



EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT FOR 16/17 YEAR OLDS STUDYING BELOW LEVEL 2

CASE STUDIES MARCH 2018

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Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation to conduct research to identify what type of employer engagement activities are effective for learners, aged 16 to 17, with low prior attainment (no qualifications at Level 2) studying at Entry Level and Level 1 in Further Education providers.

This resource presents 25 case studies of effective practice in employer engagement activities for this group of learners. The case studies highlight the ways in which providers from across the FE sector design, recruit to, deliver and evaluate their employer engagement provision. The case studies are grouped by provider type.

These case studies accompany a guide for providers on how to design and deliver effective employer engagement activities and a summary report, which presents the findings of research undertaken between November 2017 and March 2018. These resources can be found at: tvet.excellencegateway.org.uk/transition-offer





GENERAL FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

Barking and Dagenham College

Barking and Dagenham College is a General Further Education College in East London with 12,500 students, 3,500 of whom are aged 16-18. Approximately one third of these 3,500 students are studying at Level 1.

About the activities delivered
The type of employer engagement activities offered by the college include:

- Paid work experience via the college's subsidiary company 'Aspire', which matches students to live project briefs set by internal and external employers.
"Aspire is a kind of a matching tool whereby, say the local authority wants to repaint one of their community centres... They'll put it on there, and then... the [students] will pitch for the business via the company which is called Aspire."
(Provider)

- Work experience in the college's on-site retail outlets, that are run by students and include an IT repairs shop, a florist, a photography shop and a stationery shop that is run by students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). These provide opportunities for students of all abilities to work with those from other levels and thus helps foster peer to peer mentoring.
- Employer workshops, at which employers share information and insight into their industry and products, or processes used within their sector.
- Visits to employers' premises or sites, arranged by curriculum staff. These visits allow students to see processes in operation, or on construction sites to experience work related learning in sectors such as carpentry, painting and decorating, and plumbing.

Programme design

Early in the academic year, students take part in an enrichment programme designed to enhance their transferable and employability skills such as confidence, public speaking, and planning their career pathways. As part of the programme, they engage with employers on campus through activities such as mock interviews, speed interviews and employer carousels. These activities are designed to build confidence before learners go on work experience, which is matched to students' skills and abilities. Learners who are not considered ready for an external placement can be offered internal placements to get experience of working in, and for, the college. For example, the college has gardens and greenhouses which allow Level 1 landscaping students to gain work experience. Students can also gain experience of running their own



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enterprise within college, for example students with learning disabilities, with the support of an assistant, packed sweets and sold them to college students and staff from a trolley that they took around campus.

As well as matching students to paid work experience, Aspire acts as the conduit between employer and student to match learners to unpaid work experience. When a student becomes ready for work experience (which can be at varying times throughout the year depending on the individual's progress), their name will be put into Aspire's talent bank, along with information about their skills and interests. When a suitable placement becomes available (which depends on the employer's capacity and needs), the students whose names have been on the list for the longest are matched to the placement.

Employers are involved in the design of engagement activities, particularly in deciding what activities students will do when on work experience with them, but also in the design of engagement activities on campus. For example, an employer who attended a short course for construction students helped the tutor to amend the course content so that it was better-aligned with the needs of the employer and the industry.

"I didn't think the course content was worthwhile to us... You can look at a textbook and see what drylining is, and then there's actually what we do... so it needed to be more basic... It was too much that they were trying to get them to do. I worked with the tutor and got the course narrowed down." (Employer)

Recruiting employers

The college has pursued partnerships with employers through a variety of mechanisms, including industry networks, programmes and events, such as Industry Speaks, BDC Listens in the construction industry, and the Teach Too programme. Curriculum managers have developed and nurtured strong relationships with employers to encourage their participation in engagement activities.

Additional support

The college employs job coaches who work closely with each vocational area to provide learners with on-going support prior to, during and following their work experience. The job coaches form part of the college's wider support network that includes progress coaches, opportunities coaches, onsite counsellors, dyslexia practitioners and learning support assistants. This support is designed to help those with learning needs to gain confidence and improve their skills, including their employability skills.

The difference made

Outcomes are measured through progression and destination data, such as the number of students gaining employment or becoming self-employed after completion of their college course. Key performance indicators are used to monitor impact of employer engagement activities, which include improvements in attendance, retention and achievement. Furthermore, progress is monitored via an online tracking tool 'eTracker' which allows curriculum staff to input details of employer focussed activities that the student has engaged with.

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Critical success factors

- The college's subsidiary company, Aspire, is critical in matching suitable students to short-term paid employment opportunities, acting as a conduit between employer and student.
- The enrichment programme that students take part in, early in the academic year, is designed to enhance their transferrable and employability skills. This is crucial to ensuring students develop a broad range of personal and employability skills, enabling them to maximise the benefit of employer engagement that follows.
- The high degree of flexibility in scheduling employer engagement activities means that the relationship meets the needs of the employer as well as the learner. Work experience can be scheduled for various times of the year, depending on when is most suitable for the employer and learner.

Barnet and Southgate College



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A lot of students at Level 1, their confidence has gone. On that course we build them up... At the start of that teaching we would never have put them in the placements that we put them in at the end of that teaching, in week six. So they really develop.

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Barnet and Southgate College is a General Further Education College in London. The college has over 13,000 students, including 16-19 year olds studying from Entry Level 3 to Level 1.

About the activities delivered

The college runs a six-week employability course that prepares learners for work experience by focusing on employability skills, including CV preparation, how to approach employers, and interview skills. The college involves employers in this course through their engagement in mock interviews with students. These activities are included in the preparatory course to gradually introduce students to employers, building up to more intense contact through work experience.

“A lot of students at Level 1, their confidence has gone. On that course we build them up... At the start of

that teaching we would never have put them in the placements that we put them in at the end of that teaching, in week six. So they really develop.” (Provider)

The college also runs a programme called ‘Move Up’ for young people below Entry Level 3 with additional support needs. This programme has recently developed a partnership with Mencap, which provides the college with details of work experience opportunities with employers who have the capacity to support learners with additional needs. This partnership has been particularly helpful in broadening the options for learners with higher needs.

Other employer engagement activities run by the college include employer events, at which employers come in to the college to deliver presentations and practical exercises, or carousel events, at which students rotate

around the room talking to different employers; employer talks, which tend to be specific to a particular curriculum area; careers fairs, which might focus on a specific sector or type of work; mock interviews and role plays with employers; and work experience which, for learners with higher support needs, can be internal on the college campus or with external employers in groups of two or three students.

Programme design

Curriculum staff design and deliver engagement activities that are specific to their curriculum area. This ensures that activities suit the needs of learners and support the achievement of learning outcomes. Curriculum staff consider what skills students will need to develop at particular points in the academic year, based on their knowledge of the curriculum, and run activities accordingly. Cross-college events, such as a jobs and

apprenticeships fair, are organised by the central careers team, although they also consult with curriculum staff.

Before activities take place, the college briefs employers on the courses which learners are studying. Learners are also briefed on the employers that they will engage with so that they can think of questions that they might want to ask of them. These briefings were incorporated into the programme design after some employers ran activities which were inappropriate for learners' levels and learners did not feel confident to ask questions. The briefings ensure that employers have realistic expectations of learners and that learners are prepared to participate, enabling more effective engagement between the two parties.

Learners who can source their own work experience directly with an employer are encouraged to do so, as this helps to foster confidence and communication skills. Before they start their work experience, all learners must sign and agree to comply with a written contract which sets out the expectations of them in the workplace.

Recruiting employers

The college promotes its engagement activities as an opportunity for employers to widen their recruitment pool and invest in new talent. Some of the college's students speak five different languages, and many students are looking for training opportunities, such as apprenticeships. Employers who are looking for apprentices can use work experience as a 'trial run' with a student, which can help them decide whether to offer them an apprenticeship. Other engagement activities, such as talks and presentations, enable employers

to influence the skills that students develop and, therefore, the skills of their future workforce.

Additional support

The college ensures that employers who engage with students below Level 2 have experience of working with young people at this level. Employers are briefed on any additional needs that learners have, so that they can be involved in supporting, coaching, tracking and evidencing progress they make in engagement activities or work experience.

The timing and duration of work experience is flexible for students with additional needs. For example, it could involve attending for one day each week over many weeks, rather than a one-week block placement, to give learners more time to settle in and gain confidence in the work environment. Students with autism often need longer to get used to the college environment, before changing to a workplace environment. For these young people, work experience is typically scheduled towards the end of the academic year.

"The low-level students, it takes them a few days to settle in. If we offer them one week, by the time they get settled in and they know what they're doing and they're confident at it, it will be time for them to leave... that's why they do two weeks." (Provider)

The difference made

Outcomes data from work experience is generally qualitative and collected from learners and employers via feedback sheets at the end of every placement. A proportion (roughly 5-10%) of learners are offered part-time positions with the employer after completing their work experience. This information is recorded on the

student's personal record. Feedback from learners, employers and tutors is also sought on employer engagement events which informs the design of future events.

Critical success factors

- The six-week employability course prepares learners for work experience, gradually building their confidence in engaging with employers and making them aware of expectations in the workplace.
- Activities in which students can have some practical involvement, such as role play, are more effective than engagement activities in which students take a more passive role, such as listening to an employer talk.
- The written contract for learners on work experience ensures that they adhere to rules on behaviour and conduct when working for an employer, improving the experiences of both employers and learners.

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Derby College

The Derby College Group is accountable for meeting the needs of its community, both business and civic. The Group provides an excellent learning experience to thousands of students every year, enabling them to advance successfully to the next stage of their lives, be that higher education, the world of work, career progression or establishing their own business.

All 4,500 full time students follow a study programme comprised of an academic or vocational course of learning; additional maths and English; and employer engagement activities (specialist speakers, workplace visits, projects, work experience, CV workshops and mock interviews).

This case study highlights the work of the Cricket Derbyshire Hospitality Academy, which supports students from Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and 'Get Into' Hospitality courses and apprentices.

About the programme

Since 2015, the college has launched 28 Employer Academies (EAs), each one led by a local employer, to enable students to develop technical and employability skills in real working environments. EAs help young

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The Employer Academies are building bridges for young people to make smooth transitions from education to employment and synthesise knowledge into practice.

DERBY COLLEGE

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people put their knowledge into practice while working towards their qualifications. Through the EAs, all learners have access to a mentor and coach, specialist speakers, industry visits, and the opportunity to apply for internships, work experience or part-time or casual work with the lead employer. At the end of their course, young people leave college with a qualification and the skills, attitudes and experience to begin their chosen career or progress to further study.

Students who are involved in working at the Cricket Club each receive an in depth induction, site tour and training, preparing them to work alongside Derby Cricket Club employed staff, supporting internal and external hospitality events.

In addition, the Cricket Club supports maths and English events, CV workshops and mock interviews to highlight the importance of these key skills and qualifications, providing real life practical examples and activities so students are truly prepared for the world of work.

Programme design

Through the Derby College Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs), the employers and stakeholders co-design and co-create course content to ensure the knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviours that employers value in the workplace are embedded in employer engagement activities.

Around 250 employers are represented on these boards which cover 16 industry sectors: Business, Construction, Creative Arts, Digital and Science, Early Years, Engineering, Hair and Beauty, Health and Social Care, Hospitality, Land-Based, Motor Vehicle, Professional Construction, Public Services, Rail,

Sport and Travel and Tourism.

There are 10 employers on the Hospitality ESB including hotels, restaurants, pubs, catering companies and hospitality recruitment consultants.

Additional support

The EA model is flexible and enables students who require more intensive support to progress in their employability journey. For example, while in the academy, students are paired with an experienced team member who shows them the key tasks in each job and enables them to practice under supervision.

“The Employer Academies are building bridges for young people to make smooth transitions from education to employment and synthesise knowledge into practice.”
(Derby College)

Additional support is also made available towards the end of the academic year to facilitate progression. Students can access IAG advisers and the Roundhouse Recruitment Service, an on-campus recruitment agency that supports students to apply for part-time employment to complement studies and progress into full-time employment and apprenticeships.

The difference made

Students welcome the opportunity to combine theoretical learning with practical work, which helps them develop skills and improves their confidence in their abilities. All of the learners on the Level 1 and 'Get Into' hospitality courses agreed that their course met their needs and enhanced their sector knowledge. Similarly, the college's Employer Survey data for these courses showed that all employers felt that students had the right skills and attitudes to work in the sector.



"I gained a lot of experience from that. I felt part of it because I was kept busy and it boosted my confidence up. I was a bit shy and didn't have much experience of talking with others but throughout the months I've learnt a lot and it's a great opportunity." (Learner)

"...students have picked up the extra skills that they need in addition to the units that they're doing at college. The Food and Beverage students don't have the opportunity to do Silver Service in the college, whereas many have got the opportunity to do that now because they've been out with the employers." (Hospitality Curriculum Manager)

The academy model is perceived by the college as a great platform to

prepare students for the next phase of their lives.

"The more we work with the college, the more rounded the students are by the time they come out looking for employment." (Cricket Derbyshire Hospitality Academy)

Critical success factors

- A strong employer commitment to developing both curriculum and industry opportunities, with the model embedded across 16 industry sectors.
- Students combine theoretical learning with practical, meaningful work experience.
- Students are supported by a strong team of college-wide advisers

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LEARNER

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including work experience brokers, IAG professionals, and recruitment officers.

- The ESB model has driven innovation in the college's overall offer to students, as the programme of activities is constantly reviewed and refreshed.

East Kent College

East Kent College works in one of the most deprived parts of the country with high levels of unemployment. They offer a wide range of FE, professional, basic skills and vocational courses from Pre-Entry to Level 3, as well as Access and HE programmes.

About the programme

This case study showcases the college's 'Sector-Based Work Academies' model. A Sector-Based Work Academy is a full-time three-week course which trains job seekers and entry level learners for vacancies with a specific employer. The academy programme is intensive, running from 9am to 4pm every day in community settings. Course participants develop employability and social skills; sector-specific skills for the job roles on offer; and knowledge of the company that they are applying to. They are guaranteed an interview at the end of the course. Course tutors have three aspects to their role: delivering employability workshops and job specific training; job brokering; and mentoring. Roleplay is used extensively to help candidates

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Our hospitality course helps young people who are interested learn the skills that are needed for that sector, it gives a clear pathway into employment, it drives people straight through, or if they find out that they don't want to be in that sector, they can explore other ones having learnt something about the world of work and the process of applying for jobs.

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understand what the company is looking for.

The academies provide a pathway into employment and progression and is a model that could be used for any age range and level. The college currently runs academies for a number of different sectors including hospitality, retail, care, administration, office-based and call centres. These dovetail with other employability programmes and are a valid progression option for those completing Level 1 vocational courses.

Programme design

The employability team build bespoke courses tailored to the employer's recruitment requirements. They spend time canvassing training needs and visiting employers' premises to understand the company culture and to see jobs being performed in 'real time,' taking the time to talk with existing employees to develop a picture of the skills and attributes required for different roles. This approach informs the course content. Employers are involved in the design of the course and are also involved in delivering some of the workshops, giving the participants chance to meet them and ask questions ahead of their interviews.

