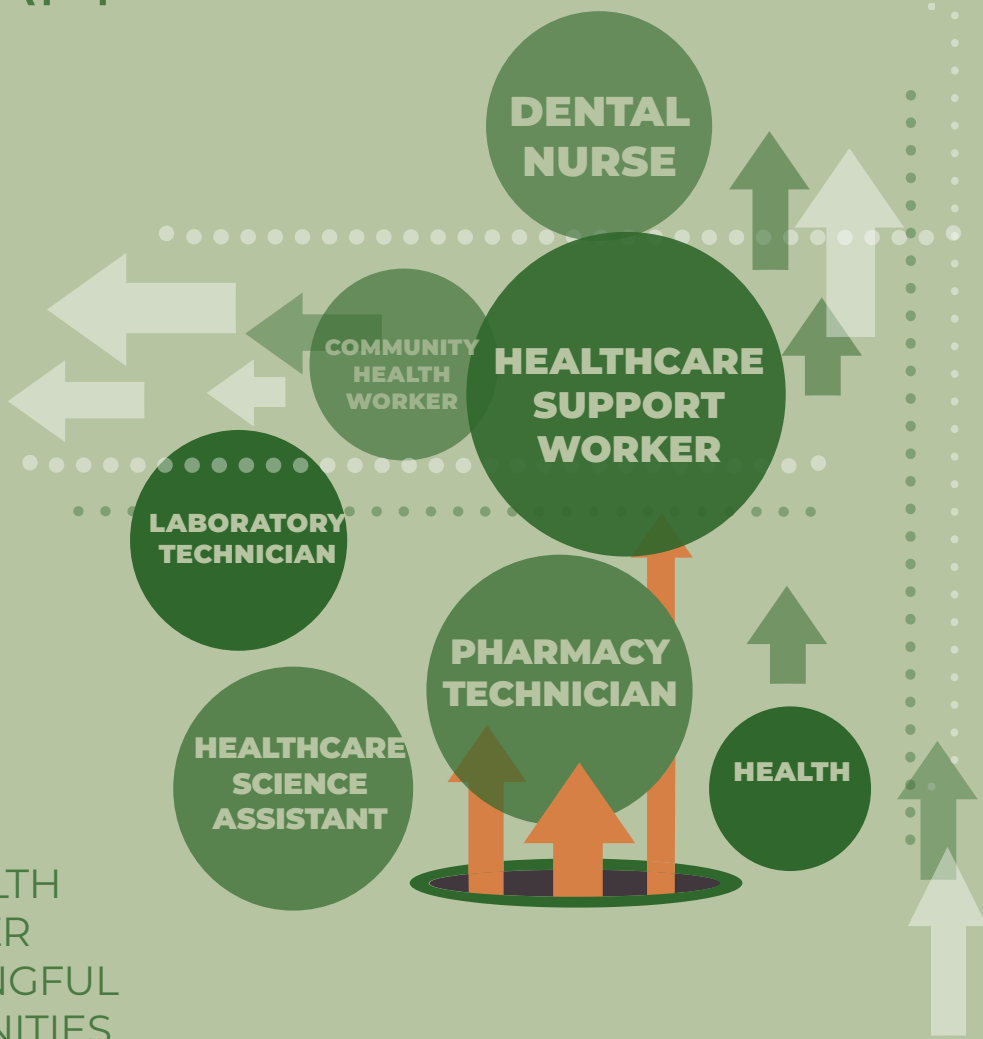
T-LEVELS
THE NEXT LEVEL QUALIFICATION

T LEVEL IN HEALTH

SMALL TEAM PROJECTS



TURNING REAL HEALTH AND CARE EMPLOYER NEEDS INTO MEANINGFUL PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

PURPOSE OF THIS RESOURCE

This resource helps colleges and schools work with health and care employers to identify a real organisational need and shape it into a meaningful, appropriately challenging health and care sector project that could be taken forward as a Small Team Project (STP) within a wider T Level industry placement. The employer should identify or agree the real challenge and remain connected to the work through agreed contact, feedback and review.

The examples and prompts are starting points, not fixed templates. This resource does not replace national guidance on designing and delivering STPs or the wider industry placement requirements.

1. ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Small Team Projects can create valuable opportunities for students to engage with real health and care challenges. The difficult part is often identifying a project that is genuinely useful to the employer, appropriate for students and rooted in the reality of a health or care setting.

