National College for Digital Skills

T-Level - Digital Software Development[1] Learner Handbook (2025-2027)

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[1] https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/TLevels/digital-software-development/2025/specification-and-sample-assessment-materials/digital-dsd-specification.pdf

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Computer Science at Ada

"Computers are incredibly fast, accurate, and stupid. Human beings are incredibly slow, inaccurate, and brilliant. Together they are powerful beyond imagination."- Albert Einstein

Computer Science at Ada is a groundbreaking effort to change the way we educate young people to be job-ready for the future. It is core to all pathways offered by the college and all learners have at least 10 hours per week of timetabled Computer Science lessons. However, as Digital T-Level students you will have at least 20 hours of taught computing class per week. The Computer Science curriculum actively incorporates the expertise of our digital industry partners alongside that of our experienced teaching team and ensures our programmes of study offer outstanding opportunities for learners to develop in-demand, industry-ready skills that allow them to make excellent progress in their chosen digital career.

Computer Science is at the heart of the digital revolution affecting all aspects of our working and social lives. Its impact is unparalleled and its reach unrivalled. We have designed our curriculum to cohesively bring together a diverse range of content areas that underpin the wider Computer Science field and for which we have evidenced strong industry demand. Our course choice of T-Level Digital Software Development allows us to do this effectively as the range and scope of its structure and the associated knowledge and practical skills-based, projects and examinations undertaken, provide our learners with the opportunity to develop the essential understanding and skills for a wide variety of software development digital careers underpinned by a broad Computer Science curriculum. This ensures excellent progression opportunities to Degree Apprenticeships in Software Development, Tech Consulting, Networking, and Cybersecurity or on to university courses such as Computer Science, Cybersecurity, Games Design and Development, and Data Analytics.

How Computer Science is taught at Ada

- We lead with concepts - supporting learners in the acquisition of knowledge, through the use of key concepts, terms and vocabulary, providing opportunities to build a shared and consistent understanding;
- We use project-based learning activities and direct industry engagement to provide learners with ample opportunity to apply and consolidate their knowledge and skills;
- We encourage learner collaboration through paired programming and structured group tasks in order to stimulate classroom discussion, articulation of concepts and development of a shared understanding;
- We model processes and practices using techniques such as worked examples and live coding and believe modelling is particularly beneficial as a means of providing scaffolding;

- We provide activities with different levels of direction, scaffolding and support that promote active learning, ranging from highly structured to more exploratory tasks with the aim of encouraging greater learner independence;
- We bring abstract concepts to life with real-world, suitably diverse, contextual examples and a focus on interdependencies within the wider Computer Science curriculum and between Ada's different subject areas;
- We encourage program comprehension through a variety of activities to consolidate knowledge and understanding of the function and structure of programs, including debugging, tracing and Parson's Problems;
- We use formative questioning to challenge misconceptions and adapt teaching to address them as they occur;
- We use supportive research-based frameworks when planning lessons, such as PRIMM (Predict, Run, Investigate, Modify, Make) and Use-Modify-Create in programming lessons;
- We encourage learners to value the importance of failure and to see it as an intrinsic part of the iterative process of coding, testing and debugging.
- We apply a semantic waves approach to teach new concepts by first unpacking complex terms and ideas, exploring these ideas in unplugged and familiar contexts, then repacking this new understanding into the original concept;
- We facilitate hands-on learning opportunities using physical computing as appropriate to enhance learning opportunities and provide learners with a creative, engaging context to explore and apply computing concepts;
- We maximise the use of lesson time by primarily using independent study for activities that reinforce concepts and provide rigorous practice of skills, and which do not need to be completed in class;
- We encourage the development of rigour through learners' timely completion of independent study tasks, class presentations - individual and group, and critical reflection through the giving and receiving of both verbal and written feedback;
- We challenge our learners to think about how a problem studied may be extended and developed and to consider what additional insights this might lead to;
- We strive to create a collaborative and curious culture of learning by supporting classroom discussions which value all learners' ideas;
- We reward engagement and accomplishment (not just academic achievement) to further encourage the development of our values;
- We track our learners across each of their taught content areas and review their expected progress with them at regular intervals throughout the academic year and implement rigorous intervention programmes should that expected progress not be met.

Computer Science Teaching Team

The following staff are the core members of Ada's Computer Science teaching team:

Mark Campbell (markcampbell@ada.ac.uk) - Assistant Principal and Curriculum Lead

Mark's journey to becoming Ada's dynamic curriculum development lead and former Head of Computer Science began at school as part of the UK's first cohort of computer science students in the late 1970s. With a degree in computer science and a master's in distributed systems, he went on to gain extensive experience in the computing industry and later as a senior university lecturer, creating and validating a range of innovative courses, including in cyber security and networking. While volunteering as a STEM Ambassador, Mark decided to shift to teaching school and college students, believing this was the best way to channel his enthusiasm and experience in computing—and so he embarked on his PGCE. At Ada, his inspirational leadership and teaching are helping shape a project-driven, industry-supported computing curriculum that empowers students to pursue their dream careers in tech. This impact was recognised in June 2024, when Mark was selected from thousands of nominees to win the Silver Award for Further Education Lecturer of the Year in The Pearson National Teaching Awards.

Sarah Salimullah (sarah@ada.ac.uk) - Principal

Sarah is Ada's Principal and a highly qualified Computer Scientist and teacher with nearly two decades of experience in education. After gaining a BSc in Computer Science (Distributed Systems) and a PGCE in ICT, she taught Computer Science at Haverstock School for over 12 years before progressing to Head of Faculty and then Assistant Headteacher. She has also worked as an Assessment Specialist for Pearson, strengthening her expertise in national standards. Since joining Ada in 2024, Sarah has led the Sixth Form with a focus on innovation, inclusion, and ensuring programmes like the T-Level in Digital Software Development prepare students with the skills, creativity, and confidence to succeed in the digital sector.

Neelu Vasishth (neelu@ada.ac.uk) - Head of Computer Science Department

Neelu is an experienced industry professional and educator. She began her journey in Computer Science Engineering (with Honors) in 1999, followed by an executive management programme at one of India's leading business schools. The first decade of her career was dedicated to software development and large-scale engineering management, with professional experience divided between Germany and India. During this time, she worked with major technology firms such as Hughes Systique, Lucent Technologies, and L&T Infotech, as well as with start-ups in the mobile telephony sector. In 2017, Neelu completed a PGCE in Computer Science at King's College London and has been teaching the subject since then. Drawing on her professional coding experience, she aims to inspire students and broaden their understanding of real-world computing. In January 2024, she was appointed Head of the Computer Science Department, a role through which she continues to lead with a focus on innovative, inclusive teaching practices that promote equality and reflect cultural diversity.

Jan Siemaszko (jan@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Lead Practitioner

Jan holds an MA (combined Bachelor and Master's degree) in Computing from the University of Aberdeen, where he received multiple awards, including recognition for a local government data analytics project and a prize for academic excellence. He went on to complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at King's College London before joining Ada, the National College for Digital Skills, in August 2022. In 2024, Jan was promoted to Computer Science Lead Practitioner. In this role, he combines academic rigour with a passion for innovative teaching, drawing on both his technical expertise and commitment to student development to help shape the department's curriculum and pedagogy.

