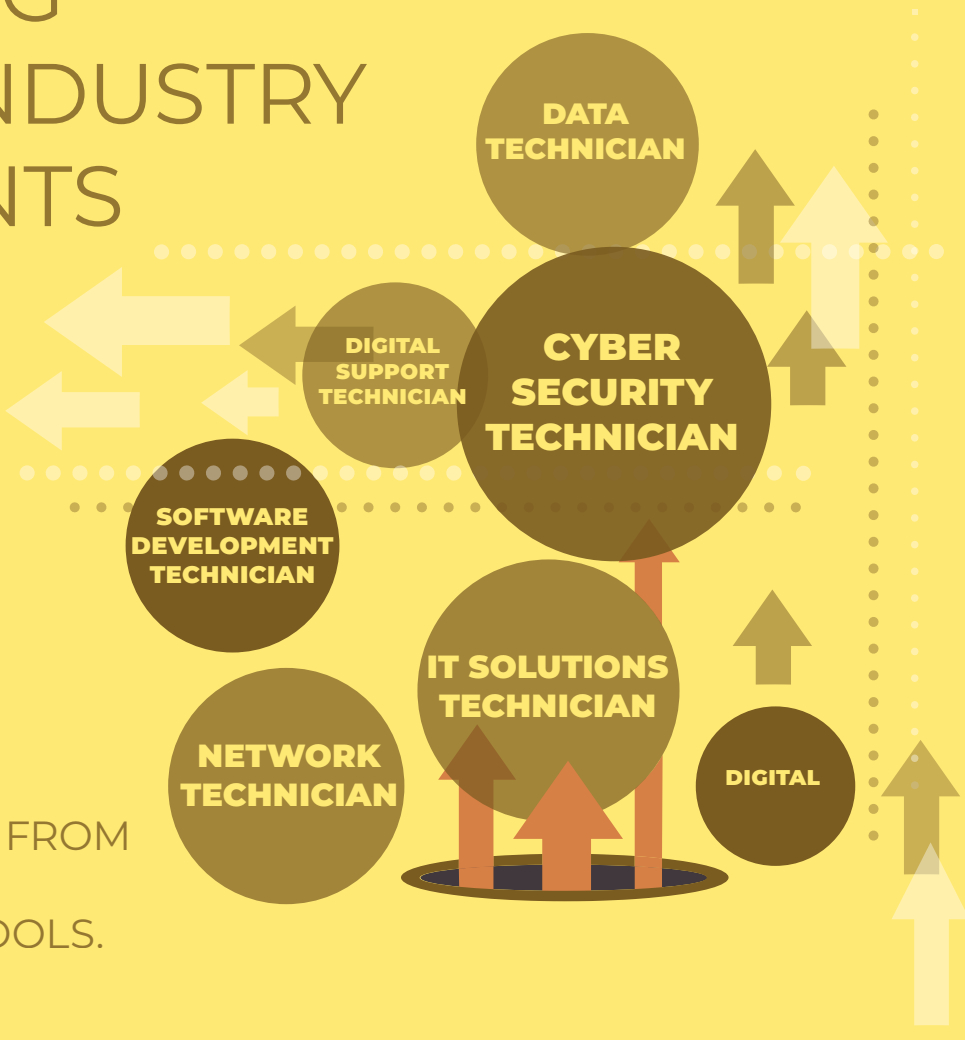
T-LEVELS
THE NEXT LEVEL QUALIFICATION

DIGITAL

DELIVERING STRONG INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS



A SHARED AMBITION FROM T LEVEL EMPLOYERS, COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS.

WHAT STRONG INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS LOOK LIKE

This page sets out the key features that underpin strong industry placements in practice. It provides a clear, shared way to understand what makes placements work well for employers, students, colleges and schools.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A STRONG PLACEMENT

MAKE THE PLACEMENT CLEAR AND MANAGEABLE

The role is realistic, expectations are clear, and hosting fits within day-to-day workflow

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR HOW WORK REALLY HAPPENS

Students understand teamwork, iteration, tools and routine tasks before they arrive

HELP STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO REAL WORK

Students take part in genuine work through systems, tasks and team activity – not observation alone

CONNECT THE PLACEMENT TO LEARNING AND PROGRESSION

Students can reflect on their experience and link it to skills, knowledge and progression

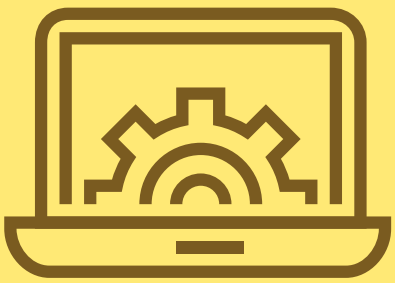
BUILD PLACEMENTS THAT CAN BE REPEATED AND IMPROVED

The experience works for all partners, making future placements easier to deliver

5 elements

Strong digital placements are built on five connected elements:

1. employers feel clear and confident hosting;
2. students arrive ready for how digital work happens;
3. they contribute to genuine workflow;
4. their experience connects to learning and progression; and
5. the placement is manageable and repeatable over time.