“Our hospitality course helps young people who are interested learn the skills that are needed for that sector, it gives a clear pathway into employment, it drives people straight through, or if they find out that they don't want to be in that sector, they can explore other ones having learnt something about the world of work and the process of applying for jobs.”

The college has plans to adapt the Sector-Based Work Academy model for its pre-apprenticeship programmes

to close the gap around accessibility to apprenticeships for young people who've not attained at GCSE.

Recruiting participants and employers

Sector-Based Work Academy students are predominantly Jobcentre Plus (JCP) mandated learners who need to develop their skills to enable them to re-enter the world of work, but ESOL learners and post-16 learners studying below Level 2 will also train alongside the mandated learners. The Employability Team has a close working relationship with Jobcentre Plus. Assessments, learner profiles and IAG interviews are used to match learners to upcoming courses and their capabilities and motivations – often it is about changing their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to work.

“Mixing different types of people gives you more breadth, it gives the younger people access to older people and their experiences. In the world of work you're mixing with lots of people.”
(Employability Team)

The college's Employability Team engages with a wide range of businesses across East Kent, particularly those moving into the area or those looking to expand, canvassing their needs and building strong relationships. The college's reputation for delivering employable candidates with JCP mandated learners has led to businesses actively seeking solutions using the Sector-Based Work Academy model.

Additional support

The Employability Team has two dedicated Support and Progression Coordinators who support people with additional needs, e.g. safeguarding, family relationships, debt and housing. The college has a discretionary



budget to support learners with food, utility, childcare and travels bills, so that there are no financial barriers to course attendance.

A key element of the programme is post-course mentoring. If a learner is successful in gaining employment, the tutor will keep in touch and offer advice to help them successfully make the transition into work, as well as supporting them to recognise their in-work achievements and budget their salary. Tutor-mentors also continue to work with those who are not successful on selection days, encouraging participation in further Sector-Based Work Academies or providing support with applying for similar vacancies. Those who are not successful in obtaining employment or would like exposure to another sector can continue to build their skills by completing additional three-week courses.

The difference made

More than 860 unemployed people have been helped into sustained employment or further education from the college's employability programmes. Learners from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds have developed good vocational, functional and employment skills as a result of effective and productive partnership working with JCP and employers. In 2016/17, 62% of learners on the college's Sector-Based Work Academies secured job outcomes.

Critical success factors

- The college's in-depth analysis of employer needs before the programme starts ensures that learners develop the skills the sector/employer requires and are therefore able to achieve a positive progression into employment or further training.

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EMPLOYABILITY TEAM

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- The availability of real jobs as an outcome is a strong motivating factor for learners and enables them to present to real employers and discuss real opportunities.
- Ultimately, the academies are about challenging negative attitudes and beliefs and giving learners an understanding of business and the skills employers need in today's world.
- The support on and beyond the course from Support and Progression Coordinators and tutor-mentors enable learners to break down barriers to work and make successful transitions into employment or further employability training.
- The short duration of the courses means learners achieve either a rapid transition to supported employment or a rapid acquisition of skills that can be marketed to other employers in the sector.

Kingston College



Kingston College is a college of further and higher education based in South West London. The college offers courses at all levels, including below Level 2 in vocational subjects. The college also runs Supported Learning courses at Entry Level 1 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

About the activities

Employability activities are run across all provision under the brand of Inspiring Futures (IF). IF runs hour-long sessions every Monday and Wednesday, during which employers come in to the college to give talks on careers in their industry. Every student is expected to attend at least three of these sessions over the course of a year. Other employer engagement activities run at the college include: careers fairs; employer visits (which can include mock interviews

carried out by the employer on site); employability weeks (in which employers come in to run interactive sessions, workshops and give talks); and work experience.

Programme design

The college sequences employer engagement activities so that they begin with preparatory activities, such as writing CVs, interview skills and internal work experience in the college, before building up to external work experience from mid-way through the academic year.

“...by [then], they’ve had all the support, they’ve had the confidence building, they’ve had the employability development. They will have also had some internal opportunity to work... to build that confidence in a familiar environment, and then, come March, we would hope that they would be ready to be outside somewhere.”
(Provider)

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Work experience is typically carried out full-time over one week. However, Supported Learning students undertake an internship that is typically 2-3 days per week over three months. Running the placement over a longer period allows the employer to see greater development in learners and understand their potential.

Students are involved in preparing employer engagement activities. For example, the college ran an enterprise and employability conference, at which students networked with employers and took part in table discussions. Students prepared questions to ask in both of these discussions prior to the event and the college provided some suggested questions and points for discussion. This ensured that students got the maximum benefit from the event.

When designing the content of employer talks, the college and

employers work together to decide what would be most useful for them to discuss. This can often depend on individual employers and their own career paths, as students find it engaging and motivating to hear employers' personal stories of how they overcame barriers to succeed. Employers tend to incorporate talks on career opportunities and work experience in their sector with more participatory activities, to make them more interactive and engaging for students.

Recruiting employers

Motivations for employers to engage with learners include access to a talent pool of potential future apprentices or employees, and reassurance that the college is equipping students with the skills that employers will require from their future workforce. Links with employers are generally developed by teaching staff who have strong industry links and backgrounds in the subjects they teach.

Additional support

Students are supported in securing work experience by the Employer Engagement Manager who is part of a central employer engagement team. The Employer Engagement Manager posts details of opportunities, explains work experience to students, role plays with learners how they would approach an employer, and suggests which employers they could approach.

The college also briefs employers fully on the support individual students may need. They work with employers to adapt materials, terminology and presentations, which has been much appreciated by employers. Face-to-face contact with employers is most effective in enabling them to fully understand the abilities of Level 1 students.

Course tutors are highly involved in securing internship placements for their learners. They meet potential employers face-to-face and provide a two-hour training session in the employer's workplace to ensure that the learners' colleagues understand their needs. The learner typically attends this training session. Some employers provide their own in-house training and support to staff who engage with students with additional support needs.

"[The learner] can let us know and we make adjustments. We have had hard of hearing students in before. We've got interpreters for them. Students with behavioural difficulties like ADHD, all of the departments are fully briefed on that and they know that they might need more breaks or they might not respond well to long listening periods." (Employer)

The difference made

Destinations data shows that the Supported Learning programme achieves a 56% employment rate for participants, compared to a national average of 6% for SEND learners. This success rate is attributed to the quality of their work experience. Progression within the college is also attributed to employer engagement. For example, 30% of Level 1 Transport Maintenance students progress to Level 2 Motor Vehicle, and feedback suggests this is because employer engagement motivates learners and raises their aspirations. In addition, students often secure part-time work or an apprenticeship with an employer after completing work experience. Learners who have completed work experience consistently comment that their employability skills, such as team work and confidence, have developed considerably.

"It's helped me with confidence because it gave me experience of working in that environment, and also helped me think about what I want to do next year." (Learner)

For the college, employer engagement activities allow teaching staff to be reassured that the syllabus matches current industry practice. Students' progression within the college also benefits the college itself as well as the individual students.

Critical success factors

- The in-depth understanding that tutors on the Supported Learning programme have of their students and their needs, which allows them to match a student to a work experience placement that they are best suited to.
- Face-to-face contact with employers to help them understand the abilities of Level 1 students and how they can adapt materials to suit the needs of students at this level.
- Having a central team of staff who make employer engagement work effectively. Without this cross-college support, curriculum staff would struggle to implement engagement effectively if working in isolation.

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London South East Colleges

London South East Colleges (LSEC) has four campuses across South East London. They offer a range of vocational courses, including apprenticeships, as well as professional qualifications and higher education courses.

About the programme

All students follow the 'Career Advantage' framework which includes: a main programme of study (from Entry Level courses to Higher Education); tutorials; support to achieve GCSE English and maths at Grade 4 or above; work experience and access to enrichment activities and enhancement courses, e.g. First Aid and Health and Safety. Through Career Advantage, students develop skills in four clusters (social, employability, enterprise and digital) which have been identified as important and valuable to employers, earning 'Advantage Awards' for interactions with employers, skills development within their study

programme and for attending employability and enrichment events.

Students evidence their own skills and achievements using an App called Kloodle. Kloodle enables students to 'tag' the development of 25 skills within the four clusters. The skills tags are linked to students' Kloodle profile pages, thereby creating a digital CV and portfolio of evidenced skills and participation in 'employability events', some of which are generic and others bespoke to each vocational course or work with an individual employer. Students have the opportunity to meet with their tutor to review their skills profile every 4-6 weeks, reflecting on prior activity and setting development targets for the future.

"You can evidence, say 'resilience' or 'communication' through a blog, a vlog, a picture, and then that will be marked by Kloodle... We've found the engagement take up much better with the students now we have this app system." (Career Advantage Team)

Students' online profiles, similar to the concept of a LinkedIn profile, can be viewed by tutors and employers partnering with the college. As tags are collected and endorsed, students achieve Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum Awards, which are recognised by employers as complementing their vocational attainment. The Platinum Award is wholly employer endorsed and is achieved through obtaining industry-specific skills.

Career Advantage is complemented by Employer Advantage, which enables employers who are supporting students to access benefits from the college, e.g. training needs analyses, advertising opportunities, discounts on facility hire and staff training. Partner employers offer work experience; part-time or vacation work; apprenticeships; secondments for college staff; mock interview preparation; site visits; job fairs; industry talks and employability workshops.

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CAREER ADVANTAGE TEAM

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Recruiting participants and employers

The college promotes Career Advantage to students through local schools, open days, taster days and student and parents evenings, where the concept of Career Advantage can be explained as a key differential from other providers' post-16 offers. Employer engagement is well established at LSEC, with dedicated engagement teams maintaining relationships with over 1,000 employers. The college works with large employers who pay the Apprenticeship Levy, employing an account manager to write apprenticeship procurement bids but also aims to be rooted in the community, working with local employers recruiting across London and the South East.

Programme design

The college has created 14 sector-specific 'Employer Advisory Boards' who review the current and future skills requirements for their respective industries, e.g. the Construction Board is comprised of 37 employers including multinationals, nationals, SMEs and micro-businesses. A skills review is undertaken annually, leading to the revision of vocational courses and the skills and activities embedded within Career Advantage. This approach ensures that qualifications and employability activities are up-to-date and relevant.

"We've asked them the question: in addition to a technical qualification, what soft skills, what employability skills would you want to see someone coming into your organisation to have? They've given us that information and, from that, we've then designed a framework around it, as I say, in those four categories: social, employability, enterprise

and digital skills." (Career Advantage Team)

The college has aspirations to create shorter, roll on roll off courses, preparing foundation or Level 1 students for entry level vacancies in industry and embedding the assessment and preparation for interviews within the Career Advantage model.

Additional support

For Level 1 Built Environment students, the tutorial system and small class sizes enable tutors to link the vocational learning to the four skills clusters. Additionally, tutors, IAG advisors and visiting employers play an important role in introducing both students and parents to the different career paths stemming from each qualification.

"I'll say, 'Okay, how do you fancy working at the Shard and being a maintenance man, being up on top? That's what a plumber or a heating engineer could do. Know how to lay electric cable – well you could work on the railways.' It's about setting their aspirations up." (Tutor)

The student enrichment team support Career Advantage too, ensuring that the skills developed through extra-curricular activities and hobbies and interests can be evidenced.

The difference made

The aims and objectives of Career Advantage is to provide LSEC students with a competitive advantage in job and university applications through the demonstration of the key skills needed for the workplace and through the creation of employer-student networks. For students in the Built Environment Faculty: 87% of entry level, 79% of Level 1 and 74% of Level 2 students from the 2016/17

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TUTOR

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cohort went on to further education, training or employment in 2017/18.

Critical success factors

- The creation of Employer Advisory Boards to facilitate an annual review of vocational courses and the activities and projects linked to the skills tags.
- Work to embed the Career Advantage brand among students, tutors and employers following recent mergers, ensuring that it is recognised and valued at key progression points, e.g. applications for apprenticeships, further study and employment.
- The use of app technology to harness students' engagement in their own self-development.
- The time invested by tutors and IAG advisors in broadening students' horizons.

New College Swindon



New College Swindon is a General Further Education College in the South West of England, with approximately 3,000 16-18 year old students. Employer engagement activities are built in to a wide range of courses, including vocational programmes and courses below Level 1.

About the programme/activities delivered

Examples of employer engagement activities run by the college include speed and mock interviews, tasks and projects set by employers (including role plays in which employers participate), visits to employer workplaces and work experience. Mock interviews generally involve each student in an interview with just one employer, for a longer length of time, and in this way more closely resembles a real interview. In comparison, speed interviews involve students rotating around tables at which employers are sat, spending

two minutes with each employer in a mini-interview before moving on to the next employer. This format allows students to gain a breadth of experience of different interview styles and questions in a short space of time and helps them learn how to think quickly in an interview situation.

Programme design

The college has introduced a framework of seven employability skills, each represented by an icon so that curriculum staff and employers can incorporate these into the design of activities. The aim is to ensure that learners are provided with opportunities to develop the full range of employability skills that are important in the workplace.

A central employer engagement team manages and organises cross-college employer engagement activities such as employer talks and fairs and work experience. This is done in collaboration with students

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...by [then], they've had all the support, they've had the confidence building, they've had the employability development. They will have also had some internal opportunity to work... to build that confidence in a familiar environment, and then, come March, we would hope that they would be ready to be outside somewhere.

PROVIDER

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and their tutors, who can advise on the particular types of activities that students are interested in. The central team is the point of contact for all employers, and will act as the conduit between employer and learner.

Engagement activities are sequenced in order to prepare learners for work experience. For example, after developing their CV, a learner might do preparatory work for speed and mock interviews, which would in turn prepare, them for work experience. To prepare for speed and mock interviews, students practice answering questions in class, and take personality tests to explore their strengths and weaknesses, so that they have a better understanding of their skills set which they can talk about in interviews.

The college used to arrange speed interviews to be conducted by external employers, but found that this high-pressured format caused students

a great deal of anxiety and they did not respond well to the challenge. They therefore decided to alter the format more recently so that speed interviews are conducted by college staff with whom the students are more familiar with, before they progress on to mock interviews conducted by employers.

“Initially, it was a mixture of employers and staff and the students said they were much more comfortable with the staff, so we changed it to just be staff with the speed interviews. Then we moved on to mock interviews, with an employer that was very easy to talk to.” (Provider)

Additional support

When recruiting employers to engage with learners with additional needs, the college focuses on those who they have worked with previously and are confident will provide the tailored support that is required. For example, some employers, such as the Co-op, have policies on engaging with diverse group of students, while a number of IT companies focus on engagement activities for young people with Asperger’s.

“We tailor every programme to the individual, we have a general programme but once we interview them and get to know them and talk to them about what their interests are and what they want to get out of it, we will tailor the week accordingly.” (Employer)

For SEND learners, the college works in partnership with the Independent Psychological Service, which provides support workers to work directly with learners. The support workers are involved in preparing the learner for a work placement and liaising with the employer on their behalf, including briefing the employer on the particular

support needs of the learner, and accompanying the learner on work experience if necessary.