Mesay Gashaw (mesay@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Lead Practitioner

Mesay holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Mathematics, with a major in Mathematics and a minor in Physics. He began his career as a computer programmer for Ethiopian Airlines before pursuing further studies in computing. He holds a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Computer Science and a Master of Science (MSc) in Internet and Database Systems. In addition, he has earned a Diploma in Education and Certificate in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment and Practice. Mesay has also completed the National Professional Qualification for Leading Teacher Development (NPQLTD) and holds Fellowship status with the Society for Education and Training (FSET). He is an active member of the Practitioner Advisory Group (PAG) for SET. With over 15 years of experience teaching IT and Computing in the post-compulsory education sector, Mesay has assumed various roles in addition to teaching, including Lead Internal Verifier and Course Leader.

Omar Mufti (omar@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Teacher

Omar completed a BSc in Computer Science and then an MSc in Internet Technology at the University of Greenwich, London. Omar then trained to be a Further Education lecturer and was awarded a Postgraduate Certificate (PGCE) in Further Education. Since completing his study, Omar has gained over eighteen years experience as a computing lecturer in FE colleges. Initially working at Croydon College and then moving to Uxbridge College (now part of HCUC - Harrow, Richmond & Uxbridge Colleges). Whilst at HCUC. Omar taught mostly on BTEC Information Technology programmes (Level 1 through to Level 3), but also taught on HNC/HND provision.

Hari Swaminathan (hari@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Teacher

Hari completed a BEng (Hons) degree in electronics engineering from Queen Mary, London University in 1991 and an MSc in Electronic Engineering from the University of Wales in 1994. Over the first 15 years of his career, he worked as a software and test engineer at companies including Ericsson, Cisco Systems, and GN Nettest. After completing an MBA at Bayes Business School (2010), he spent the next decade working in network architecture and testing roles at Vodafone and Telefónica O2. He completed the PGCE in computer science at the University of Roehampton in 2024 and joined Ada as a Computer Science teacher in June 2025.

Akhere Ihoeghinlan (akhere@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Teacher

Akhere joins Ada as a newly qualified Computer Science Teacher, having recently completed his PGCE in Computing at King's College London. He holds a BSc in Computer Science from University College London and brings with him valuable industry experience as a former Software Engineer. Akhere has taught across Key Stages 3 to 5, delivering both OCR and Edexcel specifications. He combines strong technical expertise in areas such as Python, JavaScript, systems fundamentals, and cyber security with a clear, supportive teaching approach developed through his training and classroom placements. Passionate about real-world learning, Akhere is committed to equipping students with the practical skills and critical thinking needed to thrive in the digital sector.

Christabel Quarshie (christabel@ada.ac.uk) - Computer Science Teacher

Christabel joins Ada as a newly qualified Computer Science Teacher after completing her PGCE (FE) at the UCL Institute of Education, during which she spent her placement year at Ada. She studied Information Technology Management for Business at Loughborough University and has professional experience in data consultancy, Microsoft 365 solutions, and software development roles. As one of the newest members of Ada's Computer Science team, Christabel brings enthusiasm, fresh insight, and recent industry knowledge that will complement the experience of her colleagues, while she continues to develop her teaching practice and contribute to the college's wider computing curriculum.

Amara Ochefu (amara@ada.ac.uk) - Progression Officer

Amara graduated from Loughborough University in 2020 with a BA (Hons) Politics with Minors in Spanish, Foreign Policy Analysis and Asia-Pacific Politics. Since graduating, Amara has worked at leading international NGO Malala Fund, advocating for girls' education worldwide, as well as Generation UK, an organisation that provides free training programmes to kickstart careers in less accessible fields. In 2022, she was recruited on to the JET programme and spent two and a half years working as an English Language teacher at an international school in Tokyo. Since returning to the UK, she has worked at innovative travel start-up Kahana, as well as at YML, a technology first creative agency.

Qualification Details

The Pearson T-Level in Digital Software Development is a specialist two-year programme, equivalent in size to three A-Levels. It combines in-depth academic study in Computer Science with extensive real-world experience through a minimum 45-day industry placement. Designed in collaboration with leading employers such as ARM, BBC, BT, Cisco, and CompTIA, the course ensures learners develop the knowledge and practical skills needed to thrive in the fast-paced digital sector.

Delivered by expert teachers, the qualification comprises 1,200 guided learning hours (GLH) and is aimed at students with a strong foundation in GCSE subjects who are ready for a rigorous and rewarding technical route. Throughout the programme, students engage with topics such as full-stack programming, database development, networking, cyber security, and digital design.

By the end of the course, learners will be well-prepared to progress into highly skilled employment or continue their training via a Digital Degree Apprenticeship or a University Computer Science degree—setting the foundation for a successful career in software development, cyber security, or other digital fields.

Programme Overview

The T-Level in Digital Software Development provides learners with a strong foundation in Computer Science and has been endorsed by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, as a qualification that effectively prepares students for professional digital careers. These include roles such as software developer, business analyst, cyber security professional, network engineer, technical consultant, web developer, and software tester.

In addition to completing a 45-day Industry Placement, learners benefit from regular opportunities to engage with Ada's network of industry partners, gaining real-world insight into the diverse roles, challenges, and innovations within the digital sector. The course also emphasises both independent and collaborative working, requiring students to contribute effectively within teams across technical, creative, and entrepreneurial contexts.

Programme Timetable

Guided learning includes activities such as lessons, tutorials, online instruction, supervised study, and feedback sessions that involve direct engagement with teachers and assessors. These sessions are designed to support learners through structured teaching, supervision, and assessment.

Learners will receive a minimum of 20 hours of timetabled Computer Science teaching each week. This is supplemented by additional programming labs or supervised study sessions. Alternatively,

some learners may opt for three additional hours of Core Maths (also known as Maths Studies), an AS-level equivalent qualification.

Most Computer Science lessons are 1 hour in duration, with occasional 2-hour "double" sessions where appropriate. Lesson structure varies depending on the topic, and learners will benefit from a mix of workshops, interactive sessions, and talks delivered by guest speakers from industry.

A sample[2] Year 12 Learner timetable will look like this in Term 1 (Sep 2025):

TIMETABLE Term 1 - Y12 T-LEVEL											
T1	Mon	Tues		Wed		Thu		Fri			
09:00-09:15	Y12 Assembly Sports Hall Team Time Amare 2.12	Y12 Team Checkin		Y12 Team Checkin		Y12 Team Checkin		Y12 Team Checkin			
1 (1 hr) 09:15-10:15		Problem Solving / Python Programming CS T-LEVEL (CA1/2) Mesay G 2.12/2.08		Problem Solving / Python Programming CS T-LEVEL (CA1/2) Mark C 2.12/2.08		Digital Environments / Networking CS T-LEVEL (CA7) Mesay G 2.12/2.08		Employer Set Project CS T-LEVEL (ESP) Neelu V 2.12/2.08			
2 (1 hr) 10:15-11:15	Business Context CS T-LEVEL (CA5) Jan S 2.12/2.08	Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation CS T-LEVEL (CA3/4) Sarah S 2.12/2.08		Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation CS T-LEVEL (CA3/4) Sarah S 2.12/2.08		Digital Environments / Networking CS T-LEVEL (CA7) Mesay G 2.12/2.08		Employer Set Project CS T-LEVEL (ESP) Neelu V 2.12/2.08			
Break (15 mins)											
3 (1 hr) 11:30-12:30	Digital Environments / Networking CS T-LEVEL (CA7) Mark C 2.12/2.08	Employer Set Project CS T-LEVEL (ESP) Neelu V 2.12/2.08		Business Context CS T-LEVEL (CA5) Jan S 2.12/2.08		Business Context CS T-LEVEL (CA5) Jan S 2.12/2.08		Employer Set Project CS T-LEVEL (ESP) Neelu V 2.12/2.08			
Lunch (45 mins) 12:30-13:15											
4 (1 hr) 13:15-14:15	Problem Solving / Python Programming CS T-LEVEL (CA1/2) Mark C 2.12/2.08	Business Context CS T-LEVEL (CA5) Jan S 2.12/2.08		Digital Environments / Networking CS T-LEVEL (CA7) Mark C 2.12/2.08		Certification Courses CS T-LEVEL (No MS) Akhere I 2.12/2.08	Y12 Maths Studies Roha 3.21	Certification Courses CS T-LEVEL (No MS) Akhere I 2.12/2.08	Y12 Maths Studies Roha 3.21		
5 (1 hr) 14:15-15:15	Problem Solving / Python Programming CS T-LEVEL (CA1/2) Mesay G 2.12/2.08	Certification Courses CS T-LEVEL (No MS) Akhere I 2.12/2.08	Y12 Maths Studies Roha 3.21	Clubs Including - Primary Computing (2:15-3:15 Reserved)		Ada Skills Groups (Includes T-Level) Group 4 - Ben R Group 5 - Mark B		Early End of Week			
Break (15 mins)											
6 (1 hr) 15:30-16:30	Additional T-Level Support Class as required	Certification Courses CS T-LEVEL (CNA) (Only MS) Mark C 2.12/2.08		Additional T-Level Support Class as required		CS T-Level Industry Engagement Prep Amare					