USING THIS RESOURCE IN PRACTICE

This resource is designed to support practical conversations, planning and review at every stage of a placement. It is a shared ambition, not an assessment standard.

It can be used to:

- support early conversations with employers about what a placement could involve
- align curriculum, placement and employer engagement teams around a shared approach
- shape realistic placement roles based on how digital work actually happens
- strengthen student preparation by making expectations clear
- review placement quality and identify small improvements that can be made

SHARED EXPECTATIONS FROM EMPLOYERS AND T LEVEL COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

At a glance: what strong placements look like

Strong industry placements typically:

- feel manageable and worthwhile for employers
- prepare students for real working environments
- enable contribution to genuine work
- connect to learning, reflection and progression
- build relationships that can be sustained over time
- develop a pipeline of talent for the industry

Strong placements are not defined by the scale or complexity of work assigned, but by how well the experience reflects real digital practice in a team, department or business and supports meaningful contribution.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Digital teams regularly bring in new people – apprentices, interns, junior hires and students. The same fundamentals shape whether those experiences work well: clarity about the role, realistic expectations, support and the opportunity to contribute to real work.

As digital industry placements have grown, employers, colleges and schools have been working together to understand what leads to a genuinely positive experience – one that supports students while also working for busy digital teams.

Across the sector, there is strong commitment to ensuring placements are meaningful rather than simply transactional. A shared understanding of what "strong placements" look like helps schools and colleges and employers work towards a consistent level of quality and makes placements easier to sustain over time. This framework is a shared description of what tends to work well in practice.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT DIGITAL PLACEMENTS

Digital placements often operate differently to those in other sectors. Work is typically fast moving, collaborative and shaped by live workflow rather than fixed tasks.

This means placements are often:

- embedded within live systems such as ticketing platforms, sprint cycles or project workflows
- shaped by iteration and ongoing development rather than linear tasks
- a mix of routine groundwork and visible outputs
- delivered through hybrid or flexible models, reflecting industry practice
- based on low-risk entry points such as testing, content updates or support tasks
- dependent on team-based contribution rather than individual ownership

These features mean that strong digital placements are less about set projects and more about meaningful participation in how work actually happens.

DIGITAL: EXAMPLES OF MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY

The examples below are prompts for discussion. They should be shaped around the employer's setting, the student's readiness, the tools in use and any access, data protection or safeguarding requirements.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	EARLY CONTRIBUTION	MORE DEVELOPED STRETCH
Testing and quality assurance	Follow a test script, check links or forms, record issues and report bugs clearly.	Help refine test scenarios, compare expected and actual results, prioritise issues and suggest improvements to user experience.
Content and digital assets	Update web pages, documents, images or digital records using agreed guidance.	Review content for accessibility, consistency or audience needs, and suggest improvements before publication.
Data and reporting	Enter, clean or check data, update spreadsheets, dashboards or records.	Summarise trends, identify anomalies, create a simple visual report or explain what the data suggests.
Support and service requests	Observe how tickets or support requests are logged, categorised and updated.	Triage low-risk requests, draft responses for checking, update ticket notes and identify repeat issues.
Project and workflow support	Attend stand-ups or team meetings, update task boards and record actions.	Track progress on agreed tasks, identify blockers, prepare a short update or reflect on how workflow is managed.
Research and user insight	Carry out structured research, compare examples or gather information from agreed sources.	Summarise findings, identify user needs, compare options and present recommendations to the team.
Systems and process documentation	Follow existing guidance, capture screenshots or document simple steps.	Create or improve a user guide, process note, FAQ or onboarding resource for review.

WHAT STRONG PLACEMENTS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

MAKE THE PLACEMENT CLEAR AND MANAGEABLE

Digital teams operate within live environments shaped by deadlines, client needs, sprint cycles and support demands. Bringing a student into that setting works best when expectations are realistic and agreed early.

Employers do not need to create large standalone projects or artificial tasks. In digital settings, work that sits outside real systems or user needs is less likely to feel meaningful or valuable. What matters is clarity about how a student can contribute alongside day-to-day work, and how support will operate.

In digital environments, work is often organised through shared systems and tools, meaning students are contributing within real processes rather than separate activities.

Strong placements typically involve:

- early discussion about the team's workflow and priorities
- realistic expectations of student capability and pace
- clearly defined points of contact
- proportionate supervision and regular check-ins
- a progressive approach to more complex tasks and independent working
- confidence that hosting will be manageable

In digital roles, flexible placement patterns often reflect real working practice more effectively than fixed weekly models. Hybrid working, project-based blocks or periods aligned to delivery cycles can allow students to experience how digital teams operate.