“Students with learning and physical disabilities are often very good at doing repetitive tasks so we are looking at doing some work placements with them, two or three hours a day for a small amount of time.” (Employer)

The difference made

The college is currently trialling ‘Kloodle’ to record outcomes of employer engagement activities. This is a social-media platform which allows learners to create blogs, diaries and videos recording their skills development. They can tag these with skills they have learnt, and then collate ‘evidence’ of particular skills in preparation for an interview. Users can also send employers a link to view their skills profile directly. If this is rolled out, Kloodle would be used to allow learners to diarise their work experience, including pictures and projects.

Outcomes are perceived to vary depending on the type and aim of activities. For example, preparatory activities such as speed and mock interviews are intended primarily to build learner’s confidence in engaging with employers, whereas work experience enables learners to develop other employability skills such as confidence working with customers.

“I had an idea in my mind that these are the questions that are going to come up... I’d feel more confident in going into interviews next time.” (Mock interview learner)

“It helps with confidence, because you get to meet new people, and obviously if you’re working in a beauty career... if you’re nervous and you mess

something up, you can’t freak out, you have to correct it.” (Work experience learner)

Activities which allow learners to take on roles and use skills that they might not usually experience are considered particularly effective in broadening learners’ understanding of their own interests and potential.

Critical success factors

- The seven employability skills icons ensure that employer engagement activities and programmes incorporate all the necessary skills that learners need.
- Preparatory activities to build up learners’ employability skills and confidence enables learners to maximise the benefit of their work experience.
- A central employer engagement team that organises and manages activities and acts as the main contact for employers enables greater resource to be invested in delivering successful and effective activities and work experience.

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It’s helped me with confidence because it gave me experience of working in that environment, and also helped me think about what I want to do next year.

LEARNER

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Preston's College

Preston's College is a General Further Education College in Lancashire that specialises in technical and vocational provision, including Level 1 courses in automotive technologies and engineering.

About the activities

It is emphasised to students from the beginning of vocational courses that their aspirations should be to gain employment within the industry they are studying. Work experience is an important element of their course, but employer engagement takes many forms, including:

- Live projects designed by employers which require learners to deliver usable outcomes for the industry. Employers visit students at college to monitor progress on the project brief and attend final presentations to provide input on the work produced. Such projects can take place over several months.
- Employer visits to the college to give presentations and talks introducing their company and its role in industry. These can be carried out in groups or individually. For example, Halfords staff visited for a day and spoke to each

student on the automotive course individually.

- Experience days, during which students visit employers and tour their workplace.
- Interview days, during which employers visit the college to carry out mock interviews with students in order to develop their interview skills.

Programme design

The type of employer engagement activity that a student is involved in will depend on their needs and aspirations. Part of the induction process for each course is to collect



information on students' intended destinations. These are then taken into account in the design of employer engagement activities in order to personalise their learning. Throughout a course, the college also assesses students' progress and considers their preferred destinations, in order to decide what type of employer engagement activity would be best suited to them. For example, the college works with students who want to move onto an apprenticeship programme to secure them work experience in a relevant sector. In addition, every student on the automotive course participates in at least one, but more likely two or three different employer engagement activities in one academic year.

Engagement activities are sequenced over the academic year to gradually increase learners' contact with employers. The first activity takes place around week seven of the academic year, during which local employers come into the college to give talks and seminars. Around the same time, students develop their CVs and are taught the importance of work experience and the communication skills they need to successfully engage in this activity with employers.

As the year progresses, students' level of engagement with employers increases. This enables students to gain confidence before going into a real workplace. Engagement activities are designed to involve learners in practical activities, such as in a role play or workshop, rather than a passive activity, such as listening to an employer give a presentation, this has been found to engender more effective engagement.

"The greater value comes out of the projects, all the interaction. You do have employers who will come in for the workshops or into our practical learning sessions, into our real working environment, and impart their skill, which always has a better [impact] than them standing there for an hour just talking about their business." (Provider)

Recruiting participants and employers

The activities run by the college help employers to fulfil their corporate social responsibility objectives. In addition, employers are motivated to engage with students as it provides the opportunity to influence the skills set that they acquire and to identify strong candidates for apprenticeships or employment. It is important that employers are able to benefit from the relationship, as well as students and the college.

"We have to be very careful with employers that it's not just a case of take, take, take and that they see a benefit in it for themselves... Our approach is to... reach out to the employer partners and say, 'Right. What is it you really want? How can we deliver the skills and the qualities in an individual that you require and how can you help us to do that?'" (Provider)

Additional support

Before placing a student with an employer, the college ensure that the employer is aware of their individual needs. They will discuss these with the employer and visit the workplace to ensure the student can be supported while on work experience. If a student is not ready for work experience, they will engage with employers through other activities.

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“Sometimes at Level 1, learners have had difficulties in school, and then quite often they'll have social or learning difficulties. Maybe work experience isn't the right solution for them, which is why we build in other experience in terms of bringing employers in.” (Provider)

The difference made

After completing work experience, students receive either verbal or written feedback from the employer, and all students carry out self-evaluations which are used to measure the impact of engagement activities. In addition, destinations data is collected on all students six months after they complete a course, to measure outcomes such as moving into further education, employment or apprenticeships, the latter of which are in some cases gained through work experience.

Critical success factors

- Preparation activities helps learners to build workplace understanding and skills prior to work experience. This is particularly important as it is uncommon for students to have experienced a workplace environment before.

- Ensuring that work experience provides real value for both the employer and the student, and that it is tailored to their individual needs. This can involve, for example, arranging work experience for a one-week block, or work experience that spans a longer period of time, for one or two days each week.
- Engagement that provides students with the opportunity to undertake practical activities with an employer, rather than passive engagement. For example, workshops or practical learning sessions are considered to prompt a greater level of engagement from learners and so have a greater impact on students' skills and knowledge than, for example, employer talks.



LAND-BASED COLLEGES

Bishop Burton College



Bishop Burton College is a land-based college based in the East Riding of Yorkshire. The college runs a Level 1 Animal Management course with employability skills embedded within the course structure. For many learners, the course is an opportunity to build their confidence and it has been pivotal in terms of providing an entry point for young people into the college environment,

enabling them to progress to either employment or further learning.

About the programme

The course is a mixture of practical and theory work which has additional learning goals involving volunteering, enterprise and personal and social development to contribute to overall student employability. Students take an enterprise qualification and personal and social development

qualification alongside their Animal Management course.

The college has working dog kennels in which the students work, as well as an animal unit with over 400 species. Much of the course is based in the animal unit, where students' tasks replicate real-life work as a technician. For example, students complete practical assignments such as looking after the animals, health-checking

them, cleaning and feeding them correctly, following strict criteria. They are also taught that caring for animals involves a wider range of activities such as maintenance work, cleaning windows and sweeping corridors, and undertake all these jobs that are relevant to the industry.

Students are taught how to seek employment, where to look for vacancies, how to request a job description, how to complete a CV and how to complete an application form. A major part of delivery is focused around communication and interview skills in preparation for seeking work.

As part of their enterprise qualification (awarded by NCFE), students identify local entrepreneurs and invite them in for interview. They develop the interview questions, decide who will ask each question, record the interview and then review what they have learnt from the recording. As part of their own skills development, learners are asked to identify what skills entrepreneurs possess that make them successful. This activity also introduces students to the concept of self-employment as a progression option.

Employers are invited into the college to engage with students and explain what they are looking for in prospective employees and to showcase what they do. This acts as a reality check for the students, and through meeting different employers they can see that there are a lot of different opportunities in the sector.

Students undertake group work experience for a day at a time throughout the year. Each year the students also take part in Open Farm Sunday which involves them undertaking a range of tasks including

showing people around, monitoring car parking, stewarding or holding dogs for people while they view the farm.

Programme design

Bishop Burton College was one of the first colleges to run a Level 1 course in Animal Management. As a consequence, the college fully designed its own programme.

A key feature of the course is the opportunity for group work experience which is supervised by tutors. This was introduced to the programme to address the fact that many of the students are unlikely to succeed in individual work experience, since most have a wide range of personal needs, such as communication difficulties and anger management issues, and are not used to mixing with people. Another factor is that it is very competitive to secure work experience placements for animal management students so it tends to only be the most able who are successful. By running group work experience as an alternative, the college helps students prepare for Level 2 when they would be expected to undertake work experience on their own.

The group work takes place in a country park where students have the opportunity to engage with the public, build up their communication and listening skills, work alongside professionals and follow instructions, whilst undertaking activities such as litter picking and habitat reconstruction.

“We learnt that the animals are the main priority, and that we need to make sure that they’re in a nice, safe environment to live and that they’re not living in rubbish which could kill them.” (Student)

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STUDENT

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Additional support

The course cohort is typically made up of learners with no GCSEs and who may have learning difficulties or disabilities. They tend to have low confidence levels and a poor experience of school. Many have anger management issues and experienced bullying previously, and some are looked after children or care leavers.

Each student has access to wider college student support, IAG and careers advisors which they can either access independently or be directed to by course tutors. The college works actively with students who are not able to progress on to Level 2, their parents and any support agencies to explore other progression opportunities.

The difference made

Around 80% of students on the course progress to Level 2. Each student has an individual learning plan with targets which are monitored. Progress is tracked through regular tutorials. The personal and social development module runs over the full year, helping build student confidence and skills throughout the course. As a result, by the end of the course the students are transformed in terms of team working, communication skills, problem solving

and confidence levels. Change is measured through a skills audit, both of each student as an individual and by themselves as a group at the start of the project, and they then evaluate their progress at the end of the project.

The course leaders often have numerous employers that contact the college directly to actively employ Bishop Burton College students, usually because of a positive work experience placement that students have undertaken as part of their programme.

Critical success factors

- Embedding employability and personal and social development within the programme.
- Practical experience of work through the animal unit and dog kennels.
- Group work experience placements which enable students to gain a realistic understanding of the world of work, even if they are not confident enough to undertake individual work experience.



SIXTH FORM COLLEGES

Oldham Sixth Form College



Oldham Sixth Form College is based in Greater Manchester and offers a range of vocational and academic courses to 2,700 students. The college has developed a range of employer engagement activities to enable all of their students to have encounters with employers.

About the activities delivered

The college runs employer engagement activities throughout the year. These include careers, volunteering and apprenticeship events, visits to employers, employer presentations, work experience and work shadowing. Alumni are also engaged and invited to network with current students. Tutorials throughout the year have a strong focus on employability skills, with a heightened focus during Careers Week. An activity which has been particularly successful at the college is employer networking events.

The college runs five or six of these sessions a year, each focused on a different sector. Employers are invited into the college and meet with a small group of students who are interested in pursuing a career in their industry. This enables learners to ask questions of employers and hear their own stories of how they became successful in their area of work.

The college has introduced a competency framework through UniFrog - an online portal for students to track and evidence their skills. This enables students to log their activities against different competencies, so that they can provide evidence of these when applying for progression opportunities. The framework is also important in helping students understand the terminology used in recruitment and in the workplace, so that when an employer talks about the skills needed in their sector, students know exactly what they are referring to.

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For me, it's about getting the students to understand the terminology that's used outside of college... when they're applying for jobs and things because it helps them to have that. It gives them the edge.

**EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS
COORDINATOR**

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“For me, it's about getting the students to understand the terminology that's used outside of college... when they're applying for jobs and things because it helps them to have that. It gives them the edge.” (Employability Skills Coordinator)

The college's employer engagement activities help students to understand the 'real world' application of the competency framework. For example, when PwC visited the college and students visited EY Young People's Foundation, students saw their competency-based recruitment processes and linked these to the college's competency framework.

Programme design

Decisions on which employers to engage and which activities to run are shaped by the success of practice in previous years and the expertise of the college's staff and dedicated careers team. The college's Employability Skills Coordinator has

significant commercial experience, which has enabled the college to adapt their activities to suit the needs of employers and use the correct terminology to involve more businesses in their activities. They also have strong support from the college's senior management team, which has helped to develop an organisation-wide approach to employability skills development.

"...the deputy principal, the principal and the senior leadership team are very engaged in the employer engagement activities. They value it, they understand the impact it can have." (Employability Skills Coordinator)

The college benefits from close links with the local council which has created a borough-wide Education and Skills Commission. The Commission has developed the 'Oldham Pledge' which aims to ensure that every primary and secondary school pupil in Oldham has the support and opportunities to develop the skills and character traits which universities and employers are looking for. The college's Deputy Principal sits on the Commission and their Employability Skills Coordinator is on the steering group for the Oldham Pledge.

The college's involvement in this local strategy has helped to develop its employability offer to its students. For example, the college's competency framework reflects the character traits which the Oldham Pledge aims to develop. In turn, the competency framework informs the content of much of the employer engagement provision offered by the college; for example, they use it to develop the questions for mock interviews with local employers and run activities which ask students to identify the

competencies required for different job roles.

Recruiting participants and employers

The college has a data bank of employers who are willing to engage in activities. Many of these employers are local to Oldham town, and the relationship is strengthened through the college's engagement with the local council. Other employers are engaged by the Employability Skills Coordinator who has a good understanding of the commitments that businesses can make and the key messages which are effective in encouraging them to get involved. The first communications for students about events are disseminated through tutors, with most events open to all. The college also works with a partner organisation that can secure work experience for students, working with the student and their tutor to identify needs and aspirations.

Additional support

Decisions around which activities to run with which learner groups are shaped by an effort to match activities to the individual needs of students. For example, the college works with Mind for students who may have mental health needs. Another example is of a student who was offered online-based work experience to help with wellbeing needs.

The difference made

The college recognises that it can be challenging to identify the outcomes resulting from particular employer engagement activities. However, they have had feedback from students which shows that their activities have directly contributed to positive outcomes; for example, some students felt more confident going through psychometric testing processes with employers after

practicing these in the college, and one alumni said that, due to the preparation he received at the college, he was one of only eight people who were offered an apprenticeship for a scheme which received 2,000 applications. Generally, the college's destination surveys and reports show a high percentage of successful leavers and feedback from employers and students who engage in activities is very positive.

Critical success factors

- Sector-specific employer networking events help learners gain an in-depth understanding of the skills they need to succeed in addition to their qualifications.
- The commercial expertise of the Employability Skills Coordinator has helped them bring appropriate terminology into activities and tailor them to the needs of employers.
- The college's involvement in local skills strategies and senior management buy-in has helped to develop an organisation-wide approach to employment engagement.

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...the deputy principal, the principal and the senior leadership team are very engaged in the employer engagement activities. They value it, they understand the impact it can have.

**EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS
COORDINATOR**

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St Vincent Sixth Form College

St Vincent College is a sixth form college with approximately 1,000 16-19 year old students and around 300 SEND students. It is located in an area of high deprivation and unemployment in Gosport, Hampshire. Examples of Level 1 courses offered by the college include Health and Social Care, Public Services, Land Based Studies, Horticulture, Animal Care, IT, and Performance, Dance and Drama.