[2] Each learner will be provided with a specific timetable for their overall programme of study

In addition to timetabled sessions, learners are expected to undertake a **minimum of 15 hours of independent study each week**, typically completed at home. This time is used for:

- Pre-reading for upcoming lessons
- Consolidating and revising material taught in class
- Completing homework, coursework, or programming practice
- Working on certification courses (e.g., Cisco Networking Academy modules)
- Attempting exam-style questions, particularly for core components (past papers and other resources will be shared by teachers)

Independent Learning & Study Support

As stated, in addition to guided learning, learners are expected to engage in further directed study, including preparatory reading, independent research, and revision. These activities help reinforce classroom learning and build long-term academic resilience.

Learners who require additional academic support may be asked to attend **Directed Study Support sessions**. These may be triggered by:

- Repeated missed or late homework
- Lack of focus or participation in lessons
- Falling behind in coursework or exam preparation

These sessions typically run from **3:30pm to 4:30pm** on either **Monday or Wednesday**, and attendance is compulsory for selected students. Parents and carers will be informed in advance where appropriate.

Students who wish to request additional subject-specific help or wellbeing support are encouraged to contact **Janet Davidson, Assistant Principal (Head of Learner Services)**, to arrange a consultation.

Ada Skills Strategy

At Ada, the National College for Digital Skills, your T-Level experience is about more than grades. It is about growth — as a learner, as a professional, and as a person. Our approach is designed to equip you not only with the technical knowledge required for success in your T-Level in Digital Software Development, but also with the professional, communication, and progression skills that will set you apart in the world beyond college.

Every Ada learner undertakes a minimum of 45 days (315 hours) of direct industry work-place experience as part of their T-Level. This sits at the core of the programme, alongside our wider Ada Skills curriculum, ensuring you build both the skills and belief you need to succeed in higher education, degree apprenticeships, and employment.

The achievements of our 2024–25 Year 12 Digital T-Level cohort demonstrate the power of this approach. From delivering projects with Salesforce, Bank of America, Capgemini, Cisco, Brookfield, King, and Deloitte, our students showed that Ada's unique integrated curriculum builds the confidence, resilience, and capability to thrive in real-world professional environments. As you begin your journey in 2025–26, these successes set a clear precedent for what you can achieve.At Ada, we prioritise the development of a learner's communication and professional skills because we recognise that the better these are the higher a learner's academic attainment will be, and so the more progression opportunities they will have. Beyond Sixth Form, these are also the very skills learners will need to thrive in their future careers and lives.

Ada Skills Curriculum

The Ada Skills Curriculum is timetabled for all learners across both Year 12 and Year 13. These sessions are designed to foreground communication and professional development, mirroring the expectations of industry.

In Year 12, the intent is to build a strong foundation of professional skills. Learners complete:

- Two writing assessments
- One presentation assessment
- One group task assessment
- One mock assessment centre, comprising both a group exercise and an interview.

In Year 13, the focus shifts to deepening and specialising these skills. Learners are grouped according to their pathway and complete two further mock assessment centres, again comprising both a group exercise and an interview.

The skills rubrics used to assess these tasks have been co-designed with our industry partners, and assessments are frequently supported by volunteers from leading employers. The purpose of these assessments is to ensure that learners can approach competitive recruitment processes with confidence and resilience.

Ada Communication Skills

The Ada Communication Skills sessions are project based, meaning learners will all complete a single project every half term. Certificates are awarded to learners for successful completion of these projects, which they will be able to post on their professional social media networks. There are three levels of certificate: Effective, Advanced and Professional.

Effective is the foundation level certificate: this course aims to afford insight into the processes required to deliver effective writing and speaking. The required deliverable is a single piece of writing or a presentation that seeks to persuade on a given topic.

Advanced is the intermediary certificate: this course aims to afford insight into the processes required to deliver advanced writing and speaking. The required deliverable is a single piece of writing or presentation that affords a personal perspective on a complex issue and supports this effectively with appropriate evidence.

Professional is the higher level certificate: this course aims to afford insight into the processes required to deliver high level writing and speaking. The required deliverable is a single piece of writing or presentation that affords a personal perspective on a complex issue; supports this effectively with appropriate evidence; as well as shows an awareness of the counter issue.

By the end of Year 12, our goal is that every learner will have gained all three levels of certification.

Industry Engagement

Learning at Ada is powered by industry engagement. Across both years you will take part in a wide range of opportunities, including:

- Guest speakers
- Workplace visits
- Industry projects
- The coaching programme
- Your extended industry placement (minimum 45 days) - see later handbook section.

Every interaction is an opportunity to practise professional behaviours: preparing meaningfully in advance, engaging fully during, and reflecting afterwards.

In 2024–25, learners reflected on opportunities ranging from AI literacy projects with Salesforce to financial modelling with Chatham Financial, and from creative challenges with Capgemini to problem-solving workshops with Brookfield. These projects didn't just build technical skills, they built belief. As one student put it:

"When you say yes to opportunity, growth becomes unstoppable."

Amazon Industry Placements

A particular highlight of our 2024–25 Year 12 cohort was the success they achieved in securing full T-Level Industry Placements with Amazon. For the first time, Amazon aligned its placement application with its full apprenticeship recruitment process. Students had to submit an application form and CV, answer questions about their motivation and what they would bring to Amazon, and take part in a remote Assessment Centre.

Of the 20 placements awarded London-wide, 10 were secured by Ada students, an exceptional outcome that demonstrates the impact of our approach. This success was not accidental: it stemmed directly from Ada's sustained focus on skills throughout their studies, embedded within our unique integrated curriculum approach. By blending technical learning, communication skills,

professional development, and industry engagement, our learners were able to perform with confidence in a highly competitive and demanding process.

Amazon's feedback confirmed the strengths developed through Ada's curriculum:

- ***"Your ability to challenge views constructively while maintaining group harmony was impressive. You demonstrated mature leadership capabilities."***
- ***"Outstanding initiative and entrepreneurial spirit – the quality of your presentation and website stood out as exceptional."***
- ***"A comprehensive understanding of data analytics, with thoughtful links to real-world applications and Amazon operations."***
- ***"Resilience, adaptability, and continuous improvement were evident throughout – exactly what we look for in future leaders."***

For you, as part of the 2025–26 Year 12 cohort, this achievement sets a clear precedent. It shows how Ada's integrated curriculum can open doors to world-leading employers and equip you with the skills, confidence, and belief to thrive in them.

