

**Session Title:** Parent Focus Group – T Levels

**Date:** Thursday 6 June 2025

**Facilitator:** Claire Munroe, Parent Engagement Officer (Ada, the National College for Digital Skills)

**Participants:**

- Helen (parent of Year 11 student)
  - Raj (parent of Year 10 student)
  - Leila (parent of Year 11 student)
  - Tom (parent of Year 12 student)
  - Anisha (parent of Year 10 student)
  - Denise (parent of Year 11 student)
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**Claire:**

Thanks so much again, everyone, for making time this evening. Just to say again – there's no right or wrong opinion here. We're running these sessions because we genuinely want to understand what parents are hearing, thinking, worrying about – especially around T Levels, which we know are still new for a lot of people.

So maybe just to kick things off – what are your general impressions so far? What do you know about T Levels?

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**Helen:**

I mean... not loads, to be honest. My daughter mentioned them but I don't think she really gets what they are either. I don't... are they the same as BTECs or more like A levels?

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**Anisha:**

Yeah same here. My son got some flyer about it from school and it looked interesting, he seems excited about it, but we didn't know whether it was something employers actually take seriously yet. I've never heard of it?

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**Leila:**

My son's quite hands-on, so I actually thought the T Level sounded good – like, more practical. But then I started reading more about it and got worried about the uni side of things. They don't accept them do they?

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**Claire:**

That's a really common question. Most unis do accept T Levels – but not all. Especially the more traditional ones like Oxbridge, who haven't fully embraced them yet.

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**Raj:**

Yeah see, that's the thing. My son is only Year 10 but we're already thinking ahead. What if he wants to apply abroad? Or changes his mind completely and wants to go into something like law or medicine later? A levels feel safer.

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**Tom:**

Exactly. And it's hard because the schools are kind of pushing T Levels now. But the messaging isn't clear.

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**Denise:**

It doesn't help that every article you see is either saying they're the future or saying no one understands them and employers don't want them. I saw a piece on LinkedIn last week where someone called them a "policy experiment" and I just thought... oh great.

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**Tom:**

Yes! There was a piece in the Guardian about the results kids are getting are really poor, compared to A levels.

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**Claire:**

Yes, we've seen those headlines too. There's been some negative press – a lot of it's based on early data that doesn't always show the full picture.

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**Helen:**

Can I just say though – it's not even about the press for me. It's just... I want to know if it actually leads to something. Like, will she get a job at the end of it? Is that guaranteed?

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**Leila:**

Same here. Especially if employers aren't fully on board yet. I read somewhere that with apprenticeships, companies basically get panel tea if they don't offer them, but with T Levels it's just optional. There's no stick just... what is it? Ladder and stick?

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**Tom:**

Carrot and stick.

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**Leila:**

Yeah that. But no stick. Just hope.

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**Raj:**

And the placements – that's another thing. It sounds great in theory, but how do we know it's not just... I don't know, admin tasks and coffee runs?

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**Anisha:**

Exactly. Like, my niece did a work placement in Year 12 and they just had her stapling things for two weeks! I don't want that for my son.

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**Leila:**

Definitely not.

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**Claire:**

I completely hear that. The placements are meant to be structured – with real training and mentorship. And we vet our employer partners closely. But yes, quality can vary and it's something we monitor constantly.

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**Tom:**

Can I jump in again on the uni thing? I was chatting to another parent and they said Durham had rejected someone with T Levels. Might've just been that student, I don't know, but it makes me worry about how valid they are.

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**Claire:**

Yeah – some unis are still adapting. We are working with UCAS and the Department for Education to keep expanding recognition. But it's a slow process, unfortunately.

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**Helen:**

It just feels like our kids are the test run. Like, once all this settles in five years it'll be great – but they're on the front line of it now... like the guinea pigs

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**Denise:**

Yes – like I don't want her to look back in five years and think “why didn't someone tell me this would limit my options?” Because she's only 15, she's not thinking that far ahead. But I am.

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**Claire:**

That makes sense. I think what I'm hearing is: you want more confidence that it's a stable route, and that it leaves doors open.

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**Anisha:**

Yes. And clearer info. Like even the school couldn't fully explain the difference between the T Level and the tech BTEC to me. All they said was T Levels can be in tents because of the amount of work they have to do.

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**Tom:**

Honestly though, same. The way these qualifications get explained - so confusing. Just tell us what it does for our kid.

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**Raj:**

Yeah. Like what job can they actually get with it?

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**Leila:**

Or if it helps them get to uni. Or both. Just be clearer.

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**Claire:**

This is all incredibly helpful. We're actually rewriting our parent comms off the back of these sessions, so all of this is gold.

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**Helen:**

One more thing – is it true that fewer people passed the T Level exams last year? My friend said something about how only half the students passed the core bit.

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**Claire:**

The first-year results were mixed, yes. But it's worth noting that it was a small pilot group and lots of lessons have been learned since. Pass rates have improved each year – but that stat has definitely done the rounds.

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**Denise:**

Hmmm.

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**Claire:**

Ok, next up I'd like to talk about apprenticeships. What's your sense of them as an option?

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**Anisha:**

Honestly, I still think "plumber" or "electrician" when I hear apprenticeship. I know that's outdated, but that's where my brain goes.

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**Tom:**

Yeah same. Like, I know you can do computing apprenticeships, but it's not what most people picture.

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**Leila:**

Definitely - when I think of apprenticeships I think it's for people who can't get into uni. You tell people your kid got into Manchester or Leeds and they're impressed. If you say "he's doing an apprenticeship" they go... "oh right."

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**Raj:**

Yeah, and not everyone realises they can end up with a full degree at the end of it. Like a proper uni degree. I'm all for it personally, but some of the parents I talk to see it as a risky option too.

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**Denise:**

That's the bit that needs shouting about more. I didn't even realise until last year that they can study and work and not end up in debt. I mean... that's massive.

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**Helen:**

But also – they've got to get a good one. Like, not just any apprenticeship. I'd want to know the company's decent and they're not just using cheap labour.

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**Claire:**

Completely fair. We work closely with employers and monitor placements carefully – but yes, the variation across the sector is something we're very aware of. Ok well, that's all we have time for right now. Thank you all again – seriously, this is so valuable. I'll follow up with notes and feel free to reach out if you want a 1-to-1 chat at any point.