations and well-developed skills. In addition, the T Level has broadened participation, attracting students from diverse backgrounds and helping to widen access to professional health and care careers.

Through its employer partnerships, the college has been able to align curriculum content closely with industry needs, ensuring that students gain practical and relevant experience. This collaboration has strengthened relationships between education and employment sectors, contributing to a more coordinated approach to workforce development across Somerset.

## **Challenges**

While the benefits are clear, Bridgwater & Taunton College has faced several challenges in embedding T Levels as a route into nursing and social care careers. Securing enough high-quality placements remain one of the main barriers, with competition for placement spaces across health and care settings. Aligning the T Level curriculum with evolving industry requirements also requires ongoing review and collaboration with employers.

Funding and resource pressures are another challenge, as the costs associated with delivering placements, supervision, and mentoring often exceed available support. Maintaining consistent quality across placements can be difficult, particularly where social care providers have limited capacity to host students due to staffing pressures.

Despite these challenges, the college has worked proactively with partners such as Somerset Foundation Trust to mitigate these issues. Joint planning, early engagement with employers, and a structured mentoring model have helped ensure students receive high-quality learning experiences that prepare them for future roles.

## **Summary**

Bridgwater & Taunton College's experience demonstrates how Health T Levels can provide an effective foundation for progression into health and social care careers, including nursing and nursing associate roles. The programme has supported the development of a young, skilled, and motivated workforce, many of whom have gone on to apprenticeships or employment in social care.

At the same time, the college's approach has highlighted the wider benefits of T Levels in raising awareness of social care as a viable and rewarding career destination for 16–19-year-olds. Strong employer partnerships, clear progression pathways, and well-structured placements have been critical to success.

However, challenges around funding, placement availability, and curriculum alignment remain, and continued collaboration across education, health and social care will be essential to sustain progress. Bridgwater & Taunton College's work shows

that when these elements come together, T Levels can be a powerful mechanism for workforce development, supporting both immediate recruitment needs and the longer-term nursing pipeline for adult social care.

#### ***Case study 4: NHS Devon ICB***

##### **Organisation background**

NHS Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB) is responsible for the majority of the county's NHS budget and leads the planning and coordination of health and care services across Devon. Its work focuses on improving health outcomes, delivering high-quality care, and ensuring better value for money through partnership working across health, social care, and community organisations.

Devon ICB recognises that workforce sustainability depends on coordinated action across the system, with a particular focus on addressing the ageing nursing workforce. Many nurses in the region are aged over 55, creating an urgent need to attract and retain younger people into health and social care.

##### **Engagement with T Levels**

NHS Devon ICB began actively engaging with Health T Levels in early 2024, following the introduction of a T Level Industry Placement Coordinator role. At that time, T Level placements were largely focused on NHS settings, with limited engagement from social care providers. The ICB saw an opportunity to change this narrative by ensuring that T Levels were recognised as a route into both health and social care careers.

To achieve this, a Devon wide T Level Network was established, bringing together representatives from education providers, NHS trusts, social care organisations, Skills for Care, and Local Market Leads. This network has grown rapidly from 16 members to more than 110 within its first year and now serves as a platform for joint planning, information sharing, and promotion of social care placements. The ICB's engagement with T Levels directly supports its workforce development goals

by building a sustainable nursing pipeline, encouraging younger entrants to the sector, and countering misconceptions about the qualification.

### **Examples**

Through the T Level Network, NHS Devon ICB has worked with colleges to adapt the way T Levels are presented and delivered locally. One example includes collaborating with providers to rename the course as the Health and Social Care T Level to make the connection with social care clearer to students and employers.

The ICB has also supported colleges to highlight career routes beyond the NHS, including progression into roles such as Nursing Associate (NA) and Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship (RNDA). Collaboration with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Department for Education (DfE), and NCFE (the awarding body) has helped ensure that social care is more explicitly represented in the qualification's design and promotion.

A key success story from this work involved a student who completed a T Level placement within a social care setting, went on to study learning disability nursing, and has since returned to the local system to work within the field. This example demonstrates how exposure to social care through a T Level can inspire career decisions and strengthen the domestic nursing pipeline.

