

Phase 2 Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration

Herefordshire: improving progression into employment through collaboration between education, voluntary and supported employment organisations



Key learning points

- Identify one or more key challenges and take the plunge by approaching key partners
- Commit to a collaborative partnership approach and allocate lead responsibilities to different partners
- Make a point of engaging between sectors (e.g. education, voluntary, employment)
- Focus throughout on outcomes for young people
- Work together on individual young people's progression pathways
- Make sure young people and their parents are aware of all the options
- Research good models of provision operating in other parts of the country
- Develop a vision of what you want to achieve in the longer term
- Promote this vision to other service providers and to strategic partners

Who we are and what we did

The core partners are two further education colleges (Herefordshire College of Technology and Hereford College of Arts); two voluntary organisations which provide 'stepping stones' for young people towards independence and employment (Aspire and Echo); and a supported employment organisation (Mencap).

Our starting point was to see how, by working together, we could improve the progression pathways for 12 young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whom we identified as having the potential to progress into paid work. We worked with the young people and their parents to improve their knowledge of the opportunities available in adult life; began a process of revising the college curriculums to focus better on preparation for adulthood; agreed a supported employment partnership arrangement between Herefordshire College of Technology and Mencap; initiated a wider network of organisations involved in supporting young people into work; and set up an e-forum to support the sharing of information and good practice. Towards the end of the project we linked up with senior managers in Herefordshire Council to engage their support for developing a networked approach to improving young people's progression into adult life.

Why we did it

We were all passionate about helping young people with their transition into adult life and we felt that we could make most progress on this by working together. Although the different partners had previously worked with each other to varying degrees, we felt we could achieve more through a truly collective approach and we committed ourselves to meeting regularly over an 8 month period to achieve this.

We also wanted to develop a vision of how things could be improved to share with our local authority and other organisations working in Herefordshire. Our vision was that

- A partnership approach to provision is preferable to a 'single institution' solution.
- Herefordshire should be developing a co-delivery model designed to involve a range of partners such as those in our partnership.
- Herefordshire Council will be commissioning study programmes which embrace classroom teaching, structured work experience (with job coaching) and independent living skills.

How we did it

We recognised at our first meeting that it would be useful to work together on individual progression pathways for a pilot group of young people to ensure that the project was well grounded. Initially we mapped out pathways for 12 young people and we plan to do more in future, focusing specifically on transition into supported employment. As well as identifying ways of improving individual pathways, this process helped us plan out the other parts of the project which were as follows:

- **Working with students and their parents.** Hereford College of Arts organised an event for students and their parents to explore the range of opportunities and services available to young adults in the area. These included leisure and socialising opportunities; travel, staying safe and other training courses; buddying options; work experience; community projects; volunteering; support to move into paid employment; and sources of advice on welfare benefits and other funding possibilities, including personal budgets. Around 40 young people and parents attended and the feedback was extremely positive ("*why haven't we done this before?*") and led to specific actions for most of the college leavers. There was also a positive ripple effect to students and parents who did not attend. Next year we are planning a bigger event, or events in different parts of the county, working with Herefordshire Council and involving other education providers, including mainstream schools.
- **Reviewing college curriculums.** The colleges were keen to make use of the flexibilities presented by the introduction of study programmes to strengthen the focus of our curriculums on preparation for adult life. We investigated what organisations were doing in other parts of the country – notably North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot)'s curriculum development and Worcestershire College's piloting of Supported Internships. Our long term aim is to:
 - include job coaching support for our young people and benefits advice to their parents;
 - involve Aspire, Echo and Mencap in helping deliver individual young people's progression plans.
 - be able to offer provision 5 days a week.