Progression and Belief

Progression at Ada is about developing the knowledge, skills, and belief to reach your aspirational destination. To support this, you will:

- Have access to **Unifrog**, our digital progression platform for university and apprenticeship pathways.
- Receive **one-to-one support** each term with your team lead.
- Take part in **skills workshops** on progression topics such as:
    - Writing UCAS personal statements
    - Evidencing curiosity in applications
    - Understanding degree apprenticeship recruitment processes

Experiential Learning

In Year 12, you will be invited to attend a residential trip outside of London, designed to challenge you in new environments, build resilience, and strengthen teamwork, the same skills you will need for both your placement and your career.

More Than Just Grades

As our 2024–25 Year 12 Digital T-Level students reflected, the most valuable thing you take from Ada is not just a grade, it is growth:

- One student reflected that through projects with Salesforce, King and Bank of America, they discovered ***"it wasn't just about building skills, it was about building belief."***
- Another highlighted how ***"every challenge helped me see what's possible with support, curiosity, and action."***
- A third summed up their year by realising that ***"the most valuable thing has been my development as a person, not just the grades."***

This is the spirit of Ada Skills: developing you as a learner, as a professional, and as a future digital leader.

Term Dates and Course Delivery Plans

Term Dates (2025/2026)

Events	Dates	Time
Year 12 Induction	Friday 29th August 2025	9am - 4:30pm
Autumn Term 2025/26 Dates		
Start of Autumn Term	Tuesday 2nd September 2025	9am - 4:30pm[3]
Autumn Half-Term Break	Monday 20th October 2025 to Friday 31st October 2025	
End of Autumn Term	Friday 19th December 2025	9am - 1pm
Spring Term 2025/26 Dates		
Start of Spring Term	Monday 5th January 2026	9am - 4:30pm[3]
Spring Half-Term Break	Monday 16th February 2026 to Friday 20th February 2026	
End of Spring Term	Friday 27th March 2026	9am - 4:30pm
Summer Term 2025/26 Dates		
Start of Summer Term	Monday 13th April 2026	9am - 4:30pm[3]
Summer Half-Term Break	Monday 25th May 2026 to Friday 29th May 2026	
End of Summer Term	Friday 17th July 2026	9am - 1pm

Term dates are expected to follow a similar pattern in 2026/2027 and will be published on the college website at: https://www.ada.ac.uk/sixthform/termdates

[3] Students are expected to register with their allocated Team Leader in every timetabled team time check-in at 9am. All students are also expected to arrive at lessons, workshops and other Ada commitments on time (i.e., be at their desk and prepared to study at the given start time). Attendance and punctuality across the year groups and the college is monitored regularly by the pastoral team, who may issue further consequences and support mechanisms according to Ada's Behaviour & Disciplinary Policy

Course Delivery Plan (Year 12 - 2025/26)

Year 12 (2025/26) - T-Level Digital Software Development - Delivery and Assessment Plan														
Months		Sept - Oct		Nov - Dec		Jan-Feb*		Mar-Apr		Apr-May			June	June/July
Terms	Guided hours per week	T1a	HT	T1b	Xmas	T2a	HT	T2b	Easter	T3a	Core ESP Exam	HT	Core Paper Exams	T3b
Num Weeks		7	2	7	2	6	1	5	2	4	2	1	2	5
Ada, National College for Digital Skills T-Level Digital Software Development	4	Problem Solving and Python Programmming Content Areas 1 & 2 CORE - Paper 1		Problem Solving and Python Programmming Content Areas 1 & 2 CORE - Paper 1		Problem Solving and Python Programmming Content Areas 1 & 2 CORE - Paper 1		Problem Solving and Python Programmming Content Areas 1 & 2 CORE - Paper 1		CORE Paper 1 & Paper 2 Exam Revision and Full Mocks	CORE ESP Set Task Exam		CORE EXAMS Paper 1 & Paper 2	T-Level Placement Blocks Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks may vary with individual student/employer placement choices
	2	Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation Content Areas 3 & 4 CORE - Paper 1		Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation Content Areas 3 & 4 CORE - Paper 1		Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation Content Areas 3 & 4 CORE - Paper 1		Emerging Issues Digital Impact / Legislation Content Areas 3 & 4 CORE - Paper 1						
	4	Business Context Content Area 5 CORE - Paper 2		Business Context Content Area 5 CORE - Paper 2		Data Management Content Area 6 CORE - Paper 2		Data Management Content Area 6 CORE - Paper 2						
	4	Digital Environments and Networks Content Area 7 CORE - Paper 2		Digital Environments and Networks Content Area 7 CORE - Paper 2		Cyber Security Content Area 8 CORE - Paper 2		Cyber Security Content Area 8 CORE - Paper 2						
	4	Project Managememt & Software Development Employer Set Project CORE - ESP		Project Managememt & Software Development Employer Set Project CORE - ESP		Project Managememt & Software Development Employer Set Project CORE - ESP		Project Managememt & Software Development Employer Set Project CORE - ESP		CORE ESP Set Task Revision and Full Mock				
	3	CNA - Industry Certifications Cisco Networking Accademy Courses **		CNA - Industry Certifications Cisco Networking Accademy Courses **		CNA - Industry Certifications Cisco Networking Accademy Courses **		CNA - Industry Certifications Cisco Networking Accademy Courses **						
	1 EEP	Employer Engagement & Industry Visits		Employer Engagement & Industry Visits		Employer Engagement & Industry Visits		Employer Engagement & Industry Visits						
	1 EEP	Ada Skills Development Programme		Ada Skills Development Programme		Ada Skills Development Programme		Ada Skills Development Programme						

* T-Level Initial Placement Orientation Week - Scheduled for February 2026 - Half Term
(though this may vary dependant on specific student/employer placement arrangements)

** Cisco Networking Courses:
Introduction to IoT and Digital Transformation (6 hours) - badge / certification - self-paced
Cisco Packet Tracer - Introduction Suite (8 Hours over three modules) - self-paced
- Cisco Packet Tracer - Getting Started with Cisco Packet Tracer (2 Hours)
- Cisco Packet Tracer - Exploring Networking with Cisco Packet Tracer (3 Hours)
- Cisco Packet Tracer - Exploring IoT with Cisco Packet Tracer (3 Hours)

Introduction to Data Science (6 hours) - self-paced
Introduction to Cybersecurity (6 hours) - instructer-led
Network Basics (22 Hours) - instructed-led
Python Essentials 1 (30 Hours) - instructer-led
Linux Essentials (70 Hours) - Instructor-led

National College for Digital Skills

Course Delivery Plan (Year 13 shown here is based on this 2025/26 model and subject to change)

Year 13 (2026/27) - T-Level Digital Software Development - Delivery/Assessment Plan (students follow one of 3 general models - A, B or C, and make up the minimum 315 hours across a combination of the placement options available in that model).