### **Opportunities**

Engagement with T Levels has presented NHS Devon ICB with a range of opportunities to influence and strengthen the workforce pipeline across health and social care. The qualification has created a pathway for younger people, particularly those pursuing vocational routes, to enter the sector. This aligns with the ICB's wider ambition to widen participation and increase workforce diversity, particularly by supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed.

By bringing together education and care providers through the T Level Network, the ICB has also helped create a shared understanding of how placements can work effectively. This collaboration has raised the profile of social care as a

professional and rewarding career destination and promoted a more integrated approach to workforce planning. T Level placements are increasingly being recognised as an important component of the long-term strategy to build a sustainable workforce for both health and social care.

### **Challenges**

Despite progress, NHS Devon ICB and its partners have encountered several challenges in embedding T Levels as a pathway into health and social care careers. Early in the programme, myths and misinformation about the qualification were widespread—particularly around university acceptance and its alignment to nursing degrees. Some universities initially questioned the suitability of T Level students for higher education, although progress has been made, with institutions such as the University of Plymouth now accepting T Level graduates onto nursing programmes.

Operational and funding pressures have also created barriers. Funding reductions for providers hosting T Level students have limited the number of available placements, and many employers continue to deliver placements without full financial support. In addition, certain apprenticeships are advertised only for internal candidates, restricting progression opportunities for T Level graduates.

Further challenges relate to risk assessments for students aged 16–18, as well as higher withdrawal rates among T Level students particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and female learners. These issues are being examined locally to understand causes and improve retention.

### **Summary**

NHS Devon ICB's work demonstrates the value of system-level coordination in making T Levels a meaningful part of workforce planning. By convening partners, addressing misconceptions, and promoting collaboration between education and social care, the ICB has helped raise the visibility of social care within the Health T Level framework.

This approach has shown that T Levels can serve both as a pathway into health and social care careers and as a tool for widening participation, improving diversity, and building a sustainable nursing pipeline. The Devon experience highlights the importance of strong partnerships, targeted advocacy, and continuous evaluation to ensure that T Levels deliver benefits for students, employers, and the wider health and care system.

## Appendix 2: Resources to support T Level placements

### Resources

Our sector insights highlighted several resources for planning T Level placements in the health and social care sector and more generally. These include:

- [T Level and industry placement support available on the Plan industry placements webpage](#)
- [An HM Government guide on how industry placements work](#)
- [Skills for Health has a page of information including links and resources used for T Level placements in NHS organisations across the country](#)
- SDN is delivering a major support package for the DfE, to help employers plan and prepare to offer high-quality placements. Resources include:
  - [A webinar on hosting T Level industry placements in the health and social care sector](#)
- [A webinar on building sustainable T Level placements more generally, highlighting the issues for large employers and how these can be tackled](#)
- [A programme of national webinars to support different aspects of T Level delivery](#)

## Appendix 3: Costings

### Provider costs associated with provision of T Level placements

One of the providers consulted provided an impact statement looking at their costs associated with providing T Level placements. Roles included:

| Preparatory work                                                               |                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Interviews                                                                     | 1 hour per student                                      |
| Provider attendance at college training session with students <sup>1</sup>     | 6 hours per cohort                                      |
| Meetings with senior staff to prepare for student placement and set objectives | 2-hour meeting per cohort with 4 staff members          |
| Internal meetings                                                              |                                                         |
| Meeting with students                                                          | 1 hour per student                                      |
| 2 x staff feedback meetings                                                    | 2 x 30 min meetings per student                         |
| Weekly management meetings to prepare rotas and assign shifts <sup>2</sup>     | [Time requirement not listed] for 14 weeks of placement |
| Wider support                                                                  |                                                         |

|                                                                                                   |                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Weekly management including contacting students about shifts and provision of support to students | 1.5 hours per week for 14 weeks of placement            |
| Liaising with college about students                                                              | [Time requirement not listed] for 14 weeks of placement |
| Training sessions                                                                                 | 2 x 3-hour sessions per cohort                          |

Based on the above they felt **a cost of £250-£300** per student would be realistic.

Not included:

- Cost in care and admin time supporting people drawing on care and support
- External training, which was provided to students last year
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Communications with staff and people drawing on care and support to get their buy in
- Transport costs *no longer provided*
- Testing audits *no longer required*
- Uniform *no longer used*<sup>3</sup>

## Appendix 4: references

Boniface, S. & Whalley, L. (2025). [\*Health T Level student destination analysis\*](#).

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