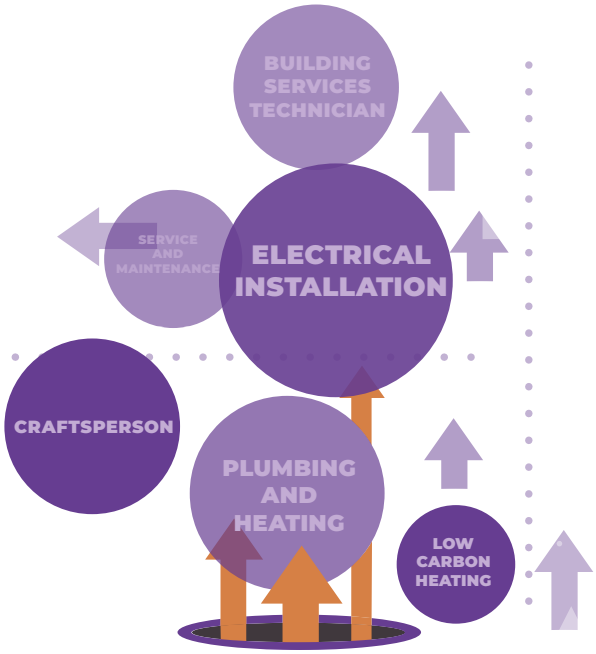
T-LEVELS
THE NEXT LEVEL QUALIFICATION

COMMON PLACEMENT CONCERNS: PRACTICAL RESPONSES FOR BUILDING SERVICES EMPLOYER CONVERSATIONS

A conversation aid for colleges and schools



PURPOSE

Employers across electrical, electrotechnical, plumbing, heating and other building services trades may be interested in supporting students but still have genuine concerns about whether an industry placement will work in practice.

This is understandable where employers work with live services, tools, specialist equipment, customer homes, occupied buildings, construction sites, mobile jobs and tight project or call-out schedules.

This conversation aid is designed to help college or school staff explore those concerns with employers and identify practical ways forward.

It is not about dismissing concerns or persuading employers that placements are easy. It is about understanding what sits behind the concern and exploring whether a safe, realistic and manageable placement model could be designed.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Use this resource during early employer conversations, follow-up discussions or placement planning meetings. For each concern, consider:

- what might sit behind this concern
- what reassurance or information might help
- what question could move the conversation forward
- what placement design options could make this more manageable

This resource should be used alongside local placement processes, risk assessment, safeguarding and health and safety procedures.

COMMON CONCERNS AND PRACTICAL RESPONSES

Employer concern	What may sit behind this	Practical response	Useful question to ask	Possible design options
"We do not usually take under-18s."	Concerns about site rules, responsibility, safeguarding, insurance, working around tools or plant, domestic visits, lone working or customer premises.	Acknowledge the concern. Explore whether this is a fixed company or site policy, an access restriction, or a concern about how risk, supervision and responsibility would be managed. Students should only undertake safe, appropriate and supervised activity. The college or school should explain the health and safety preparation already completed and whether any relevant CSCS or sector skills card is held or being worked towards.	Is this a formal company or site policy, an access requirement, or mainly a concern about managing risk, supervision and responsibility?	Check site and client rules early; observation-only start; selected work areas; lower-risk settings; named supervisor; later placement timing; avoiding lone working or unsuitable sites.
"Our work involves live services, tools or site risks."	Real concerns about electrical systems, gas work, hot works, working at height, confined spaces, unfinished construction environments, vehicles, tools, plant or live customer sites.	Agree that safety comes first. A placement does not need to involve high-risk activity. Explain the student's prior health and safety preparation and any relevant CSCS or sector skills card where applicable. These may provide reassurance, but do not replace employer induction, risk assessment, supervision, site rules or task-specific controls.	Which parts of your work would definitely be unsuitable, and which parts could a student safely observe or support?	Agree exclusions first; observation in higher-risk areas; workshop or depot activity; supervised preparation; documentation; phased responsibility; employer induction and site-specific briefing.
"We are mobile and work across different sites."	Concerns about travel, changing locations, site induction, supervision, access permissions, transport arrangements and knowing where the student should report.	Mobile work can sometimes be planned, but the arrangements need to be clear. Agree where the student starts, who they are with, which locations are suitable and how changes will be managed.	Are there particular sites, jobs or working patterns that would be more suitable for a student?	Depot/workshop start; selected sites only; fixed supervisor; planned routes; pre-agreed locations; multi-site plan; avoiding unsuitable visits.
"We do not have time to supervise someone."	Supervisors may be moving between jobs, working to call-out times, managing small teams, dealing with customers or completing time-sensitive installation, service or maintenance work. They may be concerned that a student will need constant attention or slow the job down.	Acknowledge that supervision is a real requirement. Design the placement around clear boundaries, appropriate activity and planned check-ins. Students should not work independently. They may shadow or work alongside an apprentice, mentor or experienced colleague, but the employer must identify who holds responsibility for supervision and safety.	"Who in the team could the student safely shadow or learn from, and what supervision would be realistic during the working day?"	Paired shadowing; apprentice or buddy support; named supervisor; planned check-ins; observation-first model; selected work areas; block placement; simple activity plan; school or college contact and review points.
"Day release does not fit how our work is scheduled."	Jobs may not fall neatly on the same day each week. Useful activity may cluster around installations, commissioning, maintenance windows, handover, shutdowns or holiday periods.	Explore flexible models. Placements may work better in blocks, around specific jobs, during quieter periods or across different parts of the business.	What pattern would fit your work better than one day a week?	Block placement; phased placement; job-linked placement; holiday activity; rotation model; split placement across sites or teams.