Months	Late July - August		Sep - Oct			Nov - Dec					Jan - Mid Feb		Mid Feb - March			April - May				June - July	
Terms	T0	Guided hours per week	T1a		HT	T1b				XMAS	T2a	HT	T2b		EASTER	T3a			HT	T3b	
Num Weeks	5		5	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	6	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	5
Model A Ada, National College for Digital Skills T-Level Y13 Occupational Specialism Digital Production, Design and Development	T-Level Placement (Opttional block for initial placement opportunities) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements up to 25 days available (approx 175 hours)	18 GLH 13 GLH for weeks on day-release placement	Occupational Specialism (OS) OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies			Occupational Specialism (OS) OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		Resit (1) Core Exams Core Paper 1 (1/12/26) Core Paper 2 (8/12/26)	(OS)		Occupational Specialism (OS) OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		(OS)	OSP Exam Task 1 (8/3/27-19/3/27) (15 hours) Scheduled across all teaching slots and rest of time used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 2 WB 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Black A (10 hours)		OSP Exam Task 2 Cont... 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Block B (10 hours) Scheduled across teaching slots and rest used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 3 26/4/27 to 5/5/27 (12 hours)	Resit (2) Core ESP Pre-Task (10/5/27) Task 1 (12/5/27) Task 2 (14/5/27) Task 3 (17/5/27) Task 4a (19/5/27) Task 4b (21/5/27)		Resit (2) Core Exams Core Paper 1 (8/6/27) Core Paper 2 (15/6/27)	Placement (Opttional block for completing placement requirements) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements
		2 GLH 1 GLH when on placement	Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy			Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy			IC		Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy		IC								
		2 GLH Only when not on placement	Industry Engagement & Placement Support			Industry Engagement & Placement Support			IE & PS		Industry Engagement & Placement Support		IE & PS								
		3 GLH 2 GLH when on placement	Assembly/TeamTime /Ada Skills			Assembly/TeamTime /Ada Skills			Ada Skills		Assembly/TeamTime /Ada Skills		Ada Skills								
		Placement Hours	Placement Option A - Days Release (Thursdays & Fridays) - Window up to 22 weeks avaailable x 15 hours/week = 330 Placement Hours															Placement Optional block for non-resiting students up to 25 days (approx 175 hours)			
Model B Ada, National College for Digital Skills T-Level Y13 Occupational Specialism Digital Production, Design and Development	T-Level Placement (Opttional block for initial placement opportunities) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements up to 25 days available (approx 175 hours)	18 GLH	Occupational Specialism (OS) Scheduled teaching covering: OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		Placement Option B - Full Block Release (9 Week Placement, i.e., the Amazon model) 35 hours/week (Total hours = 9 weeks x 35 = 315 Hours)				(OS)		Occupational Specialism (OS) Scheduled teaching covering: OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		(OS)	OSP Exam Task 1 (8/3/27-19/3/27) (15 hours) Scheduled across all teaching slots and rest of time used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 2 WB 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Black A (10 hours)		OSP Exam Task 2 Cont... 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Block B (10 hours) Scheduled across teaching slots and rest used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 3 26/4/27 to 5/5/27 (12 hours)	Resit (2) Core ESP Pre-Task (10/5/27) Task 1 (12/5/27) Task 2 (14/5/27) Task 3 (17/5/27) Task 4a (19/5/27) Task 4b (21/5/27)		Resit (2) Core Exams Core Paper 1 (8/6/27) Core Paper 2 (15/6/27)	T-Level Placement (Opttional block for completing placement requirements) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements
		2 GLH	Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy						IC		Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy		IC								
		2 GLH	Industry Engagement & Placement Support						IE & PS		Industry Engagement & Placement Support		IE & PS								
		3 GLH	Assembly/TeamTime /Ada Skills						Ada Skills		Assembly/TeamTime/Ada Skills		Ada Skills								
																		Placement Optional block for non-resiting students up to 25 days (approx 175 hours)			
Model C Ada, National College for Digital Skills T-Level Y13 Occupational Specialism Digital Production, Design and Development	T-Level Placement (Opttional block for initial placement opportunities) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements up to 25 days available (approx 175 hours)	18 GLH	Occupational Specialism (OS) Scheduled teaching covering: OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		Placement Option C - Multi Block Release (Up to 5 Week Window) 35 hours/week (Total hours = 5 weeks x 35 hours up to 25 days available (approx 175 hours)	Occupational Specialism (OS) OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		Resit (1) Core Exams Core Paper 1 (1/12/26) Core Paper 2 (8/12/26)	(OS)		Occupational Specialism (OS) Scheduled teaching covering: OS1 - Business Project Mgmt OS2 - Frontend Development OS3 - Backend Development OS4 - Testing & QA Strategies OS5 - Deployment Strategies		(OS)	OSP Exam Task 1 (8/3/27-19/3/27) (15 hours) Scheduled across all teaching slots and rest of time used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 2 WB 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Black A (10 hours)		OSP Exam Task 2 Cont... 22/3/27 to 23/4/27 Block B (10 hours) Scheduled across teaching slots and rest used to continue OS revision across remaining OS1-5 areas	OSP Exam Task 3 26/4/27 to 5/5/27 (12 hours)	Resit (2) Core ESP Pre-Task (10/5/27) Task 1 (12/5/27) Task 2 (14/5/27) Task 3 (17/5/27) Task 4a (19/5/27) Task 4b (21/5/27)		Resit (2) Core Exams Core Paper 1 (8/6/27) Core Paper 2 (8/6/27)	T-Level Placement (Opttional block for completing placement requirements) Exact Dates and mode - multi-day release or full week blocks will vary with individual student/employer placement requirements
		2 GLH	Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy			Industry Certification CNA			IC		Industry Certification Cisco Networking Accademy		IC								
		2 GLH	Industry Engagement & Placement Support			Industry Engagement & Placement Support			IE & PS		Industry Engagement & Placement Support		IE & PS								
		3 GLH	Assembly/TeamTime /Ada Skills			Assembly/ TeamTime /Ada Skills			Ada Skills		Assembly/TeamTime/Ada Skills		Ada Skills								
																		Placement Optional block for non-resiting students up to 25 days (approx 175 hours)			

Course Structure

The T Level Technical Qualification in Digital Software Development has **two** mandatory components.

Core Component

The core component covers the underpinning knowledge, concepts and skills that support threshold competence in the digital industry.

Assessment component	Assessment method	Duration	Marks	Weighting	Timetable	Availability
Core Paper 1	Written examination	2 hours 15 minutes	90	30%	Set date/time	June/ November
Core Paper 2	Written examination	2 hours 15 minutes	90	30%	Set date/time	June/ November
Employer Set Project	Externally set project	14 hours 30 minutes	100	40%	Set date/time	May/ November

Core Papers - Content Areas

The Digital DSD T-Level consists of eight 'core' content areas of which the first four are examined in Core Paper 1, and the remaining four are examined in Core Paper 2, in June of Year 12.

Content Area 1: Problem Solving
This unit develops your knowledge of computational thinking and the principles that underpin all areas of computer science. You will learn to analyse and interpret problems, applying abstraction, decomposition, pattern recognition and algorithm design to create effective solutions. You will also develop your understanding of programming constructs, including sequence, selection and iteration, and gain insight into how data is represented, processed, and manipulated within a program. By the end of this unit you will be able to design, justify, and evaluate detailed and complex solutions to real-world problems.

Content Area 2: Introduction to Programming
This unit introduces you to the fundamentals of programming and provides you with the skills to design, test, and evaluate working solutions. Using Python 3 as your core language, you will gain experience of applying data types, control structures, modular design, and file handling. You will also explore the principles of software development methodologies and understand how programs move from specification through to implementation and testing. The focus is on developing your ability to write efficient, maintainable, and well-documented code to meet a defined problem scenario.

Content Area 3: Emerging Issues and Impact of Digital
In this unit you will explore the emerging trends and technologies that are reshaping the digital landscape. Topics include artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, quantum technologies, and the increasing role of data-driven decision making. You will examine the social, moral and ethical implications of these technologies, considering their impact on individuals, businesses, and wider society. The emphasis is on developing a critical awareness of how digital transformation creates both opportunities and challenges for the future workforce.