About the programme/activities delivered

A cross-college team of staff deliver employer engagement activities for students at all levels, including careers fairs, mock interviews, guest lectures, careers talks and work experience placements. For students at Level 1 and below, work experience is typically the key employer engagement activity, although students at all levels are encouraged to attend careers fairs and talks.

Programme design

Early in the academic year (before the October half term) learners participate in a short programme that prepares them for work experience later in the year. The programme covers employability skills such as how to contact employers, how to dress for an interview and interview skills.

“Working with the young people in advance of the placement is critical. It’s foolish not to do it because you’ve got to teach them what the professional skills and expectations are and actually, they’re quite nervous, quite often. Even if they’re very confident, they’ll be nervous, it’s a new environment, it’s out of their comfort zone.” (Provider)

Before the work experience takes place, the learner meets with the employer to discuss what they are hoping to achieve. This meeting is considered crucial as it gives the employer the opportunity to explain

what types of activities the learner will be involved in and provides clarity about the young person’s needs and objectives.

Learners at St Vincent College typically respond more positively to work experience activities that are practical and hands-on, rather than office-based. It is therefore considered particularly important to discuss what activities a learner will be doing during their work experience, to ensure they get the most value from it.

“We do tend to find that when they go to an office-based employer, they’re more likely to come back saying, ‘Well, I didn’t really get to do a lot, I didn’t really feel that I was involved,’ because often the work is cerebral or, you know, process-driven. Things that are more either manual or practical or hands-on or active tend to result in easier engagement.” (Provider)

When a young person is on work experience, the college invests time

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Working with the young people in advance of the placement is critical. It’s foolish not to do it because you’ve got to teach them what the professional skills and expectations are and actually, they’re quite nervous, quite often. Even if they’re very confident, they’ll be nervous, it’s a new environment, it’s out of their comfort zone.

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into communicating regularly with the learner and employer to monitor progress and resolve any issues that arise as quickly as possible. Tutors make telephone calls to both the learner and employer after the first day to check how it has gone and whether there are any issues that need resolving.

Additional support

The college runs a programme called 'Futures' for learners with high needs (including SEND students). For learners on this programme, a separate team of staff organises supported work placements. The team comprises one manager and five high-needs Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), whose role is to source work experience, liaise with employers and accompany students on the supported placement. The placements are tailored to suit the needs of the individual student, and because the LSAs work closely with the learners, they have a good level of understanding of each student and the type of placement that would work best for them.

Supported work experience provides a high level of flexibility, for example around the timing and duration of placements. Most of the Futures programme learners go on work experience for one or two days per week over a number of weeks, rather than a one-week block. This is considered to be less demanding on the learners and provides more opportunity for reflection and support with any issues while the learner is still on placement.

The specialised team is trained in working with learners with particular needs and so can ensure they are effectively supported while on work experience, for example by working with the employer to make any

adjustments necessary to the working environment. Larger companies typically have greater capacity than SMEs to provide the resources to both understand individual student's needs and provide the support required. This can create a challenge for the college when placing students as it is located on a peninsula, where the nearest large companies are located in conurbations at least a 45-minute drive away. Transport of students to placements is therefore sometimes an issue, although students who are provided with local authority funded transport to college can use this support to travel to their placement instead of to college.

The difference made

All courses assess students on their performance on a work experience placement, but the level and format of assessment varies according to the level of the course and ability of the student. Assessment of work experience below Level 2 comprises workbook entries and self-evaluation questions that learners complete, written feedback from the employer, and, for learners with Learning Support Assistants, observations from their LSA. Learners' workbooks require them to provide feedback on personal development they have achieved through the experience, including what they have learnt, and what they would like to do in the future. Workbook entries are recorded on the college's Pro Monitor system which holds a record for every student, including specific work experience components that are completed before and after a placement.

Critical success factors

- A short course programme in employability skills to prepare learners for work placements. This

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We do tend to find that when they go to an office-based employer, they're more likely to come back saying, 'Well, I didn't really get to do a lot, I didn't really feel that I was involved,' because often the work is cerebral or, you know, process-driven. Things that are more either manual or practical or hands-on or active tend to result in easier engagement.

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preparation is considered critical to ensure that learners have the skills they need, particularly confidence, to take their first steps into the workplace, and to ensure they understand what will be required of them in the workplace in terms of professional skills and behaviour.

- A detailed briefing of the employer on what the learner wants to achieve from any engagement activity; and what will be required of them to enable students to achieve this.
- Ongoing monitoring and support from the college while the student is on a placement, to ensure that the placement continues successfully and both employer and student can easily contact the school in the event of any issues arising.

Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth College

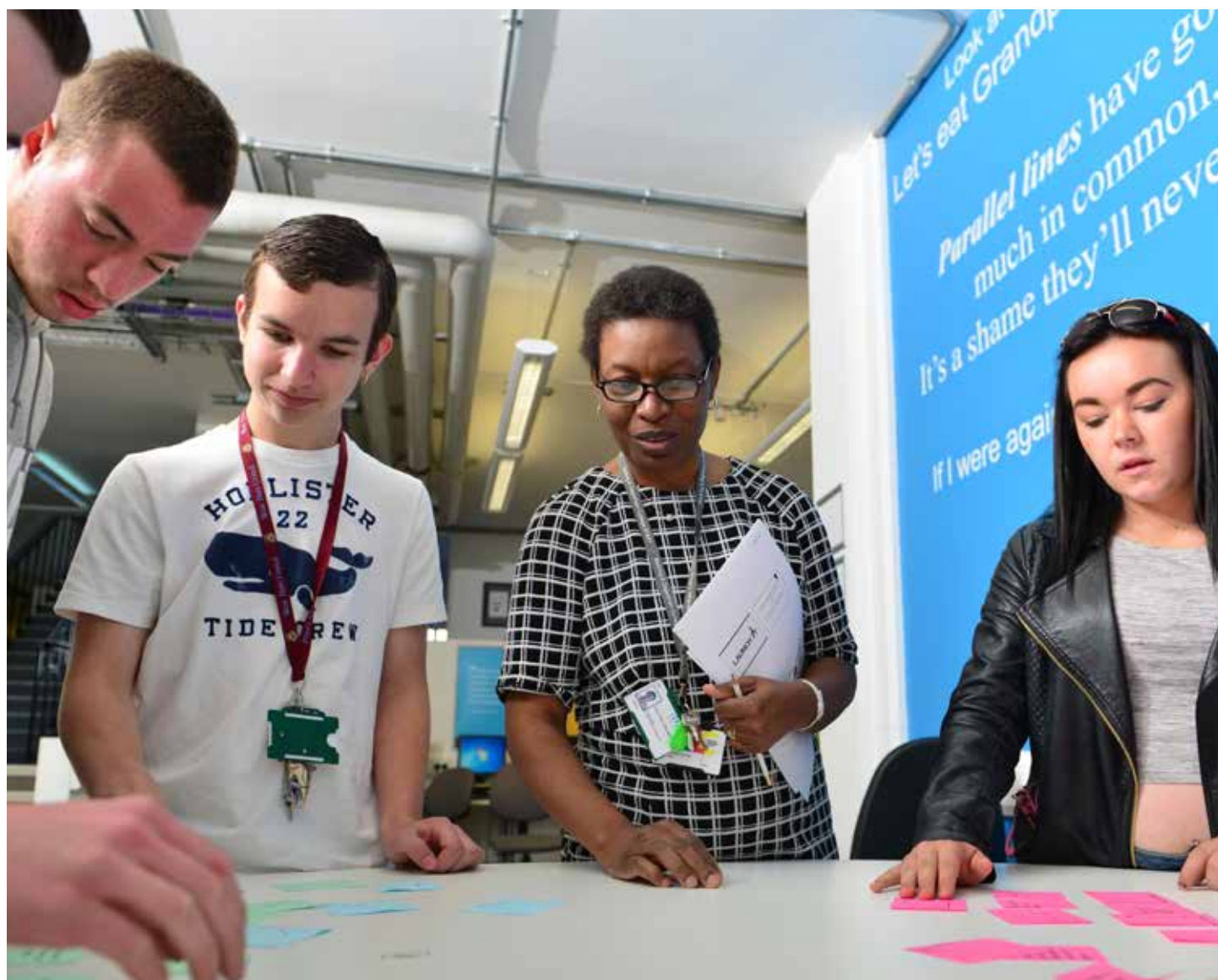
WQE is a sixth form college based in Leicester. They run an extensive and varied programme of careers activities throughout the year, catering for students wanting to progress to further learning, apprenticeships or employment.

About the programme/activities delivered

Employer engagement activities include careers fairs; mock interviews

with employers; a creative industries careers fair; and a volunteers fair. For learners interested in apprenticeships there are lunchtime talks regarding apprenticeship opportunities and one-to-one support sessions for students who need specific help with applications and CVs. Mock Assessment Centres with local employers are used for students who are focused on progressing to an apprenticeship.

The whole programme of employer engagement activities is carefully sequenced and builds momentum throughout learners' time at the college. It is linked to the student's academic curriculum, as well as individual employer's recruitment cycles. Whilst activities take place throughout the academic year, the college also has a careers week with focused skills development which includes a session called



“employability for the digital age”. It teaches students how to use LinkedIn and other digital resources to enhance their exposure and opportunities. For the Careers Fair, employers bring back students who they recruited from the college the year before, which proves to be very motivating for current students.

Through its links with large employers such as PWC, Deloitte, and Jaguar Land Rover, many students are offered work experience which allow them to develop workplace skills and progress towards higher apprenticeship opportunities. Leicestershire Education Business Company also provides work experience for WQE students each year and, for the past two years, Barclays has attended the college to launch its higher apprenticeship programme. This gives students real exposure to employers and their criteria for recruitment.

Programme design

Every June, WQE holds a consultation via its Progress Coaches with its entire student body. The feedback received is used to inform the planning of its careers activities. For example, last year the consultation identified skills gaps and sector gaps, such as a Computer Science sector gap in the engagement provision. To address this, WQE brought in the University of Birmingham to deliver information on the sector and potential job roles. The college also has student Career Ambassadors, who have regular conversations with staff from the Careers Department. This encourages regular and open dialogue with the students. In addition, the college is part of the Careers and Enterprise Company’s Enterprise Advisor Network. They work with an Enterprise Advisor from

the commercial sector who provides significant input into WQE’s careers strategy.

A key role is played by the WQE Business Network. This is a group of employers who meet every term to guide and advise on the practicality of the college’s employability provision.

Recruiting participants and employers

The college recruits employers through a variety of means. Employers are often proactive in contacting the college directly and offering opportunities to learners, which the college takes up where possible. The college also makes contact with employers they have worked with previously and their Enterprise Advisor connects them with sector specific employers where the college has identified gaps in engagement. The Enterprise Advisor is part of a wider Enterprise Advisor Network which has opened up a pool of contacts with which the college can work. This relationship is relatively new but the college has already benefitted from their advice and support in developing employer engagement opportunities for learners.

As a large college with over 2,000 students, WQE is unable to mandate student attendance for sessions in the way that other small institutions are able to, so staff encourage students to attend and the employability agenda is embedded in college life. Tutors are reminded of their responsibilities for student progression and the college has strong staff buy-in to their careers strategy. In addition, staff can see that the students benefit so are happy to promote the careers activities.

The difference made

The college is currently piloting a

'traffic light' system for feedback after employer engagement sessions. In place of lengthy feedback forms, students will be asked to rate their experience (using coloured stickers) immediately following a session. The college's Careers Manager also attends every session to gain first-hand experience of an event.

Although most students progress to further learning, the events are useful for broadening learners' horizons and thoughts about their career progression routes. Feedback from learners also suggests that the events are effective in helping them to understand the wide range of roles available in different sectors.

"Some of them think they know what they want and then go to something... and then they go, 'I never knew about that. I think I might research that.'"
(Vice Principal)

For the college, their successful employer engagement programme has boosted their reputation with local businesses, enabling them to leverage in funding for additional activities. Having a well-respected employability skills offer also helps in learner recruitment as it appeals to both schools and parents. "That can only be beneficial to the college in the long-run." (Vice Principal)

Critical success factors

- The timing of the college's employer engagement activities is crucial. They avoid overwhelming or inundating students in their first term or during exam time as this results in low attendance. Instead, they fit their programme around students' timetables and deadlines for external applications.
- Securing whole staff engagement has been key in influencing and encouraging students to attend employability sessions. Numbers at the college's Careers Fair doubled because tutors encouraged learners to attend.
- The employment of a Careers Manager reporting directly to the Vice Principal means that there are minimal layers of management processes to complete before decisions can be made. Senior staff buy-in helps decisions to be made quickly and effectively.
- The college's investment in employer relationships has been crucial in the success of their activities. The college makes great efforts to be professional, welcoming and to thank people for giving up their time and make it clear that employers will benefit from activities as much as learners do.



TRAINING PROVIDERS

Community Learning in Partnership (CLIP)



CLIP is a training organisation founded in 1995 to widen participation in learning and work amongst people from rural, isolated and coastal communities in Lincolnshire. CLIP works with over 2,000 learners a year in three training centres, offering a range of study, vocational, employability, apprenticeship and Functional Skills programmes.

About the programme

This case study focuses on one of CLIP's youth programmes: Flare. Founded in 2003, Flare is a roll-on, roll-off 16-19 study programme funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, that supports approximately 80 learners aged 16-19 and NEET per year. Learners have no or very few qualifications, low aspirations and present with a variety of challenges. Flare combines study for a vocational qualification (usually

at Entry Level, Level 1 or Level 2) with Functional Skills maths and English, an employability qualification, work experience, an enrichment project with the Shooting Fish Theatre Company, and weekly sports sessions.

Recruiting participants and employers

Flare participants are recruited via local schools and local authorities, who can refer care leavers, those who have been homeschooled and those who have dropped out of education. Referrals are also made from organisations such as LEAP, HATS and Jobcentre Plus via the Youth Obligation. CLIP's reputation for supporting young people and their visible training centres mean young people also self-refer or make an approach based on the recommendations of family or friends. The programme is also promoted

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We've worked with the Alzheimer's Society. We had a small group of people who wanted to work with the elderly and especially people with dementia. We also got in touch with dementia café in the town. They came in and did a talk and at the end said, 'Right. If you want to volunteer for us, here are the application forms. Any questions?' So, we then supported the students in filling out the application forms, and I think there were about four students who engaged for a good few months.

CLIP Tutor

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using CLIP's social media networks and through stands and leaflets at jobs fairs and careers services' offices.

An important element of CLIP's work is building relationships with local employers with a view to Flare participants being offered extended work experience or volunteering opportunities. After 20 years, CLIP has developed a network of employer partners and a strong visible presence in the towns where they operate, having spent considerable time breaking down barriers to employers working with disengaged young people.

Programme design

The content of the programme is wholly designed by CLIP tutors. The opportunity to acquire employability and literacy skills is central to course design and associated activities. Where possible, employers from the

sectors that the young people are interested in are invited to talk in the workshop sessions. Each activity is designed to raise aspirations and awareness of different businesses and charities in the locality.

