T Levels & apprenticeships

Compare the course. Compare the job. Ask questions.

Both include learning, practical skills and assessment. The main difference is whether you are a student on a course or an employee in a paid job.

COMPARE	T LEVEL	APPRENTICESHIP
Your status	A student on a full-time course, usually at a college or school.	An employee, aged 16 or over: you have a paid job and a training programme.
Where you learn	Mostly at college or school, with a work placement of at least 315 hours (about 45 days). Some placements are longer.	Mostly through your job, with planned training from a college or another provider. Training happens in paid working time.
Qualification level	Level 3. One T Level is broadly the same size as three A Levels.	Different apprenticeships run from Level 2 to Level 7, including degree apprenticeships.
How long	Usually two years after GCSEs.	Depends on the job and level: from eight months to several years.
Pay	No course salary. Employers do not have to pay for the placement, though some offer pay or expenses.	You earn a wage, including during required training. The vacancy and contract state the pay.
Fees and costs	Normally no tuition fees if you start before age 19. Ask about eligibility, travel, kit and placement costs.	You do not pay apprenticeship training fees. Budget for travel and other day-to-day costs.
How you apply	Apply to the college or school. Check its subjects, GCSE requirements and interview process.	Apply for a job vacancy. Employers select applicants, often using an application, interview or tests.
What comes next	Work, an apprenticeship or further study, including some university courses. Check course-specific entry requirements.	Work in your occupation or further training. You may apply for a higher apprenticeship or further study.

Check the actual offer: the right starting level depends on the occupation, your existing skills and the course or employer's requirements.

T Level guide | Apprenticeship guide | Pay and training | Placement payments

What will it involve?

Ask about the weekly timetable, assessment and support.

On a T Level

You attend taught lessons and practical sessions. You also complete a work placement, which may be in a block or spread across the course.

Ask the college how placements are arranged, where you might travel and who helps if there is a problem.

On an apprenticeship

You do a real job and learn the skills it needs. Training may be weekly, in blocks, at work, online or with a college or training provider.

Ask the employer about hours, shifts, paid training time, travel and holiday arrangements.

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?

T Levels: exams, an employer-set project and tasks showing the skills needed in your chosen field. For example, you may design software or complete engineering tasks. You must also complete the placement.

Apprenticeships: assessment varies by programme. It may include someone observing you at work, practical tasks, questions, a project or a discussion using examples of your work. Ask which methods apply to the exact apprenticeship.

BEFORE YOU COMPARE THE MONEY

Check the wage in the apprenticeship advert and the legal minimum for your age and training year. Compare travel, meals and equipment costs too. T Level students can ask their college about bursaries and help with placement expenses.

WHAT IF I CANNOT FIND AN APPRENTICESHIP?

Finding an employer can take time. You can apply to college as well as for apprenticeship jobs. A college course can help you build skills and experience while you keep applying. Ask for feedback on applications and speak to a careers adviser before changing courses.

Ask about support: learning support, accessibility, equipment and changes to assessment arrangements. Discuss what you need with the college, training provider or employer.

T Level placement advice | Apprentice pay and conditions | Applying and feedback

Two routes into engineering

Aisha and Alex are fictional. The named courses are real examples.

Both have five GCSEs at grades 4-6, including English and grade 5 in maths and science. They explore different ways to learn engineering skills.



Aisha

College and placement

1. Apply to college

She chooses Truro & Penwith's Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control T Level, advertised for September 2027.

2. Study and practise

She learns engineering at college, completes practical tasks and exams, and gains experience on her work placement.

3. Plan the next step

After completing the T Level, she could apply for work, a higher apprenticeship or an engineering degree that accepts it.



Alex

Paid job and training

1. Apply for a job

He applies for engineering apprenticeships. In this story, an employer offers him a paid job with training.

2. Learn while employed

He takes the Level 3 Mechatronics Maintenance Technician apprenticeship through Truro & Penwith, learning to maintain machines.

3. Plan the next step

After completing his apprenticeship, he could apply for maintenance technician roles or explore further training.

If Alex does not find a job straight away: he could start a college engineering course, build practical experience and continue applying. Aisha can also apply for apprenticeships while at college.

Keep choices open: a T Level can lead to an apprenticeship, but does not guarantee one. Earlier study may affect the training you need; the employer and provider check this. Neither route guarantees a job or a university place.

EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

Find a T Level | Find an apprenticeship | Cornwall College | Truro & Penwith