Content Area 4: Legislation and Regulatory Requirements
This unit focuses on the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern digital practice. You will develop an understanding of key legislation, including data protection, intellectual property, copyright, and computer misuse laws. You will also explore the importance of compliance, governance and professional codes of conduct, with a focus on how organisations must operate responsibly in a digital environment. By the end of the unit you will be able to evaluate the risks of non-compliance and make recommendations on how businesses can meet their statutory obligations.

Content Area 5: Business Context and Impact of Technology
This unit develops your knowledge of how digital technologies operate within a business context. You will study different organisational structures, the role of IT in supporting business functions, and how digital solutions can improve efficiency, innovation, and customer experience. You will also learn to analyse business requirements, identify stakeholder needs, and evaluate the cost-benefit implications of adopting new technologies. This knowledge prepares you to consider the wider strategic value of digital solutions when working on projects.

Content Area 6: Data
This unit provides you with a strong foundation in the role of data within digital systems. You will learn about data structures, storage, retrieval and analysis, including the use of relational databases. You will develop practical skills in creating and querying databases using SQL, alongside gaining an appreciation of data quality, validation, and security. You will also explore how data is used to inform business decisions and how visualisation techniques (such as charts and dashboards) can communicate insights effectively.

Content Area 7: Digital Environments and Networking
In this unit you will study how digital environments are designed, implemented, and maintained. You will explore the fundamentals of networking, including topologies, protocols, IP addressing, and routing. You will also investigate the architecture of cloud and virtualised environments, and consider the implications of scalability, resilience, and disaster recovery. The focus is on giving you both the conceptual understanding and the applied skills to evaluate and design networking and infrastructure solutions that meet organisational needs.

Content Area 8: Security
This unit focuses on cybersecurity and the methods used to protect digital systems. You will learn about common threats such as malware, phishing, denial-of-service attacks and insider risks, and examine how to mitigate them through preventative measures. Topics include authentication, access control, firewalls, intrusion detection systems, and encryption techniques. You will also consider the wider organisational responsibilities around security policies and incident response. Practical activities, such as using sandboxed environments to harden servers, will give you hands-on experience in applying these principles.

Core Employer Set Project (ESP)

The Employer Set Project (ESP) is a synoptic assessment that makes up 40% of the Core component. It is completed under supervised conditions over a total of 14 hours 30 minutes and is externally set and marked by Pearson. The project is designed to replicate a vocational challenge validated by employers, ensuring that your skills are tested in an industry-relevant context. You will respond to a client brief by completing a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates your ability to plan, problem-solve, code, test, and evaluate. The ESP is divided into five assessed tasks:

- **Task 1: Planning a project**
  You will produce a project plan using Microsoft Project, including Gantt charts, resource schedules and costings. You must demonstrate how your plan addresses deadlines, dependencies, and risk.

- **Task 2: Identifying and fixing defects in existing code**
  You will develop a test plan and test to debug supplied Python code, document the process, and make changes so the program meets requirements. This develops your skills in evaluating, correcting, and refining existing digital solutions.

- **Task 3: Designing a solution**
  You will decompose the given problem into smaller sub-problems and design an effective solution, using flowcharts, pseudocode, or annotated code snippets. This stage emphasises algorithm design, abstraction, and justification of choices.

- **Task 4a: Developing a solution**
  You will implement your design using the latest version of Python, supported by the pandas and matplotlib data libraries. This enables you to create robust, data-driven software applications, including analysis and visualisation components where appropriate.

- **Task 4b: Reflective evaluation**
  You will evaluate the effectiveness of your solution, testing against success criteria, considering user needs, and suggesting improvements for future iterations.

The ESP requires you to integrate skills from across the Core Content Areas. planning and organisation, programming and debugging, data analysis, and professional reflection. The final portfolio includes planning documentation, an annotated digital portfolio, prototype software, testing evidence, and evaluation.

Occupational Specialism Project (OSP)

Assessment component	Assessment method	Duration	Marks	Weighting	Timetable	Availability
Digital software development	Externally set project	50 hours 30 minutes	144	100%	Windowed	March to May

The Occupational Specialism Project (OSP) makes up 50% of the overall qualification. It is a substantial, synoptic project completed across 50 hours 30 minutes, under a mix of supervised and controlled conditions, and externally marked by Pearson. This is where you demonstrate threshold competence in Digital Software Development, showing that you can operate like a junior software developer in a realistic work scenario.

The OSP is built around four major tasks:

- **Task 1: Analysing a problem and designing a solution**
  You will analyse a given problem, define functional and non-functional requirements, and produce acceptance criteria aligned to user needs. You will then design an appropriate solution, which may include system models, data structures, and interface designs. Generative AI tools may be used to create short snippets of code for specific functions, but not for the full solution, you must evaluate and refine any AI-generated outputs.

- **Task 2: Developing the solution**
  You will implement your design using Python and JavaScript. At Ada, this currently involves working with a React JS frontend, a FastAPI backend in Python, and a MySQL relational database for data storage and management. This reflects the modern full-stack frameworks widely used in industry. You will write and debug code, apply version control, and produce a fully working solution that meets the client's requirements.

- **Task 3a: Gathering feedback**
  You will test your solution systematically, document the testing process, and gather structured feedback from users or peers. The aim is to assess usability, functionality, and alignment with the client brief.

- **Task 3b: Evaluating feedback**
  You will evaluate your solution critically against the original requirements, user feedback, and success criteria. You will also reflect on the quality of your work, identifying areas for improvement and future development.

The Performance Outcomes (POs) assessed in the OSP are:

- **PO1**: Analyse problems to define requirements and acceptance criteria (16.7%)
- **PO2**: Design, implement and test software (39.6%)
- **PO3**: Change, maintain and support software (12.5%)

- **PO4**: Create solutions in a social and collaborative environment (6.3%)
- **PO5**: Discover, evaluate and apply reliable sources of knowledge (12.5%)
- **PO6**: Apply ethical principles and manage risks in line with legal and regulatory requirements (12.5%)

The OSP ensures you can demonstrate a complete end-to-end software development process: from problem analysis and design, through full-stack implementation and testing, to evaluation and ongoing maintenance.

Industry Placement

The T-Level includes a mandatory Industry Placement of at least 315 hours (around 45 days). At Ada, this is one of the most important and distinctive parts of your course. It is what sets your T-Level apart from simply doing three A-Levels, giving you real-world digital experience that prepares you for university, higher apprenticeships, and exciting careers in the technology sector.

Your placement(s) will:

- Build the skills and professional behaviours that employers value most
- Strengthen your CV, UCAS applications, and career prospects
- Give you the chance to apply what you learn in lessons to real digital projects
- Open doors, many students secure apprenticeship offers from their placement employers

This hands-on experience is the **best preparation you can get** for your future digital careers.

How Placements Work

You must complete a minimum of 315 hours (45 days). This can be arranged in different models:

- **Block placements**: several weeks full-time with an employer
- **Day-release**: one or two days a week alongside your college timetable
- **Hybrid placements**: a blend of on-site and remote work
- **Split placements**: your 45 days can be divided between up to two different employers, each potentially with a different model

At least 50% of your hours must be completed **on-site in the workplace**; up to 50% may be remote.

