



Case study: T Level Science industry placement at Cranfield University

Setting up a placement opportunity for a T Level Science student needn't be a laborious process. Janet Marshall, who manages apprenticeship and T level opportunities at Cranfield University, found the process to be no problem at all. Janet says:

"To be honest, it was really easy... once we had partnered with our local T Level provider, MK College Group we just worked with them to recruit the T level student in the same way as we would recruit an apprentice... we were sent CV's from the students and then offered the students the opportunity to go through an interview, short assessment and tour of the workplace. It was slightly more informal than a usual interview process but it gave both the students and us a valuable experience"

With her experience of managing apprenticeships as a comparison, Janet considers the straightforward arrangements for a T Level Science placement to be simpler:

"The T levels guidance was much easier for us as an employer because the main responsibility of the student lies with the provider and we didn't need to worry about eligibility requirements as this was all done by the college. ... it seemed a much easier process... And because employment isn't attached to it, we didn't have to go through our approvals process ... from a recruitment perspective, it seemed a much easier process and MK College Group were brilliant, really supportive."

The placement is in an environmental laboratory and it's been set up so that the student comes in two days per week. This suits the nature of the work at the laboratory and fits well around the student's ongoing T Level Science studies. So, as Janet explains, this is proving to be a model that works – and it's working well:

"Our structure for the placement is two days a week, as we felt it was important for the T Level student to get a meaningful experience. It was important to us that he could also learn some independent responsibilities and one day a week just wouldn't have allowed this learning to happen as he might start something and then not see it again until the next week. The placement was in a research lab and with the types of projects our technical staff work on, the two days would give him that continuity of experience and that has worked out really well. The student has even wanted to continue his placement during the school holidays – he is a great example of a keen and enthusiastic T Level student."

High praise indeed for this student, who has obviously won over the team with his hard-working attitude and enthusiasm for the role. And there's been a positive impact on the team dynamics:

"He's bringing in some new approaches and different perspectives and adding to the diversity of the team. I think the team are learning from him as much as he's learning from them... and he's just so enthusiastic about working in the team and learning from more experienced colleagues. He is bringing the eyes and ears of the future into the team and the organisation..."



The student is supervised by a member of staff who is completing an apprenticeship and this has been very successful – it's given the member of staff the opportunity to develop skills in coaching, mentoring and even some management, while the student has benefited from a varied and worthwhile programme of work. What's worked particularly well is allocating certain regular tasks and responsibilities to the student, so that on placement days he is able to work unaided for a proportion of time. Janet says:

"He has been involved in setting up some of the experiments and equipment, he's maintained and ordered stock and has been involved in a variety of biology based laboratory experiments. He shadows and works with a range of experienced technicians, so he's not just learnt technical skills but also workplace skills and how to communicate with peers.. He's also got involved in low risk activities including the bottle wash and clearing up but his placement manager has provided him with a really thorough experience and progressed his competence a variety of areas, aligning it to his T Level where possible."

This practical skills development is hugely beneficial for the student, but it's also brought positive outcomes for the employer in the form of increased capacity within the workforce. Janet reports that there has been much less "hand-holding" than was expected as the student was able to progress quickly to completing valuable tasks independently:

"I think the unexpected benefit is the speed that he's been able to learn and become competent... he has become more independent than we envisioned a T Level student would be. He's been shown what to do once or twice and then he's just flown with it and he's picked it up very quickly. The return for us is that he has grown into a competent extra pair of hands for some low risk activities.

"I think he's learnt a lot during his placement and it helps him to absolutely see where the theory he learns at college applies in practice in a laboratory environment. He can genuinely say that he's had some laboratory work experience in an environment that's quite bespoke but that he can really utilise for the rest of his career. I think there's a real win-win on both sides."

The placement has been such a success that this employer is hoping that the student will apply for a permanent position when one arises in the future. Recruiting to technician roles can be difficult, so the desire to find new talent is a key motivator and they hope to host another T Level Science student next year. Janet is more than happy to recommend that other employers get involved and would encourage other university laboratories to support T Level Science placements:

"Just give it a go- it's a beneficial way to support your early career talent pipelines and particularly the sustainability of technical skills in the laboratory environment. It's also about supporting young people into our organisation and helping them understand that Universities are great places to work. Even though a T Level placement is for a temporary period of time, it's a really good way of enthusing young people to consider technical careers ... Just do it!"