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MEDIA RELEASE

[30/09/2026]

Local T-Level students start apprenticeships after gaining hands-on qualification

More students are choosing Technical (T) Levels than ever before, with enrolments between the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 academic years increasing by **7.6%**, according to the Department of Education.

The qualification, that is equivalent to three A-Levels, combines classroom learning with hands-on work experience. It was first rolled out in **September 2020** and there are now 21 courses available, ranging from Digital Data Analytics to Legal Services.

For the last two years Lincolnshire Co-op has worked with **The Priory Witham Academy** and **The Priory Lincoln Academy** to offer students studying a T-Level in Management and Administration and Digital (Cyber Security) nine weeks of work experience.

During the placement, the students work across different teams in the co-op's Support Centre including cyber security, community, talent acquisition, central operations, project management and finance.

The retailer provided T-level placements to 6 students last year and to a further 7 this year, who are set to complete their work experience in October 2026.

Former Priory Witham Academy student **Bailey Smithson** and **Owen Bradley**, who studied at Priory Lincoln Academy, completed their work experience in October 2025.

After standing out during their placements and completing their T-Levels in summer 2026, both started full-time apprenticeships at Lincolnshire Co-op's Support Centre in June 2026.

Project Apprentice Bailey spent time with the teams in Sustainability and Procurement, Project Management and Project Governance during his placement.

Bailey said: *"I realised I wanted to work at Lincolnshire Co-op because the teams I worked with were so supportive and welcoming. If I had any questions, they took the time to help and made me feel valued."*

"When I was offered the apprenticeship, I was so proud and couldn't wait to get started. From developing my skills to having the opportunity to make a difference within the business and beyond, I've already made so much progress in my new role."

Owen, IT Application Apprentice, gained experience in the IT Support Team and Application Management Team.

Owen said: *"My placement prepared me for my apprenticeship because it was treated like a real job, giving me hands-on experience, responsibility, a clear understanding of workplace expectations, and skills I use in my role every day."*

"If anyone is considering T-Level's I would highly recommend it. Not only do you get a qualification, but you also get a placement opportunity, which can lead you to gaining connections, or even going straight into the industry you want to work in."

83 colleagues are currently studying an apprenticeship across Lincolnshire Co-op in a variety of courses like Data Analytics and Pharmacy Services. Since 2020, **332 colleagues** have been enrolled onto an apprenticeship.

Since November 2021, the Society has also supported the government's **Restart Scheme**, which is an employment programme that helps long-term unemployed people learn how to apply for jobs and prepare for interviews, as well as gaining valuable work experience.

In under five years, Lincolnshire Co-op has welcomed **236** participants for a two-week work experience placement through the scheme.

Over 30 of these individuals have secured permanent positions within the business across areas including Food Stores and Property.

Every year, the co-operative also works with the **University of Lincoln** to provide 10 law students with a week of work experience with the Corporate Confidence and Assurance team.

These placements give students an insight into the world of an in-house practitioner and are an opportunity for students to boost their CVs and stand out to employers.

Erika Stainton, Lincolnshire Co-op's Careers Development Lead, said: *"Although T-Levels are still a new qualification, we are seeing growing numbers of students choosing this route because of the valuable blend of classroom learning and industry experience."*

"At Lincolnshire Co-op, we're proud to support different pathways of progression that help people of all ages and experience develop the skills, knowledge and confidence needed for their future careers and ultimately make life better in our communities."

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CONTACT DETAILS NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Notes to editors:

1. **Lincolnshire Co-op** is an independent co-operative society. Its purpose is to bring together ideas, energy and resources to make life better in communities. It has around 300,000 members and 2,900 local colleagues in Lincolnshire and the surrounding counties and an elected board of directors who oversee the business. The society provides **valued services** and supports the **local economy** from outlets across its trading area including food stores, filling stations, post offices, travel branches, funeral homes, a florist, a crematorium and community libraries. It also cares for people's **health and wellbeing** through its pharmacies and support for a network of wellbeing walks. Local good causes benefit through its Community Champions scheme and together, colleagues and members also look after the **local environment** through volunteering.

As well as its trading outlets, Lincolnshire Co-op owns properties, from flats and houses to commercial premises. The society brings land and buildings back into use to create attractive environments. With Lincolnshire Co-op as landlord, rents stay local and are invested in schemes that benefit the community.