What You Might Do on Placement

Placements are varied, but could, for example, include:

- Writing, testing and improving code
- Developing websites or apps (for example, using React)
- Supporting agile project teams and using version control
- Software testing and quality assurance
- Researching and trialling new technologies (e.g. AI tools)
- Providing help-desk and front-line IT support
- Acting as a junior researcher on live projects
- Running community coding clubs and supporting digital inclusion (e.g. Westminster Libraries)

Examples of Ada's Industry Placements

- **Amazon (London, Oct–Dec 2025)** – Ten students in Year 13 will complete a **9-week full-time block placement**, fully immersed in a global tech workplace.
- **YouView (London & Remote)** – One student has completed a **4-week hybrid placement** (2 weeks on-site + 2 weeks employer supervised remote work) on website development using React.
- **Department for Education (Coventry, Sep–Oct 2025)** – A group of Year 13 students will complete a **4-week hybrid placement**: 2 weeks on-site in Coventry (with accommodation, travel and expenses covered), followed by 2 weeks DfE-supervised remote work based at Ada.
- **Cisco and other London tech firms (Jan–Feb 2026, Year 12)** – Ada is arranging **short 3–4 week placements** in Term 2 of Year 12. These give students early exposure to industry before Core exams in the summer.
- **Westminster Libraries** – Students will contribute to **community-facing projects**, hosting coding clubs and supporting local residents with digital tools.

How Ada Supports You on Placement

Ada ensures placements are structured and fully supported:

- **Dedicated Placement Officer** – Part of Ada's Skills and Employability Team, your Placement Officer will meet you for **regular 1:1s before, during and after your placement**, helping you prepare, supporting you while in placement, and reflecting with you afterwards.
- **Workplace Mentor** – Each employer provides a **dedicated mentor** who inducts you, sets learning objectives with you and Ada, and supervises your progress.
- **Learning Goals & Reviews** – You'll set objectives at the start of your placement. These will be reviewed mid-way and at the end, with feedback recorded in your placement logbook.
- **Health & Safety** – Ada and your employer ensure safeguarding, insurance, and risk assessments are in place.
- **Completion Sign-off** – Your logbook and mentor review confirm your hours and achievements, which are signed off as part of your T-Level.

Ada Skills and Work Taster Hours

Your **Ada Skills programme** prepares you for industry. Through regular **Industry Projects** with real employers, you will already complete **up to 35 hours of Work Taster Activities** by the end of Year 12. This is the maximum that can count towards your 315-hour requirement, meaning you will have already made a strong start before beginning your main placement. The Placement Officer, Ada Skills curriculum, and your industry placement work seamlessly together to ensure you are **work-ready, confident, and prepared for progression**.

Technical Skills Development & Certification

Alongside your T-Level, you will complete a structured programme of professional certifications and skills development. Ada is both a recognised **Cisco Networking Academy** and a member of the **Amazon AWS Academy**, giving you access to world-class technical training.

Cisco Networking Academy Certifications

You will complete a sequence of Cisco NetAcad modules, each providing industry-recognised digital badges and certifications:

- HTML5 Essentials
- CSS Essentials
- JavaScript Essentials
- Python Essentials
- Packet Tracer Introduction
- Networking Basics
- Linux Essentials
- Introduction to IoT
- Data Science Essentials

AWS Academy Cybersecurity Labs

Through AWS Academy, you will also complete **cloud and cybersecurity labs** using Amazon Web Services and Ubuntu Linux servers. Typical activities include:

- Secure server setup with security groups and key-based access
- SSH hardening (disable password logins, restrict users, audit logs)
- Firewall configuration with UFW
- Patch management and system auditing
- Fail2ban intrusion mitigation
- Multifactor Authentication (MFA) setup
- Backups and recovery techniques
- Deployment hygiene (secrets handling, reducing attack surface)

These skills ensure you graduate with both a T-Level qualification and **professional technical certifications** that are valued by employers worldwide.

T-Level Assessment Information

The T-Level in Digital Software Development (DSD) is assessed through a combination of Core Components and the Occupational Specialism Project (OSP). All assessments are set and marked externally by Pearson, with final qualification outcomes awarded by the Department for Education.

Achievement in the qualification requires a demonstration of depth of **knowledge** gained in each of the 8 content areas, an assured acquisition of a range of practical software development **skills** required for employment or progression to higher education, and successful development of **transferable skills**.

Core Component (50% of overall grade)

The **Core Component** assesses your knowledge and understanding across the eight content areas and your ability to apply this in practice. It consists of three parts:

- **Core Paper 1** – written exam, 90 raw marks (2 hours 15 minutes)
- **Core Paper 2** – written exam, 90 raw marks (2 hours 15 minutes)
- **Employer Set Project (ESP)** – supervised project, 120 raw marks (14 hours 30 minutes)

Weighting and UMS

Raw marks are converted to a **Uniform Mark Scale (UMS)** to standardise results across years.

- Core Exams (Papers 1 + 2 combined) → **240 UMS (60%)**
- ESP → **160 UMS (40%)**
- **Total Core = 400 UMS**

This means your final Core grade (A*–E) is based on your **combined UMS total out of 400**.

Grade	Core Exam	Core ESP	Core Overall
Maximum	**240**	**160**	**400**
A*	216 – 240	144 – 160	360 – 400
A	192 – 215	128 – 143	320 – 359
B	168 – 191	112 – 127	280 – 319
C	144 – 167	96 – 111	240 – 279
D	120 – 143	80 – 95	200 – 239
E	96 – 119	64 – 79	160 – 199
U	0 – 95	0 – 63	0 – 159

How Raw Marks Map to UMS (Example)

The following tables show how raw marks are mapped to UMS score for each of the two Core sub-components (Core Exams and Core ESP) using the Summer 2024–25 Core Component Boundary Mappings for the T-Level Digital Production, Design and Development:

Core Exams (Papers 1 + 2 combined: 180 raw → 240 UMS)

Grade	Raw (out of 180)	UMS (out of 240)
A*	130 - 180	216 - 240
A	111 - 129	192 - 215
B	92 - 110	168 - 191
C	73 - 91	144 - 167
D	54 - 72	120 - 143
E	36 - 53	96 - 119
U	0 - 35	0 - 95

Core ESP (100 raw → 160 UMS)

Grade	Raw (out of 100)	UMS (out of 160)
A*	80 - 100	144 - 160
A	69 - 79	128 - 143
B	58 - 68	112 - 127
C	47 - 57	96 - 111
D	36 - 46	80 - 95
E	25 - 35	64 - 79
U	0 - 24	0 - 63

Worked example[4]

- **Core Exams raw = 120 / 180**
  Falls in the A band (111–129 raw → 192–215 UMS).
  - Using straight-line interpolation within the band:
  - Position = (120 – 111) / (129 – 111) = 9 / 18 = 0.5
  - UMS ≈ 192 + 0.5 × (215 – 192) = **204 UMS**

- **Core ESP raw = 70 / 100**
  Falls in the A band (69–79 raw → 128–143 UMS).
  - Using straight-line interpolation within the band:
  - Position = (70 – 69) / (79 – 69) = 1 / 10 = 0.1
  - UMS ≈ 128 + 0.1 × (143 – 128) = **130 UMS**

- **Total Core UMS = 204 + 130 = 334 UMS → Core Grade = A**

[4] *The exact raw→UMS mapping is set by Pearson each year and published as Grade Boundaries.*

Occupational Specialism Project (OSP) (50% of overall grade)

The **Occupational Specialism Project (OSP)** makes up **50% of your T-Level grade**. It is a synoptic assessment taken in Year 13 over **50 hours 30 minutes** under controlled conditions, where you demonstrate full-stack development skills from analysis through design, implementation, testing and evaluation.