This resource focuses on that sector-specific task. It is designed to help employer-facing and curriculum colleagues move from an initial employer conversation to a clearly described project opportunity, while keeping individual student roles, learning goals, employer oversight, professional boundaries and intended value visible from the start.

Work together from the start

In this resource, "employer-facing colleagues" means colleagues responsible for employer engagement, industry placements or both. Job titles and team structures will vary between colleges and schools.

The strongest health and care projects bring together two perspectives:

- Employer-facing expertise: understanding the employer, building the relationship, knowing what the organisation may value and considering what is practical within an industry placement. Employer engagement and placement responsibilities may sit with the same person or team or be shared across different roles.
- Curriculum expertise: understanding what students are learning, what they are ready for and where there is potential for meaningful health, care, transferable and professional challenge at the appropriate level.

Bring these perspectives together early and involve the employer in shaping the opportunity wherever possible. A promising employer need should not be developed into a fixed project by one person or team and then passed on for others to implement. Employers, employer-facing colleagues and curriculum colleagues should work collaboratively so that the project reflects a real organisational need, is practical to deliver and creates meaningful learning for students, distinct from the taught elements of the T Level.

Strong projects are built through active collaboration and alignment between employers, employer-facing colleagues and curriculum colleagues, not a sequence of handovers.

Use this alongside the national STP guidance

This resource complements two sources of national guidance. Use the first for the requirements applying to T Level industry placements generally, and the second for the specific requirements and arrangements for designing and delivering an STP. Use this resource to help identify and shape a strong health or care project to take forward through those processes.

- T Level industry placements: delivery guidance for education providers
- Designing and Delivering Small Team Projects (STPs) as part of T Level Industry Placements

What this resource will help you do

- identify what must be checked through the national guidance before delivery
- agree employer contact, feedback and review arrangements
- identify individual student roles, contributions and learning goals
- use the project co-design template to capture the need, context, learning opportunity, potential value and boundaries
- move from an initial employer conversation to a clearly described student challenge
- bring employers, employer-facing colleagues and curriculum colleagues together to shape a project opportunity

2. WHAT MAKES A STRONG HEALTH AND CARE PROJECT?

A Small Team Project is not simply a classroom assignment carried out for placement hours. It begins with something real in the employer's service and gives students a meaningful reason to investigate, think, apply their learning and contribute.

Starts with a real need. There is something the employer would genuinely value exploring, reviewing, understanding or improving.

Is rooted in health or care practice. Students need to understand the service, the people it supports and the health, care or wellbeing context.

Requires active thinking or analysis. Students do more than collect information or make a resource. They investigate, analyse evidence, make judgements, develop ideas and justify their response.

Leaves the thinking to students. The project defines the challenge, context and boundaries, but does not tell students what patterns to find or what conclusion to reach.

Could create real value. The employer can see value in hearing the findings, reviewing the recommendations and considering any outputs.

Is safe and appropriate. The project takes account of confidentiality, consent, safeguarding, sensitive information, access and professional boundaries from the outset.

Keeps each student visible. Each student should have an agreed role, individual learning goals and a defined contribution that can be reviewed and evidenced.

Remains employer-led. The employer sets or agrees the challenge, provides genuine workplace context, maintains agreed contact, gives feedback and contributes to review. The college or school structures and coordinates delivery but does not replace employer oversight.

3. THINK BROADLY ABOUT HEALTH AND CARE SETTINGS

More settings, more options

Health and care activity takes place across a much wider ecosystem than hospitals and large NHS organisations.

Instead of starting with "Which NHS organisations could offer a project?", ask:

"Which organisations in our area contribute to people's health, care, wellbeing, independence, prevention, access to support or quality of life?"

Possible employer settings include:

- Adult social care, including care homes, residential care, domiciliary care and services supporting people who need care and support.
- Primary care, including GP practices, primary care networks, care coordination and social prescribing services.
- Community and hospital pharmacies supporting medicines, health information, prevention and wellbeing.
- Community health services, including community hospitals, neighbourhood teams and services delivered in people's homes or local settings.
- Rehabilitation and therapy services supporting recovery, participation and independence.
- Mental health and wellbeing organisations and services.
- Healthwatch and other organisations focused on patient, service-user and public voice, advocacy and engagement.
- Charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises supporting health, wellbeing, inclusion or access.
- Public health, prevention and health improvement teams, including local authority services.
- Services supporting older people, disabled people or people with long-term conditions.
- Organisations focused on access, communication, engagement, advocacy or inclusion.
- Acute, secondary and specialist healthcare services where an appropriate project opportunity exists.