“We’ve worked with the Alzheimer’s Society. We had a small group of people who wanted to work with the elderly and especially people with dementia. We also got in touch with dementia café in the town. They came in and did a talk and at the end said, ‘Right. If you want to volunteer for us, here are the application forms. Any questions?’ So, we then supported the students in filling out the application forms, and I think there were about four students who engaged for a good few months.” (CLIP Tutor)

Visiting employers are asked to share the behaviours and qualities that they expect from an employee. Afterwards, participants usually have a follow-up session to review the learning they gained from the visit and consolidate this by making notes or posters of the attributes mentioned by employers.

Work experience is a core part of the Flare offer, with many students working for half or one day per week across several months. Tutors, learners and employers meet together ahead of the work experience to agree a set of learning goals and tasks, which are reflected upon weekly by employers and learners, with achievements recorded in a diary. Students who are not ready for an external placement can work in CLIP’s own café or with a set of employers who can support someone with higher level needs, e.g. in the back office of a charity shop.

Flare participants work with the Shooting Fish Theatre Company for half a day per week over four or five

months on an enrichment project which is designed to develop literacy and employability skills. With the support of theatre professionals, students write, produce and direct their own play, recruiting actors to play the roles they have created. Job descriptions for assistant theatre roles are produced, e.g. set designer, casting director, producer, lighting engineer. Each young person applies for a role that interests them, attends a job interview and then is paired with a professional doing that job role, so that they develop skills and can complete tasks under supervision. The project comes to fruition with two weeks’ full-time work involving set-building, rehearsals and performances.

Additional support

There are four elements to CLIP tutors’ work: teaching, careers advice, job brokerage and mentoring. The decision to combine these roles was based on the view that young people progress further when they receive holistic support from one person who they have built a trusting relationship with. In addition, Flare participants receive IAG and mentoring. JCP learners can receive support for up to a year, but CLIP will continue to work with those who remain NEET after the formal contract period expires. The purpose of these sessions is to raise aspirations and achieve progression to FE, apprenticeships or work.

The difference made

Since 2003, the average progression rate to further learning, an apprenticeship or employment for Flare students is 73%. Progression to volunteering roles is also included in this statistic, but only for those participants with severe learning difficulties. An independent evaluation of the 2016/17 Shooting Fish project

found that 90% of Flare students had improved their skills and the same proportion stated that their confidence had increased.

“I have just done my English exam and I think it went better than when I did it last time. My punctuation is really improved, they pulled me up on that. I am also better at writing more descriptively.” (Flare student)

“I am able to speak more now at my work experience, I can speak to the children more confidently than before this work.” (Flare student)

Critical success factors

- The career coaching model, where participants receive sustained IAG and mentoring from their tutor after their programmes until they reach their learning or career goals.
- Development of employability and literacy skills through an enrichment project.
- Building positive relationships with local employers, largely to dispel negative perceptions of youth and to encourage employers to recruit locally.
- Embedding work experience into the programme, so that young people have a period of

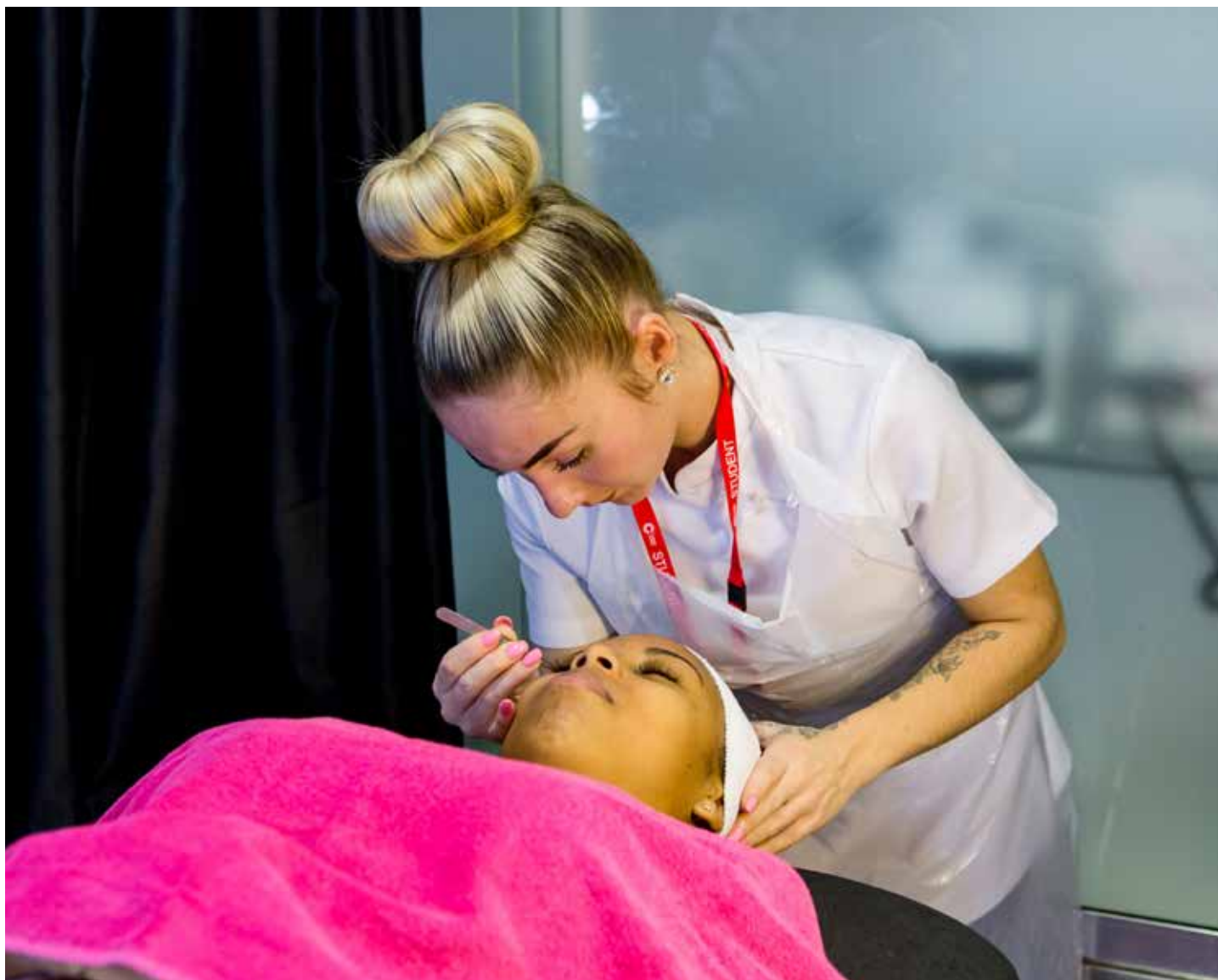
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FLARE STUDENT

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Qube Learning Ltd



Qube is a training provider for young people and adults aged 16+ in England. Qube specialises in apprenticeships, traineeships, vocational courses and e-learning, and provides programmes which are focused on employed positions and therefore take place within a work environment. It provides learners with training both prior to and during a work experience placement, and covers a broad

range of sectors, including retail, health and social care, finance and logistics.

About the programme

Qube's programme for 16-24 year olds runs for up to 12 weeks and includes English, maths, employability skills training and work experience. The programme targets young people who are furthest from the labour market. A maximum of 130 learners

are on the roll-on/roll-off programme at any one time with 13 tutors assigned to a case load of up to 10 learners each.

Programme design

Qube assesses each learner using an Information, Advice and Guidance process, including the completion of soft skills and learning styles questionnaires, work-readiness assessments and personality profiling.

This initial IAG session helps shape a learner's programme. It might identify, for example, a student's need to develop certain soft skills, which would prompt the tutor to embed additional learning modules into the delivery plan. The employer and placement type is selected based on what would best meet the learner's needs.

"We assign the placement based on the learner. 98% of the time, we get the learner first, and then we get them a placement based on [the result of the IAG given]. So, you know, we take into account travelling times, bus journey, all the little things. It's what that employer can do to support them as well, because everybody needs to buy into it." (Tutor, provider)

Qube has found through experience that it is important to involve the employer in the design of their programme. In the past, they used a 'one size fits all' approach and retention rates and customer satisfaction were lower. Now, when engaging with an employer for the first time, Qube's programme designers conduct a full training needs analysis and spend time with the employer's training managers and departmental heads to fully customise learning plans for the programme. This enables Qube to ensure that the style of learning suits business needs and that activities best meet learners' developmental and support needs. Consequently, outcomes have improved for employers, learners and providers.

Recruiting participants and employers

Qube tutors recruit their own learners to the programme, through various sources including social media and job websites.

"I use Facebook a lot because learners like social media. I might post on there and say, 'Are you sixteen to eighteen? Are you looking for work?' Then they'll send me messages. [For example,] I have a girl who wants to work in health and social care. She's got no qualifications from school. She's just moved to Leeds. So, she's feeling a little bit lonely. She's just said, 'Nobody ever gives me a chance because I don't have any qualifications or experience.'" (Tutor, Provider)

Although work experience is unpaid, learners are motivated by the possibility that they will be offered a job by the employer at the end of it, and Qube provides funding for specific costs, such as a DBS check, passport, provisional driving licence and suitable clothing. A lunch allowance of £3 a day is also provided, along with travel costs and certificates that are relevant to the sector they want to work in, such as health and safety or food hygiene.

Employers are motivated to engage with learners by the opportunity to recruit at the end of the programme, and the incentive of corporate social responsibility.

Additional support

Employers are advised not to carry out a formal interview with learners before the work experience, as feedback suggests that many young people find this intimidating. Instead, employers hold a more informal 'meet and greet' with the learner to assess their suitability for work experience within their organisation. Tutors accompany learners to this informal meeting if required. Tutors also provide support throughout the programme, in a highly personalised way that is responsive to the holistic needs of each individual learner.

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TUTOR PROVIDER

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TUTOR PROVIDER

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Tutors visit learners once a week while they are on work experience. If a student is identified in the initial IAG sessions as having entry-level skills, or if they have particular learning difficulties or needs, they will be allocated a Qube learning support specialist who will also visit them on a weekly basis to provide additional learning support. Furthermore, Qube employs a team of in-house mentors who provide pastoral care to students with additional social needs, including support with issues such as housing and benefits claims.

When tutors visit learners in the workplace, they provide training to meet their individual skills gaps, such as Maths and English Functional Skills, or training on talking to people on the telephone. Tutors also signpost learners on to other support services as necessary, such as organisations that support young people who self-harm. Tutors receive training from external organisations in how to support learners with particular needs. For example, training from the National Autistic Society enables tutors to work with employers to ensure any reasonable adjustments are made to support a learner with autism.

The difference made

All students are assessed using a RAG rating at the beginning, middle and end of the 12-week programme, which includes rating of soft skills

such as confidence, motivation and timekeeping. Outcomes from these assessments are recorded in learners' log books and data on all students is aggregated by Qube. If poor performance is identified at a specific workplace, Qube works with the employer to bring performance levels back up. The programme achieved an 85% positive destination (i.e. into apprenticeships or employment) rate in 2016/17. Anecdotal evidence of positive outcomes is also recorded on Qube's Facebook page, where learners and their parents post feedback.

Critical success factors

- The employer and placement type is selected to fit the needs of the learner, rather than learners being assigned to fit employer needs.
- Employers design the activities that learners carry out when on work experience to ensure that they meet the individual learner's developmental needs.
- Regular contact with both the learner and employer during the placement, and discussion about the learner's progress is important in ensuring that work experience progresses well and that good outcomes are secured.



THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

All Together

All Together is a national social enterprise and future-minded careers guidance company which specialises in careers education, information, advice and guidance (IAG) services across schools, colleges and universities.

About the programme

In response to a request from Suffolk County Council, All Together launched a pilot for delivery of guidance services across four special schools in 2017. A key aim of this pilot was to ease the transition of 16-19 year old students from special schools on to college, work or apprenticeships. All Together's Mock Interview Project has played a significant role in this, recognised with a CDI National Award in the Special School category in March 2018.

The project is tailored to individual needs and designed to integrate with the curriculum and school activities. The mock interviews are part of a

package of experiences that are important in preparing young people for their future career paths and to develop their communications skills. Although the project has been used in special schools it is also suitable for vulnerable young people in mainstream settings working below Level 2.

The programme runs for five months in a series of sequenced sessions with groups of up to 10 students. The first session is informal, involving a group discussion with local employers. In the second session, employers teach learners how to communicate; they learn different styles of handshake and the importance of eye contact. In the following session, learners are invited to apply for "in-school" jobs, such as a library assistant or pop up café assistant. They complete an application form, and employers carry out a mock interview with each learner. In the fourth session,

another employer is brought in and the learners practice asking and answering questions in a group. The fifth and final session is a celebration, where learners are given a certificate and provide tea and cake in their pop-up café for the employers.

Programme design

The programme was designed in consultation with the special schools involved in the pilot. In the initial stages, a qualified careers guidance professional from All Together spent significant time working with schools and parents to ensure they had a clear understanding of the programme and how it would benefit the young people involved. There was an initial wariness on the part of some schools; working intensively with schools and parents to develop the project was important in helping them see that the project was not going to raise expectations beyond a student's capabilities and that its goals were

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We've got our core message, but it's always about tailoring it. We have a huge resource bank, but nothing we do is off the peg.

MANAGING DIRECTOR, ALL TOGETHER

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achievable. This also helped All Together to identify the learner outcomes that the programme needed to achieve and develop tailored employer activities which would deliver those outcomes.

“We’ve got our core message, but it’s always about tailoring it. We have a huge resource bank, but nothing we do is off the peg.” (Managing Director, All Together)

Recruiting participants and employers

Employers were recruited through individual connections, the Careers and Enterprise Company and cold calling. Three employers took part in the programme, giving three hours of their time per month for five months. Employers were clear that in order to engage, they needed the dates of sessions in advance and a clear indication of a time commitment. The learner groups were selected by need; those that were closer to leaving school were involved in the project.

Additional support

All young people on the programme have learning difficulties and some require support with communication and need particular assistance. Extensive use is made of visual aids and the intention is to keep materials as simple as possible. One of the employers involved with the project explained how the engagement process was very gradual and gentle and they were prepared beforehand to gain an understanding of different learners’ needs.

“I think this is the thing, it’s about building relationships with employers and helping them to make the transition into special schools, because it’s not an area that they feel comfortable in.” (Assistant Head, The Warren School)

The difference made

The Mock Interview Project has been particularly effective for this group of learners who had previously not had the opportunity to take part in employer engagement activities. It has been warmly welcomed by the staff who have been involved and worked with the students in the intervening weeks. The learners have all had access to one of All Together’s Level 6 qualified careers guidance professionals, which has integrated their experience and enhanced their individual guidance sessions. The relationship with the employers has been good and effective use of their time has been facilitated by preparing the learners before each session.

The outcomes achieved by learners include increased confidence, improved ability to communicate with people who are unfamiliar to them, and improved ability to describe who they are, what they like and what they are like. One employer acknowledged that although some learners would not be able to work in an open environment because of their particular needs, others did have the potential and through the project they were learning life skills.