Where any activity takes place away from the employer's usual workplace, it should still involve meaningful employer oversight and be clearly separated from normal classroom learning.

Where employers, colleges and schools, work together to shape placements around real workflows, while maintaining consistency for the student - the experience is more likely to feel authentic and manageable for all involved.

Where employers feel clear and supported, they are far more likely to view the experience positively and host again.

IN PRACTICE, ASK:

- Is the student's role shaped around real digital workflow?
- Does the employer know what the student can realistically do at the start?
- Is there a clear workplace contact for task-setting, questions and check-ins?
- Are expectations clear around tools, access, communication, working pattern and supervision?
- If any activity is remote or hybrid, is there meaningful employer oversight and a clear separation from normal classroom learning?

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR HOW WORK REALLY HAPPENS

Students who settle in the working environment quickly tend to have a clear picture of how digital teams operate before they arrive. Most roles involve collaboration, iteration and routine groundwork alongside more visible project activity.

Students should arrive with a basic understanding of workplace expectations, while recognising that employers will still provide task-specific guidance, instruction and feedback.

Understanding this in advance helps students engage positively with the full range of tasks they may encounter, from testing and documentation through to content updates, research or shadowing live work.

This includes understanding how work is organised through tools such as ticketing systems, shared platforms and collaborative workflows, and how tasks are assigned, tracked and completed within digital teams.

Well-prepared students typically:

- understand that routine tasks are part of digital delivery
- are ready to work as part of a team
- ask questions, communicate clearly and respond positively to feedback
- recognise the importance of reliability and professionalism
- are curious about how work flows through the department or organisation

Alongside technical activity, students develop core employability skills through exposure to real working environments, including communication, teamwork, reliability and professional confidence.

When curriculum includes development of these skills and behaviours and expectations are clear from the outset, students integrate more quickly and require less intensive supervision.

IN PRACTICE, ASK:

- Does the student understand how digital teams organise and track work?
- Has the student been prepared for routine groundwork as well as more visible digital outputs?
- Does the student understand expectations around communication, reliability, data protection and professional behaviour?
- Is the student ready to ask questions, follow instructions and respond to feedback?
- Are curriculum and placement staff confident the student is ready enough for placement?

HELP STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO REAL WORK

The most effective placements allow students to take part in genuine workflow, taking on tasks that reflect real entry-level roles within digital teams, even in small ways.

Contribution builds confidence and gives employers a clearer sense of a student's developing capability.

Depending on the workplace, this may include:

- responding to support requests or user queries
- assisting with testing, quality assurance or system checks
- updating content, documentation or digital records
- carrying out structured research, data entry or data validation
- supporting team workflows through ticketing or task management systems
- contributing to meetings, stand-ups or project discussions
- helping to maintain systems, platforms or digital resources

In digital environments, this contribution is often structured through workflow systems, where tasks are assigned, tracked and reviewed as part of wider team activity.

These impactful experiences help students understand pace, standards and collaboration in a way that observation alone rarely achieves and a classroom can never achieve.

As in any digital role, students benefit from regular, informal feedback. Short check-ins help them understand expectations, build confidence and improve quickly, often seeing the impact of their contribution in real time.

IN PRACTICE, ASK:

- Is the student contributing to genuine digital workflow, not just observing?
- Is there a planned progression from observation to supported contribution?
- Are tasks stretching the student appropriately for Level 3?
- Does the student understand why the task matters to users, clients, colleagues or the team?
- Could the student produce something useful, such as test notes, content updates, research findings, a support summary or process guide?

CONNECT THE PLACEMENT TO LEARNING AND PROGRESSION

Placements are most valuable where students can make sense of what they are seeing and doing. When workplace experiences connect back to learning, students develop a clearer sense of relevance, direction and professional identity.

This is strengthened where:

- students are prepared before they start
- teachers understand the nature of placement activity and expectations
- students have opportunities to reflect on what they have learned
- workplace examples are shared and discussed
- links to progression opportunities are visible

The aim is not to replicate classroom learning in the workplace, but to deepen and contextualise it.

Strong placements should be planned around clear learning goals that help the student understand what they are developing and how this connects to their T Level, future progression and workplace expectations. These goals should be reviewed during the placement, so the student, employer and college or school can see how progress is being made.

IN PRACTICE, ASK:

- Can the student explain what they are learning, not just what they are doing?
- Do teachers and placement staff understand the digital activity taking place?
- Are students reflecting on technical skills, professional behaviours and workplace practices developed through placement?
- Are workplace examples being used to strengthen classroom learning?
- Can the student see links to future roles, apprenticeships or employment in digital?

