

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS: T LEVELS

Institution of
**MECHANICAL
ENGINEERS**

**SURVEY RESULTS
2022**

Improving the world through engineering

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PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS: T LEVELS – KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Only 1 in 5 people (18%) have heard of T Levels.



Among those who heard T-levels, the majority (71%) know little about the qualification.



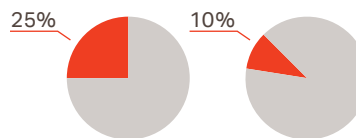
Highest awareness is among parents of 16–18-year-olds (39%).



In terms of age groups, young people 18–24 are most aware with one in three (29%) saying they have heard of T Levels.



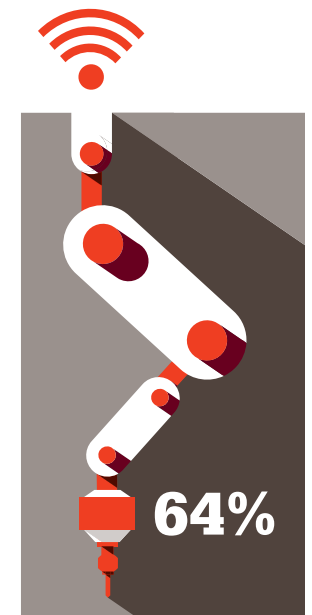
People in the higher AB social bracket are more likely to know of them (25%) than respondents in the DE bracket (10%).



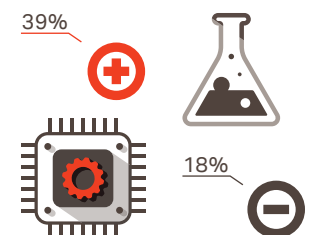
Awareness is greatest in south-east England where 23% say they have heard of the qualification.



We also asked about future skills. Six out of ten people (64%) say 16–19-year-olds do not know enough about the skills they will need for their career.



An engineering T Level is due to be introduced this year. The survey found twice as many people (39%) think engineering would be better taught more in a workplace environment, compared to 18% saying this for science.



Two years ago, the Government launched Technical Levels to offer 16–19-year-olds in England a mixture of classroom learning and “on the job” experience in an industry placement.

The new qualification is part of a wider plan to reform the UK’s skills system and boost the prestige of technical education to improve both productivity and international competitiveness.

The two-year courses follow GCSEs and are equivalent to 3 A levels. They have been launched so far in a range of subjects including construction, business and administration and education and childcare.

In September 2022, engineering and manufacturing will be added to the list. As education and skills are among the Institution’s policy priorities, we commissioned ICM Unlimited to carry out a survey to find out awareness of the new qualification. The survey took place in December 2021 and involved around 2,000 participants.

The Government’s goal is for T Levels to become one of the main choices for students after GCSE alongside:

- / Apprenticeships for students who wish to learn a specific occupation ‘on the job’
- / A Levels for students who wish to continue academic education

The Government has described the qualification as combining “the best of apprenticeships and A Levels”, with placements helping support local businesses with the skills they need.

Education Minister Nadhim Zahawi said recently:

“They will enable as many young people as possible to get specialised training that is going to set them up for successful careers. More T Levels mean more highly skilled workers and that means a more robust economic recovery and growth.”

Although the poll found low awareness of the new qualification, people understood it is designed to raise technical knowledge and allow more practical education in schools.

Just over 5,000 new T Level students started their courses in September 2021, with 10 T level subjects taught so far in England, a figure expected to rise to 20 by 2023¹.

T Levels are only being introduced in England. For the rest of the UK, BTECs (available across the UK), NVQs (available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and other vocational courses like Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) will continue to apply.

The key to the success of qualifications for the engineering sector is for industry to see value in the qualification as well as the skills it provides. Companies will also need support to ensure they can provide the experience required for the learners, and that the learners see the value in the options they have once they have completed the T Level.

The short duration of T Level placements -- minimum of 45 days – could limit the value students can bring to a company and limit the knowledge and skills students can acquire.

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1042614/2021_T_Level_Action_Plan_Formatted_Clean_Version_15_Dec.pdf

AWARENESS OF T LEVELS

The poll found low levels of awareness among the public about T Levels and among those people who have heard of them, few (26%) said they knew much about the new qualification.