“Our vision for our young people is that, when they leave us, they form part of their community, and by bringing people from the outside in, we’re able to do that. This has opened up so many more doors than we ever thought it would.” (Assistant Head, The Warren School)

Involving employers through visits to the school and having students visit their business has broken down barriers and opened up opportunities for students in the community, helping partners realise the potential of such activities. The employers involved have recommended the process to

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I think this is the thing, it’s about building relationships with employers and helping them to make the transition into special schools, because it’s not an area that they feel comfortable in.

**ASSISTANT HEAD,
THE WARREN SCHOOL**

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other employers, which is opening up opportunities for further engagement.

Critical success factors

- Partnership is key and it has been important in building up relationships with the schools, the Careers Enterprise Company, healthcare teams, social work teams and parents, to maximise opportunities and make connections.
- Preparation is important to ensure that the young person is ready for transition and familiarise students with employers (who are effectively strangers) in unfamiliar settings. It is also a two-way process with employers needing to fully understand student needs.
- There is a need to recognise that ‘one size does not fit all’ and tailor the project according to the needs of the school and the learners.

Barnardo's CareFree



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It was good being the person asking the questions – I don't feel as scared of the idea of interviews as much.

PARTICIPANT

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CareFree is a Barnardo's project for young and young adult carers up to the age of 19 based in Leicestershire. Between 2017 and 2018, CareFree ran a participatory research project called What Employers Want (WEW) with 10 young adult carers aged 16 to 18.

About the programme

WEW was a participatory research project which trained and supported unemployed young people to carry out face-to-face research interviews with local employers. The purpose of the interviews was to identify what an 'employable young person' looks like from the perspective of an employer.

The research training for young people was delivered in two sessions in the evening. This allowed for different young people's availability and fit in with their normal routine of attending young carer's sessions in the evening. The training session

introduced participants to the aim of the project and their role within it. It also gave participants an understanding of basic research principles, particularly around face-to-face interviews.

The young people carried out five employer interviews. These were conducted in pairs, with those who were less confident paired up with someone who was initially more comfortable to lead the interview. Following the interviews, the young people met to share and compare their experiences and then had a final session to write up their findings into a report.

Programme design

Each stage of the WEW project was designed and planned with the young people. At the training sessions, participants were encouraged to think about what they wanted to get out of the research and to take the

lead in shaping and developing the project. For example, the project lead provided the group with some example interview questions, but the young people rewrote these in their own language as they felt this would help them to feel more confident during the interviews.

A key challenge for the project was arranging times for interviews that fitted in with the young peoples' caring responsibilities and other commitments, whilst also offering flexibility to fit in with employers' availability. The project lead, the lead officer for young adult carers at CareFree, was mindful that young adult carers should not be asked to extend their day more than necessary. To overcome this, the project lead worked closely with employers and the young people to match their availability and agree suitable interview times.

Recruiting participants and employers

The project lead wanted to involve young people with different levels of confidence and ensure engagement beyond those who routinely put themselves forward for projects. In total, ten young people were engaged in the project. Half of these were recruited from an existing programme run by CareFree, which supported young adult carers to develop independent living skills. The project lead approached, on an individual basis, other young adult carers who they thought might be interested or would benefit from involvement in WEW.

Five employers were involved in the project. CareFree approached large employers with whom Barnardo's have established relationships, such as financial organisations, to be involved in the project. However, they were also keen to engage smaller businesses to explore the flexibility that different types of employer could potentially offer to young people with caring responsibilities. Leicester City Council's Youth Service provided details of some smaller businesses which they had developed links with through their work experience programmes. Small employers involved in the project included a café and a clothing shop.

The project lead made the initial approach to employers to discuss when they would be available for interview, after which the young people made contact to agree a specific time. Interviews were conducted with employers in the city centre over three weekends.

Additional support

While interviews were taking place, the project lead made themselves available in a café nearby so that

participants could get support if needed and to ensure safeguarding arrangements. Initially, not all participants were confident to take the lead in the interviews and required some additional support from the project lead and their peers. However, once they had observed an interview and better understood what was involved, these young people felt more confident to take on the 'talking role'.

The difference made

Participation in the project has enabled young adult carers to become more confident in talking about themselves and has helped them to believe that they can repeat this successfully in a job interview.

"It was good being the person asking the questions – I don't feel as scared of the idea of interviews as much."
(Participant)

The experience also helped participants to recognise the transferable skills they had gained as carers, learn how to communicate these to potential employers, and gain confidence in their ability to progress in the future.

"So, feeling more confident about actually saying, 'Yes, this is me and this is part of my life, but that doesn't mean to say that I have to hide it... I can talk about it, and transfer some of those qualities that I've got in my caring role to and relate it to... job interviews in the future." (Project lead)

Feedback from the interviews suggested that smaller employers in particular had gained awareness and a wider understanding of young adult carers and the skills they offer. For CareFree, the WEW project has helped the service to review the information that they provide to employers and identify gaps in their awareness raising activities. It has

also helped the service improve their support for young adult carers to make successful transitions into work, particularly in relation to preparing for interviews and the skills they need in order to enter the world of work. They have now developed a set of resources on developing young adult carers' career aspirations and skills.

Critical success factors

- Involving young adult carers in the design of the project ensured that participants took ownership of delivery and got the most benefit from their involvement.
- The project lead's knowledge and experience in supporting young adult carers meant that they could tailor the programme design to the needs of participants and employers.
- Interviewing employers directly helped participants to develop skills and confidence and learn first-hand what employers are looking for when recruiting a young person.

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So, feeling more confident about actually saying, 'Yes, this is me and this is part of my life, but that doesn't mean to say that I have to hide it... I can talk about it, and transfer some of those qualities that I've got in my caring role to and relate it to... job interviews in the future.

PROJECT LEAD

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Drive Forward Foundation

The Drive Forward Foundation charity launched in 2012 to provide practical and emotional support for care leavers aged between 16 and 26 living in London, helping them develop the skills, confidence and motivation for work, education and training. Nationally, only 15% of looked after children achieve 5 A*-C grade GCSEs (including English and maths), so many of Drive Forward's clients are below Level 2.

About the programme

The charity's early work was based on a 'job brokerage model' placing young adults leaving the care system into job vacancies. Provision quickly evolved following the realisation that young people required more holistic and personalised support to achieve sustainable employment. The offer now includes four key elements: one-to-one guidance to explore interests and career pathways; weekly workshops staffed by the charity and volunteers to

build confidence and employability skills; meaningful interactions with partner employers including 'Aim Higher' days (workplace visits to gain insight into different industries, followed by opportunities to apply for supported work placements or industry vacancies); and professional mentoring for those starting employment.

The charity noted that employers wanting to recruit a more diverse workforce needed to increase their understanding of disadvantaged groups and how to tailor their engagement activities and training accordingly. Their current model involves working with a clinical psychologist to understand how structural barriers and the impact of childhood trauma can combine to disadvantage young care leavers. The psychologist helps employers to create working environments that further break down remaining barriers.

Recruiting participants and employers

The number of care leavers working with the charity has increased by 20% since funding for an Outreach Coordinator has been secured. Outreach takes place in hostels, housing associations, supported housing and prisons. Strong relationships exist with local authority Leaving Care Teams, who refer care leavers when they are ready to address training and work challenges. Employment Consultants work from Drive Forward's offices near Waterloo and in five hubs across Greater London, enabling young people to access co-located services from Drive Forward, Leaving Care Teams and Jobcentre Plus advisors.

The charity has an employer engagement team who approaches employers across London, seeking partners from sectors of interest to programme participants. Once involved, many partners run repeat

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They don't have someone to moan to or ask questions to. That means frustrations and tensions build up and up - the mentor is almost like a surrogate family or parent figure to an extent whilst, obviously, being more professional. We try to build a long-term vision in the young person... because what is typical of care leavers is they often struggle to hold in mind a long-term vision for themselves.

EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANT

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workshops, Aim Higher Days and placements.

Programme design

Care leavers are supported by an Employment Consultant who provides one-to-one support to explore their career interests and research potential vacancies and education pathways. Employment Consultants then use this information to arrange employability workshops and drop-in sessions, Aim Higher Days and placements in sectors of interest for the young people. They also work in partnership with employers to design the content of Aim Higher Days and set objectives for work placements.

The partnership with a clinical psychologist has informed a new manifesto which embeds the values of listening and empathy in all interactions with young people, enabling the charity and its partners to re-assess: how feedback to young people is given; the importance of first contact with the charity; and training content for mentors and employer partners.

Additional support

Mentoring is seen as vital to sustaining work and engendering a long-term view of progression, creating a safe environment for young people to raise questions and discuss challenges. A mentoring programme for care leavers on work placements and those entering employment was established in 2016. Twenty-three young people were paired with a mentor; out of these, 22 managed to sustain their employment, equating to a drop-out rate of 4%, compared to 42% before the programme began.

“They don’t have someone to moan to or ask questions to. That means frustrations and tensions build up and up - the mentor is almost like a surrogate family or parent figure

to an extent whilst, obviously, being more professional. We try to build a long-term vision in the young person... because what is typical of care leavers is they often struggle to hold in mind a long-term vision for themselves.” (Employment Consultant)

Mentors and mentees are paired together based on personality and interests. After professional training, mentors contact their mentee once a week over a minimum of four to six months, with personal contact being made at least once a fortnight. Mentors support with challenges in the workplace, long-term plans, and health and wellbeing.

The difference made

Drive Forward has assisted over 500 care leavers into education and work. Young care leavers engaged with Drive Forward see the organisation as making the main difference to their future once other forms of funded support fall away.

“It was a very positive surprise, and a relief to see that there was support beyond the care system and education... It’s an agency which can help you get up and continue your journey rather than finish it falling down... I got the opportunity to jump in to a field that I really could see myself excelling in, with the support of Drive Forward... They are the train that took me to Hogwarts.” (Drive Forward client)

Employers-mentors often see significant changes in the attitudes and behaviours of the young people they support.

“Since we’ve worked together just her ownership of things and her proactivity and her confidence have gone through the roof.” (Employer-mentor)

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It was a very positive surprise, and a relief to see that there was support beyond the care system and education... It’s an agency which can help you get up and continue your journey rather than finish it falling down... I got the opportunity to jump in to a field that I really could see myself excelling in, with the support of Drive Forward... They are the train that took me to Hogwarts.

DRIVE FORWARD CLIENT

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Critical success factors

- Three areas of Drive Forward Foundation’s approach to employer engagement that are particularly effective are: co-located services; creating a psychologically informed environment; and one-on-one guidance and mentoring to sustain employment.
- Work with the psychologist has also informed the identification of five success factors of Drive Forward Foundation’s work: ‘realistic expectations’- knowing the practical steps to realising an ambition; ‘coachability’ – learning from past experiences; ‘employment resilience’ – learning from challenges in the workplace; ‘positive support networks’ – leaning on people with positive energy; and ‘self-belief’ – having a long-term vision.

Greenpower Education Trust



Greenpower Education Trust is a UK based charity which aims to inspire young people to pursue careers in STEM industries. They run projects with teams of 11-16 year olds, each of which design, build and race an electric car, competing against other teams across the UK.

About the programme/activities delivered

The aim of the project is to inspire young people to pursue study or careers in STEM subjects and to develop employability skills. In 2018, 38 projects are running across the UK, and teams compete at Greenpower events in other countries including the USA, Poland and China. The annual International Final takes place at the UK's Rockingham Motor Speedway. In 2017, 639 teams participated in the UK, with an estimated 10,000 young people involved. Teams can return to

compete year on year.

Programme design

All projects follow a calendar of race track events from March to October. A team begins a project by ordering their car kit. Greenpower then puts them in contact with one of their network of ambassadors, who spends a day with the team to offer support with their project. In addition, Greenpower connects the team with local employers who act as mentors, spending on average five sessions with the team. Teams participate in monthly car building sessions, followed by a visit to race sites, a transition skills workshop, a practice day at a race track, and then a race day. Once a team has worked on a car for a season, the car belongs to them and they can dismantle and build it again the following year, so that it acts as a learning tool for many years to come. The practical activity

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It really gets the nitty gritty of inspiring someone, because they're actually making it and learning it in a completely different way than you would at school.

PROVIDER

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of building a race car is designed to produce tangible results and a real sense of achievement among participants.

“It really gets the nitty gritty of inspiring someone, because they're actually making it and learning it in a completely different way than you would at school.” (Provider)

“I came in and we were about 21st, 25th on the grid, and now we've gone through five or six years of developing on the cars, and we came first this year.” (Learner)

Employer volunteers also attend practice and race days, at which they scrutinize each team's car, talk to participants about how they built their car, and act as judges for awards.

Recruiting participants and employers

The project recruits young people from schools, colleges, and

community organisations, with a focus on geographical areas of deprivation and limited opportunity. Once a school or organisation is involved with Greenpower, they typically produce a team each year to participate. If a young person is interested in taking part, they apply through their teacher or adult leader. Whilst word of mouth is highly effective in raising awareness of the programme, Greenpower have also produced a video to explain the programme to young people.

Employers are motivated to engage with the programme by the opportunity to raise their profile among the young participants, and to support disadvantaged young people. Additionally, the participants are seen as a potential talent pool which employers can consider for future recruitment.

“...we are doing a little bit of talent spotting. So if we see a good team and a young person that’s shining in the engineering field and doing very well in school... we’ll ask them to get in touch, or just give them a leaflet on our work experience or our apprenticeship schemes or graduate schemes.” (Employer)

Additional support

If a young person with SEND wants to be involved in the programme, their school or provider organisation will support them individually. Greenpower ensures that each team member is treated as an equal, so that as long as they meet the safety criteria, they can participate. As an example, a young person with a prosthetic arm was able to take the role of team driver because the team designed the car with special adaptations.

The difference made

Outcomes are measured through independent evaluations conducted

by external researchers, involving participants, parents and teachers before and after participation in the programme. These evaluations have shown that the practical activities run as part of the project enable participants to develop their communication, teamwork skills and confidence, because they are working with others who share their enthusiasm for the project.

“I came into secondary school being one of those really shy kids. I didn’t really get involved in any of the football or music. [Greenpower] boosted my confidence quite a bit. We have people who get bullied quite a bit [in school], but they feel comfortable [in the team], because everyone gets on really well.” (Learner)

As well as development of various softer employability skills, participants find working with the practical application of mechanics helps them with their classroom-based learning, and they are more likely to report an interest in STEM subjects after taking part in Greenpower.

“I’m not very academic, I’m not very good at learning sometimes, but in the practical environment it really does help... we learn how the fittings work on the mechanical side of things. It definitely does help when putting it in perspective in a classroom.” (Learner)

Further, a number of participants are offered work experience with an employer involved in their project, and some receive job offers at the end of the project. Contact with employers at Greenpower events can also lead to further opportunities for employer engagement for team members. For example, young participants talk to employers at race events, which often leads to their teacher asking the employer if they can visit their

workplace so that the students can learn more about working for the company.