Small or specialist organisations may offer a greater depth of experience and participation in an STP may enable them to offer industry placement hours in a more accessible way. The key question is not whether it looks like a traditional health employer, but whether students can learn from how it supports people's health, care or wellbeing.

4. FROM EMPLOYER CONVERSATION TO PROJECT

The aim is not to design the whole STP in the first employer conversation. The aim is to discover whether there is a worthwhile health or care project that T Level students could undertake to help address the employer's need, and to describe it clearly enough to take forward. These stages should support a joint conversation between the employer, employer-facing colleagues and curriculum colleagues, not a handover after one person or team has already designed the project.

Step 1: Explore the employer need

Employer-facing colleagues will often lead the initial conversation, drawing out what the employer would genuinely value and what is realistic in the setting.

- What is happening now?
- What would the employer like to understand, review, improve, or develop?
- Why does this matter to the organisation or the people it supports?
- Is there something useful they have not had the time or capacity to explore?

Step 2: Identify a student challenge

Bring employer-facing and curriculum perspectives together. Keep the challenge rooted in the employer's reality while considering what students are learning and ready to undertake. This may influence the timing of the STP.

- What genuine question could students investigate?
- What context, materials, information or access could help them understand the issue?
- Is there enough substance for students to analyse and make judgements?
- What should remain open for students to discover for themselves?
- What kinds of insight, recommendations, resources or other outputs might be useful to the employer without fixing the final response?

Step 3: Shape the project

Curriculum colleagues should help test the learning opportunity, student readiness and T Level content stretch. Employer-facing colleagues should ensure the idea remains anchored in a real employer need and is practical to take forward.

- What relevant health or care knowledge, wider T Level learning and transferable skills might students need to apply?
- What could make the work appropriately challenging?
- What might be useful to the employer at the end?
- What professional boundaries, approvals and sensitivities need to shape the project?

Step 4: Agree what happens next

Together, check that the project opportunity is worth developing before moving into formal placement and STP planning.

- Is the employer need, student challenge, potential value and scope clear enough to take forward?
- What still needs to be checked with the employer, employer-facing colleague or curriculum colleague?
- Who will take the project into formal STP planning using the national guidance?

The template in the next section can be used to capture the emerging opportunity during the conversation or shortly afterwards. It helps employers, employer-facing colleagues and curriculum colleagues record what has been agreed, what still needs checking and what should be taken forward into formal STP planning.

HEALTH AND CARE PROJECT CO-DESIGN TEMPLATE

Who is shaping this project?

Employer or organisation: _____

Employer-facing colleague(s): _____

Curriculum colleague(s): _____

Other relevant colleague or expertise:

Complete the template collaboratively wherever possible. The employer need, curriculum opportunity and placement requirements should inform one another from the start.

1. Employer need

What would be useful to understand, review, explore or improve? Why does it matter?

_____

_____

2. Employer sector context

Who or what is affected? What does the organisation need students to understand about the service, setting or population?

_____

_____

3. Student challenge

What genuine question or problem could students investigate? What information, evidence, materials or access might be available?

_____

_____

4. Opportunities for learning and development

What should students have the opportunity to investigate, understand, analyse, apply, develop or justify? What would make the project appropriately challenging while leaving students to reach their own conclusions?

_____

_____

5. Potential value

What insight, recommendations, resources or other outputs might be useful to the employer? Avoid fixing the final answer before students investigate.

_____

_____

6. Professional boundaries and approvals

What needs early consideration around confidentiality, consent, safeguarding, sensitive information, professional boundaries, access or use of records and systems?

7. Taking it forward

What has been agreed in principle? What still needs checking? Who will take the idea forward into STP planning?

How outputs could be presented to and considered by the employer:

How each student's progress, contribution and employer feedback could be reviewed and recorded:

Boundaries and approvals:

Information, systems or environments students may need to access:

Likely delivery location or pattern:

Individual student roles, contributions and learning goals:

Proposed number of students:

Named employer contact and proposed contact points:

Record these points at a proportionate level before the idea moves into formal STP planning. Confirm all delivery requirements against current national guidance.

8. Initial delivery considerations

Next step. Use the national STP guidance to design and deliver the Small Team Project, including the required delivery, employer oversight, review and evidence arrangements.