BUILD PLACEMENTS THAT CAN BE REPEATED AND IMPROVED

A strong digital placement is rarely a one-off success. Where expectations are clear and the experience feels worthwhile, employers are more likely to host again and develop the relationship over time.

This helps create:

- more stable placement opportunities
- greater employer confidence
- useful contribution to the team or business activity
- clearer progression pathways
- reduced pressure on colleges and schools to constantly source new hosts

Strong placements are shaped through ongoing feedback and refinement. Small adjustments, informed by employer and student feedback, tend to make the biggest difference over time. In practice this often includes:

- regular review points with the student and employer, including a final review, to check progress, wellbeing, learning goals, suitability of activities and any support needed
- honest feedback from employers and students
- colleges and schools using feedback to strengthen preparation, matching and support
- small adjustments each year rather than large redesigns

Where this cycle is in place, placements become easier to sustain and improve.

IN PRACTICE, ASK:

- Does the placement fit naturally into the team's workflow and delivery cycles?
- Would the employer feel confident hosting again?
- What feedback has been gathered from the student and employer?
- Has the college or school used feedback to improve preparation, matching or support?
- Are there tasks, templates, tools or processes that could be reused for future students?

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE ACROSS ROLES

Strong digital placements do not happen by chance. They are shaped through clear roles, shared understanding and ongoing alignment between those involved.

IF YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER

Your role is to provide a structured and realistic experience within your working environment.

In strong placements, this typically means:

- being clear about what the student will and will not be doing
- involving the student in genuine workflow wherever possible
- providing proportionate supervision and regular feedback
- treating the placement as early talent development as well as additional capacity
- offering brief, focused feedback that helps the student understand their strengths and areas for development and supports the college or school's final review

A manageable, well-structured placement builds confidence for both you and future students.

IF YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL

Your role is to create clarity and alignment between the employer and the college or school.

In strong placements, this typically means:

- setting realistic expectations with employers about student contribution and capability
- shaping placements around real workflows rather than artificial or standalone tasks
- ensuring communication is clear and consistent before and during the placement
- supporting regular feedback between employer and student
- building relationships that can be sustained over time

Strong placements are built through active alignment, not passive coordination.

IF YOU ARE A TEACHER OR CURRICULUM LEAD

Your role is to prepare students for the realities of work and connect placement to learning.

In strong placements, this typically means:

- making the nature of working life explicit, including teamwork, routine tasks and professional expectations
- preparing students for contribution, not observation
- reinforcing reliability, communication and responsiveness as core employability skills
- building structured reflection into learning so placement experience is understood and applied
- engaging with placement context so teaching reflects real workplace practice

Placement is not separate from the curriculum. It is part of how students develop professional identity.

HOW STRONG IS THIS DIGITAL INDUSTRY PLACEMENT?

A quick check to support planning, conversations and reflection.

Use this tool to sense-check a placement at any stage – early discussion, planning, or review.

MAKE THE PLACEMENT CLEAR AND MANAGEABLE

Employer understands the student's role, feels the placement is manageable, and has clear expectations of support and contribution

WHERE ARE WE NOW? ✓

- EMERGING ☐
- DEVELOPING ☐
- STRONG ☐

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR HOW WORK REALLY HAPPENS

Student understands how digital teams work (e.g. tickets, sprints, collaboration tools) and is prepared for routine tasks, demonstrating reliability, communication and professionalism

WHERE ARE WE NOW? ✓

- EMERGING ☐
- DEVELOPING ☐
- STRONG ☐

HELP STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO REAL WORK

Student contributes to genuine workflow (e.g. testing, content updates, research, support tasks), not just observation

WHERE ARE WE NOW? ✓

- EMERGING ☐
- DEVELOPING ☐
- STRONG ☐

CONNECT THE PLACEMENT TO LEARNING AND PROGRESSION

Placement activity links to curriculum and agreed learning goals, and students can reflect on and make sense of what they are doing

WHERE ARE WE NOW? ✓

- EMERGING ☐
- DEVELOPING ☐
- STRONG ☐

BUILD PLACEMENTS THAT CAN BE REPEATED AND IMPROVED

Placement feels worthwhile and manageable, with potential for the employer to host again

WHERE ARE WE NOW? ✓

- EMERGING ☐
- DEVELOPING ☐
- STRONG ☐

QUICK REFLECTION PROMPTS

Use these to guide discussion:

- Is the student contributing, or mainly observing?
- Does the employer feel this is manageable and worthwhile?
- Are expectations clear on both sides?
- Can the student explain what they are learning and why it matters?
- Would this employer choose to host again?

WHAT TO DO NEXT

MOSTLY EMERGING
→ clarify expectations, simplify scope, strengthen preparation

MIXED
→ adjust structure, improve feedback, align curriculum more closely

MOSTLY STRONG
→ capture what works and builds towards repeat placements

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