

T-Levels Week Interview: Lisa and Ali

Last week was T-Levels Week, a national awareness week that aims to celebrate T-level students, providers and placement organisations.

In this interview, we sat down with Lisa Moizer, a project manager in the EWS Directorate and supervisor of Ali Imran, her T-Level placement student. Ali is studying a Management and Administration T-Level course at Stockport College and combines classroom learning with one day a week at the GMCA.

We dug into how to find a perfect match, what sort of work a T-Level student can do, and whether any preconceptions of hosting a T-Level student have been proven right or wrong.

Lisa, were you specifically looking for a T-Level student?

Lisa: Not exactly! Working in the EWS directorate, you're surrounded by inspiring activity that gives young people in our city-region the best chance to thrive. I asked myself, "what am I doing to give young people opportunities here in the GMCA" and that led me to want to support a T-Level placement.

What drew you to a T-Level student rather than another early careers student, such as an apprentice?

Lisa: I looked at three things: the type of work, the length of the project and the amount of work. I knew I had a couple of longer-term projects that could benefit from some additional support. The type of work includes auditing webpages and introducing a new technical tool, a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. Alongside the projects, I knew there would be the opportunity for other ad hoc tasks, which also lend themselves well to the structure of a T-Level placement.

So, you worked with the People Services team to get a job spec together and Ali applied! How did you find the placement at the GMCA, Ali?

Ali: My college provides a lot of support for T-Level students to find and apply for placements and it was the careers officer who showed me the placement here at the GMCA. She helped me to create a CV and cover letter, and I was lucky enough to get an interview.

Lisa: We have great relationships with colleges across Greater Manchester from the work we do across GMCA that we can definitely use to our advantage when looking for young talent.

What was the interview process like?

Ali: I actually really enjoyed it. My Dad is a businessman; I have visited his office and seen interviews taking place, so I didn't feel too nervous. I had some interviews with other organisations as well, but the role at the GMCA stood out to me as one where I'd learn a lot and the people were friendly too.

Fast forward to Ali's first day, what did you have to prepare for that to set Ali up for success?

Lisa: I approached it like any new starter, there's a checklist of things you need to do, such as sorting their IT equipment, giving them an office tour and setting them up with a buddy. As most T-Level students are under 18, there's also an added layer to employee safeguarding that you have to keep in mind but the Learning and Development Team are fantastically supportive. What's been really nice is the support from members of the team, who've previously hosted T-Level students. I would like to support future placement supervisors in the same way!

Did you need to change your working pattern?

Lisa: Not really. As Ali is with us every Monday, I know I need to be in the office on that day and I've been able to make that work quite easily.

What was the first day like for you Ali?

Ali: On my first day with Lisa, there was a training session for the new CRM tool the team were introducing.

Lisa: We had the CRM training session planned weeks in advance, so it was great timing. I was delighted that Ali could join in as it was a key part of the project he's supporting.

How was it combining a work placement with college?

Ali: It hasn't been too difficult because I'm enjoying it so much!

What's it been like for you, Lisa, having a T-Level placement student in the team?

Lisa: I don't know many 17-year-olds so I didn't quite know what to expect from Ali, but I can safely say he's a wonderful addition to our team. He's determined, professional and has a great attitude to work.

Have there been any expected or unexpected benefits of hosting a T-Level student?

Lisa: It's not a one-way street. We often talk about giving young people opportunities, but we don't always think about the benefits we get from it! We've been able to offer mentorship opportunities to existing team members, use our experience to support other organisations looking to host placements, and ask Ali to provide his feedback from his point of view to understand how we can better serve young people in the work we do here at the GMCA.

What's been your favourite thing about your placement at the GMCA?

Ali: My project with the new CRM was really cool because I'd actually learned about CRMs as part of my T Level course, so I was able to apply that knowledge to my work.

Would you recommend a placement at the GMCA?

Ali: I already have! I have some friends from college who have applied for T-Level placements here next year. I'd love to come back and work here as a Degree Apprentice.

Lisa, what's one piece of advice you'd give to another GMCA colleague looking to take on a T-Level student?

Lisa: Ask yourself, "what could my team get from this?". Let's flip the narrative of only the T-Level student getting something from the experience and realise how much we can gain too.

Thank you to Lisa and Ali for sharing their experiences.

T-Level courses range from marketing to accounting to digital services. Placements, which are 45 days minimum, can be done in blocks (i.e., a few weeks in a row) or over a prolonged period (i.e., once a week).

Reach out to Isobel Bramley in the Learning and Development Team to discuss hosting a T-Level student in your team. If you would like an informal chat about the process and experience, Lisa is happy for you to get in touch with her.