6. WORKED EXAMPLE: COMPLETED HEALTH AND CARE PROJECT CO-DESIGN TEMPLATE

Improving communication with residents and families

This example mirrors the blank co-design template. The blue handwritten-style text shows how the fields might be completed following a conversation with a residential care employer. It is illustrative rather than a ready-made project brief.

Who is shaping this project?

Employer or organisation: Example residential care provider

Employer-facing colleague(s): Industry placement or employer engagement colleague

Curriculum colleague(s): Health curriculum colleague

Other relevant colleague or expertise: Care setting lead or communication and accessibility expertise

1. Employer need

What would be useful to understand, review, explore or improve? Why does it matter?

Staff are regularly asked similar questions by residents and families about routines, activities, visiting arrangements and what to expect. The employer would find it useful to understand whether existing information could be clearer, easier to find or more accessible.

2. Health and care context

Who or what is affected? What does the organisation need students to understand?

The project is based in a residential care setting. Communication should respect residents' dignity, privacy, individual needs and preferences.

3. Student challenge

What genuine question or problem could students investigate?

Explore how key information is currently communicated and identify evidence-informed opportunities to make it clearer or more accessible.

Review agreed materials and, where appropriate and agreed, gather structured feedback from staff, residents or families.

4. Opportunities for learning and development

What should students investigate, understand, analyse, apply, develop or justify?

- Investigate communication in a real care setting.
- Consider different audience needs.
- Compare evidence and analyse accessibility, clarity and purpose.
- Take responsibility for an individual contribution.
- Make judgements and justify recommendations.
- The employer's existing knowledge should give students genuine workplace context without fixing their conclusions.

5. Potential value

What outputs might be useful to the employer?

A concise review, prioritised recommendations and, where appropriate, draft or prototype materials for consideration.

6. Professional boundaries and approvals

What needs early consideration?

- Agree accessible materials and information.
- Plan whether and how students can safely gather feedback from residents or families.
- Confirm consent, safeguarding, confidentiality and personal-information arrangements.
- Confirm any access to records or systems and escalation routes.

7. Taking it forward

What has been agreed and who will take it forward?

The employer has agreed in principle that the issue would be useful to explore. Employer-facing and curriculum colleagues will confirm scope and take it into formal STP planning.

8. Initial delivery considerations

Named employer contact and proposed contact points: To be agreed

Proposed number of students: To be agreed

Individual roles, contributions and learning goals: To be agreed during formal planning

Delivery pattern: Employer contact or site activity combined with structured college or school-based work

Access: Agreed public-facing information and workplace context

Boundaries and approvals: Recorded before contact with residents or families or access to information

Review and feedback: Agreed check-ins plus individual review and evidence arrangements

Presentation: Findings and recommendations presented to the employer

Next step. Confirm detailed delivery, employer oversight, student roles, review, evidence and approvals using the national guidance.

7. EXAMPLE HEALTH AND CARE CHALLENGE THEMES

The examples below show common types of organisational need that could become meaningful health projects. They are intended to help colleagues and employers identify possibilities, particularly where they are unfamiliar with the breadth of health and care activity. They are prompts for discussion, not ready-made project briefs.

Communication with patients, residents, service users, families or carers

- Do the same people repeatedly need to ask for clarification, or do common questions suggest that information could be clearer?
- Is important information difficult to find, understand or use?
- Are current letters, leaflets, webpages, displays or messages suitable for different audiences?

Possible project direction. Students could review existing communications, gather appropriate service-user or audience feedback where agreed, consider audience needs and recommend clearer or more accessible approaches.

Access, navigation and signposting

- Are people sometimes unsure how to access the service or what happens next?
- Are there stages in a referral, appointment or support journey that cause confusion?
- Could information about other services or sources of support be clearer?

Possible project direction. Students could map an agreed part of the user journey, review available information and identify evidence-informed improvements.

Health promotion and prevention

- Is there a health or wellbeing priority that the organisation wants a particular audience to understand?
- Are existing messages being noticed and understood?
- Are there barriers such as language, confidence, stigma, health literacy, format or channel?

Possible project direction. Students could research the audience and topic, review current activity and develop justified ideas for improving awareness or engagement.

Participation, activities and wellbeing

- Are there activities, routines or support offers that people do not engage with as much as expected?
- Would the employer like to understand what helps or limits participation?
- Could communication, timing, format or practical support affect engagement?