We hit a problem in that Herefordshire College of Technology's cohorts are generally too small to be able to separate provision for younger and older students and were therefore constrained by the rules applying to adult funding which in our judgment did not encompass study programmes. We therefore decided on an incremental 'step by step' process and this autumn will have one group of students for whom work experience and job skills will be right at the centre of their study programmes. This will be outcomes driven and marks the beginning of a major shift of emphasis. At the same time, Hereford College of Art plans to work with Aspire, Echo and Mencap to provide our students with a wider range of options over and above our 2 day a week provision.

- **Supported employment partnership.** We were impressed by what we learned about the partnership between Nescot and Surrey EmployAbility, the local supported employment organisation run by Surrey County Council. We are developing a similar partnership between Herefordshire College of Technology and Mencap (which is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions to provide employment support). As a first step, we will work together in the autumn to identify young people for whom supported employment would be a good progression pathway and with whom Mencap will work while they are still at college (funded by the College). Herefordshire Council are supportive of this approach as it is outcomes driven and job coaching is fundable from the high needs funding block.
- **Supported employment and volunteering provider forum.** Our aim was to set up a network so as to:
 - Enable good practice to be shared between providers of different kinds.
 - Provide a forum for speakers on a variety of current topics.
 - Offer intelligence to commissioners and to support them in developing commissioning strategies.

We organised a meeting of organisations involved in helping young people progress into employment. 17 provider organisations attended plus two local authority adult social care representatives. One of the latter gave an overview of the current financial situation and its implications and everyone else then had an opportunity to briefly explain the work of their organisations. This worked really well as people discovered opportunities and organisations that they had not known about and made good links for future working. Someone said she had spent a lot of time trying to research what was available in Herefordshire and had discovered more in 1 hour with us, than she had been able to do in 3 days. Another provider emailed to say it was *"the most beneficial and productive meeting I have been to in Hereford for a long time!"* Agreement was reached to meet again, with focuses on different topics, and to develop an online directory of providers and opportunities.

- **E-forum.** We set up an e-forum (<http://wmcluster.forumotion.co.uk>) to support the sharing of information and good practice because we recognised that we would not be able to continue to meet so frequently and we were keen to share information and resources more widely. We are still working on this to make sure it is user friendly for people with learning difficulties and disabilities and we intend to establish a link with the Learn Herefordshire website. Longer term, we plan to work with Herefordshire Council to link or migrate the e-forum to a platform supporting the Local Offer.

What impact we've achieved so far

During its 8 month time span, the project had the following benefits:

- **For young people:** access to more information and different opportunities with lots more potential for future cohorts.
- **For their parents:** better and broader information, with a discernable shift in perceptions and aspirations rippling out to other parents.
- **For our own organisations:** partnership working and better signposting to each other's services.
- **For other service providers:** initiation of a much needed forum of supported employment and volunteering organisations.
- **For senior decision-makers in the local authority:** awareness of the potential to use and develop the core partnership as a test-bed for developing the Local Offer and education, health and care plans.

What longer term impact we aim to achieve and how it will be assessed

- **For young people:** a better understanding of how to move successfully into working life and adulthood, and more effective support to make this happen including earlier planning and better learning choices.
- **For parents:** understanding of and confidence in progression pathways to help their children move into paid work and be as independent as possible.
- **For partners:** realisation of our vision of co-delivery of support for young people to progress into employment and study programmes which embrace classroom teaching and structured work experience.
- **At a strategic level:** a useful testbed for important elements of the integrated education, health and care planning process.

Impact will be assessed through tracking the progress of the pilot group of young people and how successful they are in getting into paid employment. Other evidence of impact will come from student and parent feedback; from jointly developed progression plans becoming a core feature of 'steady state' arrangements; and from evidence that the project work has helped shape the Local Offer and the planning process in Herefordshire, with many Education, Health and Care Plans strongly focused on supported progression into employment.

How we plan to maintain progress after the end of the project

We have agreed a 7 point Legacy Plan to continue working together as a Core Partners Group in close conjunction with Herefordshire Council.

For project resources please click on <http://wmcluster.forumotion.co.uk> and for further information contact:

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