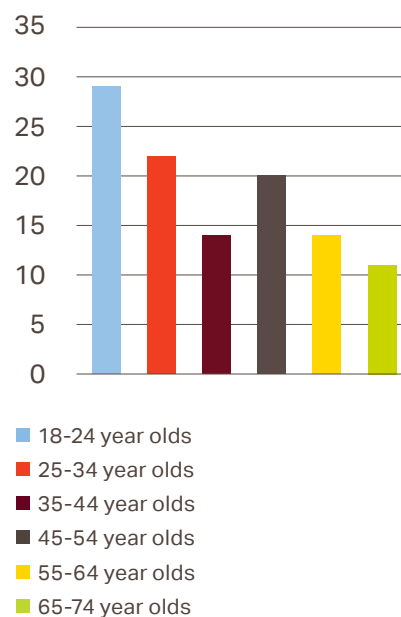
Only 1 in 5 people (18%) say they have heard of them, rising to 1 in 4 (27%) parents.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, highest awareness was found among parents of 16-19 years-olds, with 39% saying they had heard of T Levels. However, of these parents, only 18% said they know a lot or a fair amount about the qualification.

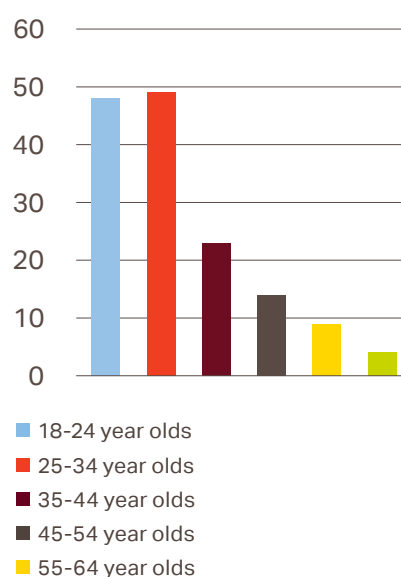
In terms of age groups, young people between 18 and 24 were most likely to have heard of them (Graph 1) and half of these respondents said they felt well informed about the qualification (Graph 2). This group and 25-34-year-olds knew far more about the qualification than any other age group.

These findings highlight the need for the Government and the education sector to raise the profile of the new qualification if it is to be a success and attract young people.

Graph 1. Have heard about what percentage of people heard about T Levels, by age group.



Graph 2. How much do you know about T Levels? Percentage of people saying they know a lot or fair amount, by age group.



- <https://www.imeche.org/policy-and-press/reports/detail/the-culture-of-engineering-in-schools>
- <https://www.engineeringuk.com/research/briefings/securing-the-future-stem-careers-provision-in-schools-and-colleges-in-england/>

04

WORKPLACE TEACHING

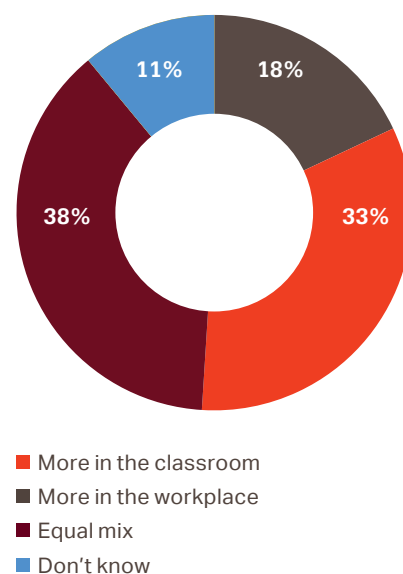
It was interesting to see how attitudes differed towards the teaching of education and science. Twice as many people thought engineering would be better taught in a work environment compared to science. Four in ten people (39%) say engineering should be taught more in a workplace environment, compared to 1 one in five (18%) for science (Graphs 3 and 4).

This shows that people see the value in vocational routes to employment, including apprenticeships.

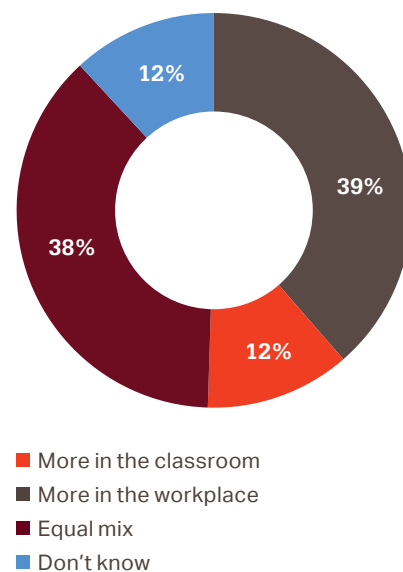
We also wanted to find out how prepared people thought students were for the world of work. Six out of ten people (64%) say 16-19-year-olds do not know enough about the future skills they will need for their career.

It is hoped that the placement aspect of the T Level will give learners an insight into real engineering projects and the skills required in the field.

Graph 3. Where should science be taught?



Graph 4. Where should engineering be taught?