Possible project direction. Students could examine the context and available evidence, consider relevant wellbeing or person-centred principles and propose realistic improvements.

Accessibility and inclusion

- Could information or part of the service experience be difficult for some people to use?
- Does the employer want to consider language, literacy, sensory, communication, cultural or digital access needs?
- Are there materials or processes that would benefit from an accessibility review?

Possible project direction. Students could review agreed materials or processes, consider a range of user needs and identify practical opportunities for improvement.

Service-user or patient experience

- Is there one part of the service experience the employer would value understanding better?
- Are there recurring questions, delays, hand-offs or points of uncertainty?
- What non-sensitive evidence could help students understand the experience without accessing inappropriate personal information?

Possible project direction. Students could investigate an agreed part of the experience, identify themes and present recommendations for consideration.

Community engagement and participation

- Is the organisation finding it difficult to reach or involve a particular community or audience?
- Are some events, services or messages attracting less engagement than expected?
- Would the employer value a fresh view of how people hear about and respond to its work?

Possible project direction. Students could explore the audience and local context, review current engagement approaches and justify ideas for strengthening participation.

Public-facing and next-step information

- Are posters, displays, waiting-room materials, webpages or digital messages current and purposeful?
- Is information up to date, useful, accessible and informed by the people who use the service?
- Would it be useful to review what information is available and how it is organised?

Possible project direction. Students could audit agreed information, identify issues or opportunities and propose improvements or prototype materials.

Transitions and next-step information

- Are people clear about what happens before, during or after an appointment, activity or period of support?
- Do families or service users need clearer information about next steps or available support?
- Are staff repeatedly explaining the same process?

Possible project direction. Students could review the current information journey and develop recommendations for clearer, more consistent next-step communication.

Supporting independence and self-management

- Is there information or support intended to help people make informed choices or manage their wellbeing?
- Would the employer like to understand whether it is clear, practical and accessible?
- Could people be signposted more effectively to appropriate support?

Possible project direction. Students could review agreed information and relevant reliable evidence, consider different user needs and suggest practical improvements.

Combine the setting with a project theme

Do not treat the settings or themes as fixed pairs. A useful way to widen thinking is to combine an employer setting with a project theme that reflects a real need. For example:

- Community pharmacy plus access and signposting.
- Care home plus participation, activities and wellbeing.
- Voluntary or community organisation plus community engagement.
- Public health or prevention team plus health promotion.
- Rehabilitation or therapy service plus participation and communication.
- GP practice or primary care network plus information, access or patient journeys.
- Social prescribing service plus navigation and awareness of local support.
- Mental health or wellbeing organisation plus accessibility and inclusion.
- Community health service plus transitions and next-step information.
- Service supporting older people or people with long-term conditions plus independence and self-management.
- NHS service plus communication, service-user experience or discharge and next-step information.

These combinations are prompts, not project titles. Start with the employer's reality, involve employer-facing and curriculum colleagues, and use the project co-design template to shape a project that is useful, appropriately challenging and deliverable.

8. BEFORE TAKING THE PROJECT FORWARD

Use this short checklist before moving from the project idea into formal STP planning.

- ☐ Is the need real and recognised by the employer?
- ☐ Have employer-facing and curriculum colleagues shaped or tested the idea together?
- ☐ Is the project clearly rooted in health, care or wellbeing practice?
- ☐ Will students have something meaningful to investigate rather than simply complete a task?
- ☐ Is there appropriate challenge and opportunity for learning and development without predetermining students' findings?
- ☐ Could the employer make genuine use of, respond to or learn from the students' work?
- ☐ Have professional boundaries and sensitivities been identified?
- ☐ Is the project idea clear enough to take into the national STP design and delivery process?
- ☐ Is there a named employer contact and meaningful employer oversight?
- ☐ Does each student have a proposed individual role, contribution and learning goals?
- ☐ Have review, feedback and evidence arrangements been identified for each student?
- ☐ Have safety, safeguarding, consent, confidentiality, service-user contact and access to information, records or systems been considered separately?
- ☐ Have statements about hours, review frequency, evidence or completion been checked against current authoritative guidance?

NEXT STEP

Use the T Level industry placements: delivery guidance for education providers and the Designing and Delivering Small Team Projects (STPs) as part of T Level Industry Placements guidance to plan the placement and STP arrangements, including delivery, employer involvement, student roles, review, evidence and other requirements.

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