How the OSP is Marked

- The OSP is assessed holistically against **6 Performance Outcomes (POs)** as given below
- Each PO carries a weighting, and Pearson examiners allocate marks across all tasks.
- Your raw mark total is then converted into a grade[5]

Performance Outcome		Weighting	
		Raw marks	% of total marks
PO1	Analyse a problem to define requirements and acceptance criteria, aligned to user needs	24	16.7%
PO2	Design, implement and test software	57	39.6%
PO3	Change, maintain and support software	18	12.5%
PO4	Create solutions in a social and collaborative environment	9	6.3%
PO5	Discover, evaluate and apply reliable sources of knowledge	18	12.5%
PO6	Apply ethical principles and manage risks in line with legal and regulatory requirements when developing software	18	12.5%

The raw marks achieved across various OSP subtasks - themselves, mapped to the Performance Outcomes given above, are totalled out of a maximum possible score of 144 and mapped across to an overall Occupational Specialism grade of Distinction, Merit, Pass or Unclassified (Fail) on the basis of raw-mark-to-grade-boundaries published for the specific OSP Series Exam Assessment undertaken.

The example mapping below is adapted from the 2024/25 DPDD T-Level OSP. While the exact raw-mark boundaries for the DSD OSP will not be confirmed until its first live exam in Summer 2027, the percentage thresholds (Distinction ≈70%, Merit ≈50%, Pass ≈30%) are very likely to remain consistent. Official DSD boundaries will be published by Pearson after the first assessment.

[5] *Unlike the Core Component, the OSP is not converted into UMS. It is graded directly as Distinction, Merit, Pass or U.*

Grade	Raw Mark Threshold (out of 144)
Distinction	101 – 144
Merit	72 – 100
Pass	44 – 71
Unclassified	0 – 43

The breakdown of the various OSP Sub-Tasks is provided in the following table::

Task No.	Task Activity	Task Name	Assessment Focus	Marks	ExamTime
1A	Proposal	Proposal Document	Decomposing the problem Appreciation of wider issues Appreciation of business context	9 9 6	
Subtotal Task 1A				24	
1B	Design	Visual Interface Data Requirements	Effectiveness of the design interface Design of the data requirements	6 6	
Subtotal Task 1B				12	
1C	Generative AI	Use of AI	Problem solving Use of prompts Output review	3 3 6	
Subtotal Task 1C				12	
1	Communication	Across 1A–1C	Quality of communication	6	
Task 1 Total				54	18 hours
2A	Developing Solution	Solution Build	Functionality Code organisation User experience Legal & regulatory guidelines/standards	8 8 8 6	
Subtotal Task 2A				30	
2B	Documenting Dev.	Development Log	Suitability of tests Use of testing to inform iteration Use of content produced by others Change log	6 3 6 3	
Subtotal Task 2B				18	
Task 2 Total				48	20 hours
3A	Feedback	Gathering Feedback	Effectiveness of materials Use of feedback tools Effectiveness of communication	12 6 6	
Subtotal Task 3A				24	10 hours
3B	Feedback	Evaluation	Effectiveness of assets & content Evaluation of the digital solution Further development	6 6 6	
Subtotal Task 3B				18	2.5 hours
Task 3 Total				42	12.5 hours
TOTAL OSP				144	50.5 hours

Awarding of the Overall T-Level Grade

Once you have achieved grades in both the **Core Component** and the **Occupational Specialism Project (OSP)**, these are combined to produce your final **overall T-Level grade**.

To be awarded the T-Level, you must:

- Achieve at least a **grade E** in the Core Component,
- Achieve at least a **Pass** in the Occupational Specialism, and
- Complete your **Industry Placement (minimum 315 hours / 45 days)**.

Your Core grade (A*–E) and your OSP grade (Distinction/Merit/Pass) are mapped together using the official Department for Education (DfE) grade matrix as follows:

Core Grade	Distinction (OSP)	Merit (OSP)	Pass (OSP)
A*	Distinction*	Distinction	Distinction
A	Distinction	Distinction	Merit
B	Distinction	Merit	Merit
C	Distinction	Merit	Pass
D	Merit	Merit	Pass
E	Merit	Pass	Pass

Overall T-Level Grade Calculation - Worked Example

Core Exam Papers total score of 132/180 = 204 UMS points
ESP total score of 70/100 = 130 UMS points
Therefore, Total Core Component UMS Score = 334 UMS points (Grade A)
OSP raw score of 86/144 = Merit
Final Overall T-Level Grade = Distinction

Core Grade	Distinction (OSP)	Merit (OSP)	Pass (OSP)
A*	Distinction*	Distinction	Distinction
A	Distinction	**Distinction**	Merit
B	Distinction	Merit	Merit
C	Distinction	Merit	Pass
D	Merit	Merit	Pass
E	Merit	Pass	Pass

UCAS Points and A-Level Equivalence

Your overall T-Level grade is equivalent in value to three A-Levels. This means your T-Level can be used for university applications through UCAS. The table below shows the UCAS tariff points for each T-Level grade, and how these compare to traditional A-Level grades:

T-Level Grade	UCAS Tariff Points	Equivalent A-Level Grades
Distinction*	168	A*A*A*
Distinction	144	AAA
Merit	120	BBB
Pass (Core C+)	96	CCC
Pass (Core D/E)	72	DDD

External Assessment - Exam and Set Task Schedule

Each Core Component external assessment is available to be taken twice per year. These are referred to as the Summer Exam Series and the Winter Exam Series. At Ada, we have successfully structured our courses, and our learners have achieved great success, by adopting the following exam timetable structure:

Unit	**First Sit**	**Re-Sit** *(only where this is considered necessary)*
Core Paper 1	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (June 2026)	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (June 2027)
Core Paper 2	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (June 2026)	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (June 2027)
Core ESP	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (May 2026)	Y12 - Summer Exam Series (May 2027)
OSP	Y13 - Summer Exam Series (March-May 2027)	

Time Management

Your T-Level is designed to challenge you, and success will depend on how well you organise your time.

Across two years you will sit:

- Three Core assessments at the end of Year 12 (two exam papers and the Employer Set Project).
- A major practical synoptic project in Year 13 (over 50 hours, between March and May).

Because the T-Level is cumulative, every assessment counts towards your final grade. This means you cannot afford to "switch on" only at the end of Year 13, you need to stay consistent from the very start.

Good time management means:

- Planning and following an independent study routine from Day 1.
- Keeping pace with lessons so that revision becomes reinforcement, not catch-up.
- Setting realistic goals each week and holding yourself accountable.

Managing your time well is not just about passing assessments — it's about building the discipline and habits that will help you thrive in university, apprenticeships, and your future career.

Start early, stay consistent, and give yourself the best chance to achieve your potential.

Your Journey at Ada

At Ada, the National College for Digital Skills, our mission is to develop the next generation of diverse digital talent. Your T-Level in Digital Software Development with us is therefore more than a qualification, it's a journey of growth, challenge, and opportunity.

Success here is built on Ada's five core values:

- **Curiosity** – asking questions, exploring ideas, and pushing beyond what you already know.
- **Creativity** – designing solutions, building projects, and using technology to make an impact.
- **Collaboration** – working with your teachers, peers, and employers to achieve more together.
- **Rigour** – mastering technical skills, paying attention to detail, and striving for excellence.
- **Resilience** – meeting challenges head-on, learning from setbacks, and always moving forward.

By combining the Core Component, the Occupational Specialism, your Industry Placement, and additional professional certifications, you will complete a course that is not only academically rigorous and recognised by universities as equivalent to three A-Levels, but also one that gives you the workplace experience, professional skills, and industry credibility that go far beyond what A-Levels alone can offer.

At Ada, you will be challenged, supported, and inspired, developing as a confident digital professional ready for degree apprenticeships, university, and fulfilling careers in technology.