Employer concern	What may sit behind this	Practical response	Useful question to ask	Possible design options
"Students are not work-ready."	Previous poor experiences, concerns about punctuality, behaviour, phone use, confidence, maturity, communication or safety awareness.	Acknowledge that readiness matters. Explain how the student has been prepared and assessed before placement, including expectations around punctuality, communication, phone use, professional behaviour and safety. Where relevant, explain any health and safety learning or CSCS or sector skills-card preparation. Agree the behaviours the employer needs to see and how concerns will be raised early.	What behaviours would make you confident that a student was ready to be in your workplace?	Readiness conversation and check before placement; employer expectations shared with the student; trial visit; phased start; named contacts; early review point.
"Our work is too specialist for a student."	Employers may assume students need detailed technical knowledge or that there is no value unless they can contribute to specialist tasks.	Students do not need to carry out specialist work to benefit. They can learn by observing qualified staff, seeing how work is planned, helping prepare, recording information and understanding safety and problem-solving.	Which parts of the work require qualified staff only, and which parts could a student safely observe or help prepare for?	Observation; shadowing; preparation tasks; stock/materials checks; documentation; handover support; workshop/depot-based activity.
"We are not sure what the student could safely do."	The employer may not recognise learning opportunities in normal work or may assume the student needs complex technical tasks.	Reframe the placement around observe, support, record and discuss. Meaningful learning can come from seeing how real work happens, not just doing technical tasks.	What parts of your normal work could a student safely observe, help prepare, support, record or discuss?	Use activity planning tool; create simple task menu; link to student contribution sheet; start with observation and build gradually.
"We work in customers' homes or live buildings."	Concerns about professionalism, confidentiality, vulnerable customers, occupied spaces, reputation, behaviour and whether the student should interact directly with customers.	Agree expectations and boundaries in advance. Students should understand professional behaviour, confidentiality and customer care. Check whether client, tenant or site permission is needed. Not all customer-facing activity requires direct student interaction, and sensitive or unsuitable visits should be excluded.	Where could a student observe customer communication safely, without taking responsibility for it?	Shadowing or observation only; supervisor-led introductions; selected customer settings; office or depot tasks; agreed confidentiality expectations; avoiding sensitive visits; clear route for concerns.
"We cannot commit to the full placement yet."	The employer may be interested but unsure about capacity, timing, project pipeline, suitability of the student or whether the model will work.	Start with a planning conversation. A placement can be explored in stages before final commitment, with clear review points.	Would it be useful to start by identifying a short period, project or work area that could be realistic?	Initial visit; short taster; phased model; review point; future block; shared placement model; later start date.
"We do not have enough suitable work to fill the placement."	The employer may assume the student needs a continuous stream of technical tasks or must be productive every hour.	A worthwhile placement can combine observation, supervised support, preparation, documentation, meetings, reflection and insight into how the business operates. Start with normal workflow and identify where learning can happen safely. The provider should help build a realistic activity plan rather than expect the employer to invent work.	Across a normal week or project, where could a student observe, prepare, support, record, discuss or reflect on real work?	Simple activity menu; rotation across suitable teams or work areas; job-linked blocks; workshop or depot time; documentation and planning activity; scheduled reflection; shared model where locally approved.

CONVERSATION PRINCIPLES

When responding to employer concerns:

- acknowledge the concern as valid
- avoid suggesting that placements are simple or risk-free
- ask what sits behind the concern
- explore what might be possible rather than pushing for a yes
- offer flexible models where appropriate
- be clear about what students can and cannot do
- explain what support the college or school will provide
- agree next steps clearly

Useful phrase: "Let's look at what would be realistic and safe in your setting, rather than assuming the placement has to follow one fixed model."

WHEN NOT TO PROCEED

Some concerns may mean a placement is not appropriate at that time. For example, this may be the case if:

- the employer cannot provide safe supervision
- the work environment is unsuitable for a student
- insurance, site access or customer permissions cannot be resolved
- the employer cannot identify any safe or meaningful activity
- the placement would place unreasonable pressure on staff
- the student is not yet ready for that setting

It is better to pause, redesign or revisit a placement than proceed with an arrangement that is unlikely to be safe, manageable or valuable.

Employer concerns are not barriers to be dismissed. They are the starting point for better placement design.

In building services settings, the most successful placements are often those where the college or school and employer have been honest about risk, capacity, supervision and expectations from the beginning.

The aim is not to persuade every employer to say yes. It is to identify where a safe, realistic and worthwhile placement can be designed.

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