Critical success factors

- The practical focus of activities provides tangible results and gives participants a real sense of achievement, resulting in improved academic, employability and personal skills. In addition, the practical tasks provide a platform through which employers can comfortably engage with young people.
- The project is based on an activity that is considered fun and for which both employers and participants share a passion. This helps to attract participants to the programme based on their enthusiasm for cars, regardless of whether they are interested in related academic subjects.
- Participants work as a team to compete against others. This encourages team members to form strong bonds with each other, which can be built upon each year as teams return and strive to do better each year.

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I came in and we were about 21st, 25th on the grid, and now we’ve gone through five or six years of developing on the cars, and we came first this year.

LEARNER

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Spiral

Founded in 2014, Spiral is a social enterprise company that connects young people with professionals to give them a taste of different careers. The inspiration came from an English lesson when Spiral founder Joel Balkwill realised that his Year 11 class in inner city London had not had the opportunity to imagine their futures or how to plan for them.

About the programme

Spiral's 'Career Programme' consists of 10 weekly workshops of two hours in duration. The first few sessions involve team building games to build trust and confidence ahead of meeting employers.

"Many of these young people might never have been asked to speak in class, they might have got to this level without ever having shared an opinion, so building them up is key otherwise they won't get anything out of the rest of it." (Spiral Co-founder)

“

Many of these young people might never have been asked to speak in class, they might have got to this level without ever having shared an opinion, so building them up is key otherwise they won't get anything out of the rest of it.

SPIRAL CO-FOUNDER

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Each cohort takes part in approximately seven 'Workplace Staging' challenges, each one working with a different employer and focused on a set of pre-agreed employability skills. Spiral also builds networks for young people and offers personalised guidance from its hub in Brixton.

Recruiting participants and employers

Working in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, Spiral partners with two schools and one General FE college, who provide regular cohorts for the full Career Programme. Spiral offers ad-hoc provision to a further seven schools, two pupil referral units, AimHigher, Building Young Brixton (a consortium of youth organisations) and Lambeth Council's Early Help Unit, which supports 16-19 year olds who are NEET. Programme participants face multiple barriers to succeeding in education and work, including living in low income

households and disadvantaged communities; studying below Level 2; having English as an additional language; and learning disabilities. In addition, they are likely to have negative experiences of school; limited labour market information; and few role models or professional networks.

For Level 1 FE learners, Spiral tailors their programmes to specific pathways, e.g. visits from a childcare practitioner, midwife, nurse and clinical psychologist for Health and Social Care students and a radio producer, DJ and advertising agency for Media students. Spiral works with volunteers living and working locally, who are willing to share their own career trajectories so that potential pathways are visible, understood and accessible.

Programme design

Workplace Staging is a technique borrowed from customer service training. Spiral works with their



employer partners to co-design a workshop for up to 15 students that offers insight into ‘a day in the life’ of various roles within a company or industry. Students are invited to take on these roles to respond to a typical workplace scenario or challenge.

“We mimic challenges from the workplace using interactive role play, asking the students to take on the day in the life of whatever employer we have invited in. Here they not only get a granular understanding of the activities and challenges of each particular job, they are trained on the key transferable skills vital to success in each career. Consequently, they grow their understanding of the workplace at the same time that they grow their skills.” (Co-founder, Spiral)

Each workshop embeds one or two key employability skills into its activities, e.g. leadership, teamwork, self-management. The activities help young people develop skills that otherwise might be difficult for them to acquire. They can draw on these in a job or college interview, e.g. ‘I designed a game for nursery aged children’, or through role play ‘I handled a difficult customer’ or ‘chose the most appropriate care for a patient’.

Additional support

Spiral takes the momentum gained from the 10-week Career Programme as a launch pad for further individualised activity. Guidance sessions are available at the hub in Brixton for young people to realise their next steps. Spiral staff also provide practical help to learners, e.g. accompanied visits to employers; help organising work experience; referrals to tutors for academic support; and in-work mentoring for those starting employment.

Spiral sustains networks of employers and young people and creates a bridge between them. Many workshop volunteers give further time for question and answer sessions, networking events, workplace visits, work experience and mentoring. Many programme participants also go on to become peer mentors to others accessing the programme.

The difference made

Outcomes for young people include increased awareness of their strengths and how their interests translate into employment pathways; improved employability skills; greater insight into roles relevant to their courses; and meeting people who work in sectors of interest.

“Going to Spiral I felt that I was moving forward... what we [young people] need the most is programmes like Spiral, where people are allowed to have dreams without being laughed at or feel like the problems at home are a step that you’re going to overcome one day because you’re going to make something of yourself....I don’t think I’d ever be able to call myself a DJ or producer if it wasn’t for them.” (Career Programme Participant)

After each workshop, students use a self-assessment tracker to self-score their performance against a range of employability skills and develop a personal goal for the next session. Data for the most recent 82 participants shows the programme is effective in improving young people’s confidence in meeting new people, putting forward their ideas, being the leader of a team, communicating their ideas clearly and getting things done on time.



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CAREER PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT



“We want to help young people track their own development and see clearly what the steps are between where they are now and being professional... The skills tracker is more than just a tool for measuring improvement. It’s enhancing their self-talk and their ability to pitch their skills... they become more fluent in the ‘language of skills.’” (Spiral Co-founder)

Critical success factors

- The Workplace Staging workshops give participants a comprehensive understanding of the day-to-day nature of various roles, helping them make informed decisions about their career pathway. This is supported through the follow-up one-to-one guidance sessions.
- The Workplace Staging workshops are also effective in developing learners’ transferable and employability skills through practical, team-based activities.
- Another crucial element is the facilitation of connections between young people and professionals who can become real life role models, offering genuine insight into career pathways and how to access opportunities.

The Prince's Trust



The Prince's Trust is a national charity that works with young people aged 11-30, with a focus on those who are unemployed and at risk of unemployment through educational underachievement.

About the programme

The Prince's Trust programme that is particularly relevant for the 16-17 year old below level 2 cohort is the "Team" programme. Approximately 45% of the young people on Team are aged 16-17, and around 80% are below Level 2. The programme runs for 12 weeks, and is delivered by the Trust's partner organisations, which include colleges, training providers, and third sector organisations. On completion of the programme, participants gain a Level 1 Prince's Trust qualification in employment, team work and community skills. Each year, 8,500-9,000 young people in the UK take part in Team in groups of 10-15 participants.

Personal development activities undertaken in the early stages of the programme ensure that participants are prepared for individual work experience, which must be a minimum of 32 hours over a two-week period. Following completion of work experience, each young person attends a "Next Steps Week", during which they build on what they learnt during their placement. This includes developing their CVs, improving their interview skills and taking part in workshops, which include mock interviews, conducted by employer volunteers.

Programme design

Team is a personal development programme and is designed to build participants' confidence, reliability, resilience, communication and team work skills. As such, the programme begins with personal development, team building and problem-solving activities which help participants get

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They did it over the phone, they did a little script and then contacted local businesses to see if they would help, explained a bit about what we were doing.

PROVIDER

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to know each other. Some of these activities are deliberately fun and light-hearted, for example, one task was to see which mini-group could build the highest tower from marshmallows and spaghetti. Other tasks have a more serious purpose while also developing participants' employability skills. For example, one group designed and organised a sponsored run, a raffle and a cake sale, and contacted local employers to ask for donations for raffle prizes for a fundraising community project.

“They did it over the phone, they did a little script and then contacted local businesses to see if they would help, explained a bit about what we were doing.” (Provider)

Employers can be involved in designing and supervising community projects, such as a construction company designing a carpentry and painting project in a local school.

Employers involved in community projects can use this opportunity to get to know participants and decide who they would like to offer work experience to.

The work experience is shaped by participants' preferences. They provide their top three choices of which employer they want to work with, then Team staff broker the relationship with employers and arrange the work experience. Employers are asked to provide meaningful work experience which is engaging for the participant and useful to the employer.

Recruitment of participants and employers

The Team programme targets young people who would benefit most from the personal development it offers, and recruits from various sources such as youth offending teams, the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus and self-referrals. Team staff have a list of employers they have worked with previously, but if the participant wants to work with a new employer, staff will try to arrange this. SMEs are sometimes able to provide work experience at shorter notice than larger employers, as larger corporations are less likely to have the flexibility to respond quickly to requests. An aim for future development of the programme is therefore to find ways to enable larger corporations to engage within short timeframes.

Additional support

Staff brief the employer on any additional support needs that a participant might have before they are placed with them, so that the employer is aware of how to support the young person effectively. While on work experience, Team staff visit the young person and send text

messages to get feedback from them and their employer. This regular contact is considered important for ensuring the success of the experience for both the participant and employer.

"You're there to make sure they are developing, so if anything is going wrong or something's at risk, you can intervene straight away. The employer knows that you're taking an interest, so they're more likely to re-engage with future teams." (Provider)

Furthermore, the Prince's Trust has a national level partnership with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that if participants are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, they can continue to claim for the 12 weeks they are on the programme, even though they might not be able to actively search for jobs in that time.

The difference made

After work experience is completed, the employer provides the partner organisation with written feedback on the participant they hosted, detailing the success and challenges that the participant experienced. This feedback is passed from the partner organisation to the participant who can reflect on the feedback and use it to inform their learning over the 'Next Steps' final section of the programme.

Data from follow-up text surveys to participants shows that 74% of those on Team move into employment, education, training or volunteering outcomes within three months of completion, with approximately 35% moving in to education and 40% into a job.

Anecdotally, there is a view that the opportunity for participants to hear employers' personal stories of how they have become successful, despite coming from similarly disadvantaged

backgrounds, is inspiring to participants and encourages them to believe that they can achieve similar success.

"It's my story about coming out of school with one GCSE, and not having many options... it's not 'All's lost if you don't get decent GCSEs.' That's where I use my experience." (Employer)

Critical success factors

- The Prince's Trust Level 1 qualification provides participants with a tangible achievement and can act as a springboard to gain employment or enter further education after the programme.
- The practical and team building nature of the activities helps build participants' confidence, reliability, resilience, communication and employability skills.
- Maintaining regular contact with employers and participants during work experience ensures that participants stay on track and the experience is a success.

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It's my story about coming out of school with one GCSE, and not having many options... it's not 'All's lost if you don't get decent GCSEs.' That's where I use my experience.

EMPLOYER

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ThinkForward

ThinkForward works with disengaged young people aged 13 to 18 to enable them to succeed in education and progress into sustained employment. The ThinkForward programme was introduced in 2011 by Impetus Private Equity Foundation but became an independent charity in 2016. Their Progression Coaches work in fifteen schools and academies located in disadvantaged communities in London, Kent and Nottingham. This case study focuses on the approach in an academy in Nottingham.

About the programme

The ThinkForward programme coaches the most disengaged young people for up to five years to succeed in education and progress into sustained employment. The focus is on early and sustained intervention, working with a small number of corporate partners that

are adequately resourced to deliver engagement activities. In Years 9 to 10, activities focus on getting to know the student, developing their communication skills and introducing contact with employers within the school setting and in workplaces. Post-16 support for learners studying Level 1 courses and GCSE maths and English involves help with traineeship, apprenticeship or job applications and finding work experience.

Each year, students take part in six to eight employer activities which build employability skills. Examples include trying different construction trades with a large housing association, an assessment day at a large employer in the financial sector, giving students a challenge to tackle in a team, and opportunities to present ideas to other teams. Each young person also receives a minimum of two formal coaching sessions per term. The focus of the sessions can be academic, pastoral or career-based

depending on the young person's priorities. The coach prepares students for employer activities, accompanies them on visits and helps them reflect on learning after events. It is a long-term relationship, with the coach eventually supporting the student with placements and job, college or apprenticeship applications.

Recruiting participants and employers

Cohorts are small, with 10 students selected per year group for intensive support over a five-year period beginning in Year 9. Using a scoring mechanism and the knowledge of school staff, those most at risk of becoming NEET are recruited to the programme. Most students have poor behaviour, attainment and attendance and may be in care, on free school meals, have special educational needs, face school exclusion or have complex home lives.

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You have to do the groundwork to get them onside and build the relationship... If that young person doesn't think that you've genuinely got their interest at heart as an individual then they're very reluctant to engage and will bring their own barriers.

**THINKFORWARD
PROGRESSION COACH**

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Progression Coaches use games, informal chats and enrichment activities help to build a picture of the young person's interests, hobbies and home life, with the aim of slowly introducing the programme and why it will benefit them.

"You have to do the groundwork to get them onside and build the relationship... If that young person doesn't think that you've genuinely got their interest at heart as an individual then they're very reluctant to engage and will bring their own barriers." (ThinkForward Progression Coach)

ThinkForward chose to work with large employers in Nottingham who have established youth employability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, mainly because they can benefit from pre-designed programmes, existing expertise, funding and infrastructure.

Programme design

Progression Coaches build relationships with the young people and their parents or carers to enable them to tailor the programme to their needs. Relationships with parents and carers initially involve face-to-face visits to the home and can be sustained using text messages. Employers also value the preparation and then feedback and reflection that is offered by Progression Coaches before and after the sessions.

"...the pre and post conversation, feedback and review done with these students with the coach works, they get to know their student and can really guide them through how to unpick the feedback that they get given, the intervention over a longer period, I think it's the secret sauce of the programme really." (Employer working with ThinkForward)

Additional support

The coach's role involves pastoral support, delivering cohort workshops, arranging bespoke work placements, accompanying students to apprenticeship insight days and support with job or college applications and interviews. There is also a financial fund available to assist with clothing, food and transport.

The difference made

Experience and progression is measured using the 'Ready for Work' scale which includes the skills, attributes and behaviours that employers are looking for when employing young people. Seven key employability skills form the core of the evaluative model: self-aware; receptive; driven; self-assured; resilient; a good communicator; and organised. Across each of these attributes, the young person is formally scored using a descriptive scale which is numbered from 1 to 10 to allow for quantitative analysis.

Formal review points happen three times per term, but the tool is frequently used to help students understand how specific activities and experiences have impacted on their work readiness. Statistical and anecdotal evidence shows that ThinkForward increase 'work readiness.' Within a couple of years, the evidence base will be able to show how successful the programme has been in preventing NEET outcomes at age 18.

"I've gained loads. Communication, believing in yourself. I've got an extra step in life. Like you get some people out there struggling thinking, 'What do I do next?' They're like, 'Don't really know what to do.' Whereas us, because we've had tasters and

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I've gained loads. Communication, believing in yourself. I've got an extra step in life. Like you get some people out there struggling thinking, 'What do I do next?' They're like, 'Don't really know what to do.' Whereas us, because we've had tasters and everything and the mindset, we've got some different paths to go to.

STUDENT

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everything and the mindset, we've got some different paths to go to." (Student)

Critical success factors

Five areas of ThinkForward's approach to employer engagement that are particularly effective in helping young people facing disadvantage and low aspiration are:

- a long-term preventative approach;
- the progression coaching model;
- the opportunity to develop employability skills through sustained employer interactions;
- the movement from generic to bespoke action as the young person moves through the programme; and
- an embedded evaluative approach – 'The Ready for Work Scale.'

Volunteer It Yourself



Volunteer It Yourself is a national Community Interest Company. The aim of their programme is to develop young people's employability skills through engagement in practical trade projects, supported by employer-mentors. Since 2011, VIY has run over 200 projects with almost 4,000 young people, including 16 and 17 years olds below Level 2.