CAREERS ADVICE

The survey found that people thought careers advisers should play a much greater role in giving students guidance.

It found that 70% of people said 16-to-19-year-olds should get help from careers advisers whereas only 37% of people said students get advice today from careers advisers (Graphs 5 and 6). They said careers advisers should be the top source of advice, followed by teachers and then parents.

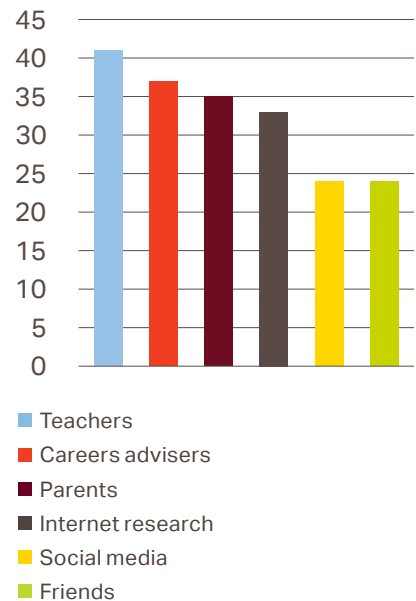
A recent joint report from Engineering UK and several Professional Engineering Institutions, including IMechE, recognises that teachers do not feel well equipped to give the careers advice, especially for STEM subjects. The Government needs to invest in careers hubs and teachers' CPD to ensure that school leavers are being given the right information for them to make the right choices.⁴

All these messages were re-iterated in the 2021 Engineering brand monitor, where teachers said that they think engineering is a good career to go into but need assistance in delivering that in the classroom⁵.

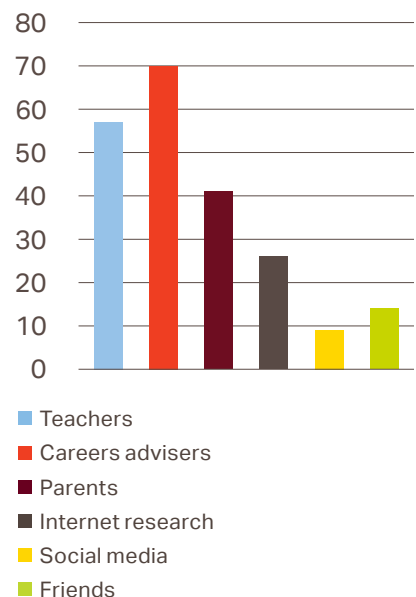
The IET 2021 skills survey found that businesses feel that there are gaps in the technical skills of their workforce. They are also finding they have to invest in upskilling their workforce. It is widely known that within engineering, skills are required at all levels including the technician / skilled craft level⁶.

An IMechE report in 2017 on apprenticeships highlights their importance for the diversity of the workforce⁷.

Graph 5. Where do you think 16-19-year-olds get most careers advice from?



Graph 6. Where do you think 16-19-year-olds should get most advice from?



4. <https://www.engineeringuk.com/research/briefings/securing-the-future-stem-careers-provision-in-schools-and-colleges-in-england/>

5. <https://www.engineeringuk.com/research/engineering-brand-monitor/>

6. <https://tinyurl.com/4mhwa3m8>

7. <https://www.imeche.org/policy-and-press/reports/detail/apprenticeships-in-the-education-and-skills-landscapes-of-england>

Our poll's findings show there is still much work to raise awareness of the new qualification but also around the perception of engineering as a whole. We need to raise understanding among young people and their parents and companies who could potentially offer placements for T Level students.

The engineering T Level course starts in September and time is of the essence to enable everything to be in place in time. Capacity is tight in schools and FE Colleges who are having to prepare for the new course while continuing with their existing teaching.

Universities will also have to prepare themselves for when the first generation of students with an engineering T Level look to apply for degree courses.

T Levels will operate in local ecosystems, i.e. companies local to the T Level colleges are best positioned to provide the placements. This will create helpful links with local business and schools/ colleges, supporting growth and skills development. To have schools, pupils, teachers and parents understanding the businesses on their doorstep will help increase participation in STEM and enable local sustainable ecosystems.

Institutions like IMechE can help raise awareness among our members and their employers. Our Education Policy Adviser Lydia Amarquaye recently wrote an article on T Levels for our membership magazine Professional Engineering. In the article, Lydia calls on industry to support the new qualification as hopefully many engineers will come through this route and it will have a positive effect to reduce the skills gap⁸.

8. https://www.imeche.org/news/news-article/engineering-t-levels-are-coming-here%27s-what-you-need-to-know?utm_source=social&utm_medium=twitter&utm_term=&utm_content=&utm_campaign=institution

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