About the programme/activities delivered

VIY typically engages young people aged 14-24 in at least two days of trade or DIY work in a community space or building. VIY recruits young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, and young people on courses related to the construction and engineering focus of the programme. The aim of the programme is to teach young

people trade and construction skills as well as employability skills such as communication, confidence, teamwork and leadership. Participants are mentored by professional tradespeople from the local area, with at least two mentors overseeing every project. Participants who complete the project gain a City & Guilds Entry Level 3 Introductory Award in Employability Skills, with a focus in a specific skills area such

as pipe-work, carpentry, tiling or painting and decorating. Participants can sometimes return to do further projects with a focus on different skills, to gain accreditation for multiple trades. The size of the group working on each project depends on the size of the space they are working in but is typically 15-20 young people at a time.

Programme design

The project is designed to focus on practical tasks that use the skills that young people are learning, such as painting or carpentry, and mimic the working environment as closely as possible, to give participants a good understanding of the workplace.

“We treat them as if I was employing them... So, by the end of the project, if they really enjoyed it and wanted to look at an apprenticeship, then they know what they’ve got to do.”
(Employer mentor)

Furthermore, the programme design is aimed at making it as different from school as possible, for example by keeping paper-based activities to a minimum. The programme’s mentors all have experience of working in a trade and inspire participants by sharing their own experiences of how they got into the trade and by giving them positive feedback.

“There’s loads of evidence [that] the most meaningful factor in whether a young person is in a job five years after they leave school... is whether they’ve had five meaningful interactions with employers... That’s what we’re trying to embed into all of our projects, to try and make the encounters with the mentors... really meaningful.” (Provider)

In addition to contact with the mentor-employers, the programme invites local employers to visit young people

on projects, to talk to them about apprenticeships they offer in the trade and give them more insight into working in the sector.

Recruiting participants and employers

The programme recruits young people from a variety of sources, including schools, Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Education Providers, and through direct recruitment at the venue where the project will take place. For example, a sports or youth club that needs redecorating or refurbishing might recruit some of the young people who attend their club to the project. To raise awareness of the programme, VIY staff give talks and run workshops in schools and colleges. Workshops involve a VIY staff member demonstrating the type of activity that the young person might carry out on the programme to give students a flavour of the project’s activities. VIY has learnt that their target groups are less likely to engage with the programme if the word ‘volunteer’ is used to describe the participant’s role. Instead, young people are more likely to engage if the message that they will gain a City & Guilds Award is clear, so that they do not feel that they are giving up their time for no reward.

Employer-mentors are generally recruited to the project through word of mouth, as one mentor will recommend other tradespeople that they know. VIY also advertises for mentors on trade recommendation websites such as mybuilder.com and Checkatrade, and Wickes (a key supporter of VIY), provides mentors through recommendations from their Store Managers. Wickes also donate all the tools and materials used at projects.

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We treat them as if I was employing them to come and paint my house...you do what you do on site... [as] if you were actually going to be doing that for yourself for a living. So, by the end of the project, if they really enjoyed it and wanted to look at an apprenticeship, then they know what they’ve got to do.

EMPLOYER MENTOR

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There's loads of evidence [that] the most meaningful factor in whether a young person is in a job five years after they leave school... is whether they've had five meaningful interactions with employers... That's what we're trying to embed into all of our projects, to try and make the encounters with the mentors... really meaningful.

PROVIDER

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Additional support

Young people with additional needs, such as learning difficulties or behavioural issues, are supported by the referring organisation, such as their school, at the level they require. For example, a young person could be accompanied by support staff from their school. The referring partner (e.g. school) briefs the programme lead on every young person in advance, so that their mentors are aware of any additional support needs they have. Mentors receive annual training which covers safeguarding issues and how to support young people with issues such as anxiety. If a mentor is briefed that a particular participant has low confidence or behavioural issues, they will make adjustments, such as spending more one-to-one time with them, and ensuring they treat the young person as if they were an adult employee rather than a school pupil, which often elicits a more positive response from the participants.

The difference made

Outcomes are measured by pre- and post-project surveys which track changes in participants' self-reported levels of confidence in various tasks such as meeting new people, team work, putting forward ideas and being a team leader. Destinations data is also analysed, for example number of participants who move on to employment, education or further training, and the number who achieve the City & Guilds accreditation

(around 70%) is recorded. This shows that the programme is successful in supporting participants to develop workplace skills, put these into practice and gain insight into a working environment. Participants also often progress onto further training and employment. For example, Wickes may interview young people who are interested in taking on a full/part-time role with them.

Critical success factors

- The provision of City & Guilds Employability Skills accreditation, which gives participants a tangible sense of achievement from the programme and avoids perceptions that they are giving up their time for no personal gain.
- The opportunity to gain experience of working as a team, on practical activities, with a diverse group of young people who didn't previously know each other. This nurtures their communication and teamwork skills.
- The opportunity to create something through practical work, which gives young people a real sense of achievement that they can evidence.
- The skills and approach of mentors and employers, who are engaging and easy to relate to. They inspire young people by sharing their own experiences of work and by giving participants positive feedback about their performance on the project.



EMPLOYER ORGANISATIONS

Salford Royal Hospital NHS Trust



Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust is a provider of hospital, community and primary care services. Their Widening Participation Team operates across five hospitals within the Northern Care Alliance and their work comprises three strands: managing work experience placements in the Trust for 14-19 year olds; attending careers events at local schools and colleges, and running employability programmes for local jobseekers aged 18+.

About the activities

The key activities delivered for 16/17 year olds below Level 2 are work experience within the Trust and careers events at local schools and colleges. Approximately 180 work experience placements are provided by the Trust each academic year, and each placement lasts for one week. Careers events can include

participating in careers fairs, mock interviews and speed interviews on the college or school's campus. The Trust has 57 careers ambassadors who attend these events. The Trust also runs a simulation event once a month for 20 14-16 year old students from local schools in Salford. Students spend approximately two hours in simulation laboratories which emulate health and social care scenarios, allowing students to take part in interactive activities, for example, handling a trauma call, identifying the deteriorating patient and providing basic life support.

Although work experience weeks are generally one-off activities, there are instances when the Trust has sufficient capacity to run a series of engagement activities with the same group of students. For example, the local Careers Hub put on a workshop with students about careers in the

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With our simulation events, the students that come in are often thinking, 'Why would I want to come here because you're either a doctor or a nurse?' They leave two hours later going, 'Oh my goodness. You've got a huge IM&T department... you've got a whole host of people, therapists and so on. Their eyes are open to all the many careers there are.

EMPLOYER

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NHS, so the Trust sent some staff from various roles to talk to the students about their career pathways. The Trust then set a task for students to research a career in the NHS and create a poster illustrating what they found, with the poster judged to be the best winning the competition. Students then undertook work experience at the Trust, after which the Trust visited students on campus to talk to them about what they had gained from the experience and deliver feedback from staff who had hosted them on their placement.

Programme design

The Trust is part of a steering group called the Salford Partnership which includes various agencies in Salford, such as Salford University, Salford College, Salford City Council, the Youth Council and youth groups. This helps shape the Trust and Salford City's offer to young people.

For example, members of the Youth Council fed back to the steering group that PHSE lessons were not effective in preparing young people for the world, and as part of the group's response to this, the Trust delivered interactive activities to teach emergency First Aid skills to young people in an open conference style event. Weeks prior to the event, the Trust gave attendees a choice of eleven scenarios and asked them to vote for the ones that were of most interest via their smartphone. The Trust then delivered sessions on the four scenarios that got the highest number of votes, which centred on themes of drugs, a stabbing, a punch that left someone unconscious and a family member choking. At the event, the Trust explored with attendees why they had chosen these scenarios, whether they had experienced or knew anyone who had experienced such events, and what they thought was the best way to respond in such scenarios. Attendees then role-played possible responses. This approach made the engagement experience more relevant, personalized and engaging for attendees, which plugged a gap in their PHSE education and, as a by-product, might also have prompted them to consider pursuing a career in the NHS.

Recruiting participants

The Trust receives requests to engage in careers events through the Greater Manchester NHS Careers Hub, whereas applications for work experience are made directly by the student or their provider to the Trust. The Trust's work experience scheme is oversubscribed so applicants are prioritized according to set criteria. Students given priority include those who are Salford residents, who go to school or college in Salford, who have parents who work for the Trust, and

those who attend schools in cold spot areas.

In the near future the Trust is hoping to engage with looked-after children in the city and have contacted the local authority Leaving Care teams with the aim of developing this relationship further. Other sources of participants include local charities and partner organisations. For example, a charity called The Girls Network provides targeted support to girls who lack opportunity in schools in disadvantaged areas. The Trust runs simulation events for these girls via the charity, and a Trust member of staff is a mentor for one of the girls being supported by the charity.

Additional support

If students who undertake work experience have additional support needs, the Trust works closely with their school or college to ensure that their experience is tailored accordingly. For example, the Trust took a student with Down's Syndrome on a placement and worked in collaboration with the student, his school and his parents to ensure they were providing him with a suitable experience. They decided to give him administrative, office-based work and his Learning Support Assistant (LSA) accompanied him for the duration of the placement. The student and his LSA visited the Trust before his placement to see the environment he would be working in and explain to his supervisor at the Trust what type of activities he could and could not do. The Trust then designed his placement based on these details.

The difference made

Key outcomes for the Trust are that students' understanding of the broad range of career pathways available within the NHS is enhanced, which, it is hoped, increases the likelihood that

they will want to work for the NHS in the future.

"With our simulation events, the students that come in are often thinking, 'Why would I want to come here because you're either a doctor or a nurse?' They leave two hours later going, 'Oh my goodness. You've got a huge IM&T department... you've got a whole host of people, therapists and so on. Their eyes are open to all the many careers there are.'" (Employer)

Critical success factors

- Relationships with partner community organisations such as those on the Salford Partnership Steering Group, which inform the Trust of employer engagement needs in the local community and the particular type of activities that are most effective.
- For students with additional support needs who do work experience placements with the Trust, a pre-placement visit involving the student, their parents and their provider is key to helping the Trust design a placement that is personalised and tailored to the individual needs of the student.
- Students are involved in the design of engagement events such as the First Aid Skills open conference event, which ensures that the activity is not only responsive to what the participants want and need, but is interesting and engaging for the participants.

UKFast

UKFast is a leading technology company supplying dedicated server hosting, critical application hosting and cloud hosting solutions. UKFast employs over 400 people with 18% of its workforce entering the business via apprenticeship schemes.

About the activities

UKFast works with 60 schools and colleges across the nation to inspire and develop a pipeline of talent for the tech industry. The company's training arm, 'UKFast Education Trust', delivers exhibitions at careers fairs; talks, employability and enrichment activities within schools; masterclasses that give young people a real sense of how technology is used in the world of work; and project-based work experience from its Manchester office.

Activities aim to help young people develop the technical and soft skills critical to the technology industry, i.e. goal-setting, critical thinking,

teamwork, communication and negotiation. UKFast employs four teachers who deliver work in partner schools and oversee activities delivered on the business' premises.

Programme design

The aim of all UKFast's educational programmes is "to bridge the gap between what they're doing in the classroom and what they need to do in industry". Enrichment and employment activities are typically open to students across all year groups and academic abilities, including 16 and 17 year olds studying below Level 2. Activities include careers talks, speed dating activities to help young people talk about themselves; mock interviews and assessments; entrepreneurial and team building challenges.

In partner schools, pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are interested in pursuing a career in technology are interviewed by UKFast and the most motivated are selected for an 'elective

programme,' which includes the opportunity to work towards a technical vendor qualification. For example, students recruited to the Linux Elective Programme work on real life servers and real life computer programmes to build websites and apps.

"...a lot of the things we do here at UKFast are based on the Linux operating system. So, having that initial understanding of the Linux environment on work experience helped me start my career." (UKFast apprentice)

Students following the "Tech Engineers of Tomorrow Programme" worked alongside UKFast employees to write a computer programme to help design a roof for the PyeongChang Olympic Stadium. Students were also encouraged to think about the budgeting, resource management and marketing for this project.

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...a lot of the things we do here at UKFast are based on the Linux operating system. So, having that initial understanding of the Linux environment on work experience helped me start my career.

UKFAST APPRENTICE

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Recruiting participants

UKFast works with ICT students from Years 5 to 13 in 50 secondary schools with a strong presence in Hulme and Moss Side, close to its Manchester offices. Impact is greatest when a series of sustained and varied activities are delivered over a number of years, as opposed to one-off interventions, which has led UKFast to concentrate its activities in 10 partner schools. Formal collaborations, known as 'Memorandums of Understanding' outline the activities to be delivered and associated learning outcomes. In partner schools, pupils take part in employability activities for between five and seven years, with smaller groups participating in work experience projects, which may lead to a UKFast apprenticeship.

Additional support

Additional support is usually provided by ICT curriculum teachers, school IAG advisers and recruitment advisers at UKFast, who can encourage students who have participated in a UKFast project to apply for an apprenticeship or progress into further learning.

The difference made

Close collaborative work with schools has proven successful. Eighty percent of UKFast apprentices come from partner schools, with a good proportion of those schools located in deprived areas. All of the students who participate in a UKFast elective project pass the technical computing qualification. Young people value the opportunity to acquire inside knowledge of the tech industry and to relate their classroom learning to real life industry.

"You get placed all around the business, so you learn how the business works day to day, not just all the technical stuff. It was testing

how you adapt to different situations. Learning the ropes of a company, how it works on a day to day basis. For me, it was very, very beneficial." (UKFast Apprentice)

"Just seeing people working on what we're doing in the classroom and getting industry experts talking to them about it is great, it's not just me in the classroom droning on at them, they relate better and become more engaged." (Partner School).

Young people's participation in technology-based projects can also develop parents' digital skills.

"For young people to go home and be excited and help their parents, who might not have had much access to IT or technology, for us, is equally as rewarding because we're changing a cycle. You know, often when you've got poor communities with high deprivation and lack of role models, you're often stuck in a cycle where they're raising their own children in that environment. If we can inspire more young people to break that cycle, we're changing the landscape, we're changing social mobility." (UKFast).

Staff at the partner schools also benefit from their relationship with UKFast, as it provides opportunities for CPD. In turn, this informs their delivery with learners.

"...we benefit from the professional development of our staff; we can go and use UKFast's space and see different projects; it skills us as IT teachers, and that informs our classroom practice." (Partner School)

Critical success factors

- The use of trained teachers within the business, who are familiar with the educational landscape and can broker relationships with schools and colleges.

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Just seeing people working on what we're doing in the classroom and getting industry experts talking to them about it is great, it's not just me in the classroom droning on at them, they relate better and become more engaged.

PARTNER SCHOOL

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- School senior leadership teams that are receptive to working with businesses and are keen to promote Apprenticeships to their learners.
- Real life work experience projects, which operate as a gateway to apprenticeship applications with UKFast.
- Having Memorandums of Understanding in place with schools enables UKFast to have a sustained programme over a five to seven year period, focussing on employability skills for the many and work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for those interested in technology careers.

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