

Phase 2 Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration

Coventry Ability Works: The Employment Maze Worker



What has been developed and by whom?

The Employment Support Service (TESS) of Coventry City Council, Hereward College, Whitefriars Housing (work-based learning provider) and Alice Stevens School (special school) formed a partnership, Ability Works, which has jointly developed and funded an Employment Maze Worker (EMW) role.

This innovative cross sector partnership focuses on how the EMW role can work across special schools, further education, work-based learning and supported employment. It involves the most senior personnel from each partner to maximise 'reach' within organisations/sectors, impact and sustainability.

The EMW works with young people, their parents/carers, providers and employers to help navigate more effective pathways to employment. The key elements of the EMW role include:

Supporting young people on the pathway into employment:

- Working with staff including teachers, careers advisers and others, across colleges, special schools, work based learning providers and adult social care providers, using **common profiling materials and Employment Options Assessment** (available from the key contacts listed on page 4) to help inform choices about employment and to assist the young person and their parent/carers and teachers to navigate the range of employment support options available as part of the Coventry Employment Pathway, including **referring young people to appropriate provision**.
- Working with young people **from 14 years of age**, as part of their transition from school into adult life, developing personalised pathways through further education/training and into work.
- Providing **direct support to assist some young people into work** using the Supported Employment Model (see <http://base-uk.org/information-commissioners/what-supported-employment> for further information).
- Working with parents, carers and professionals to **increase aspirations regarding employment** and the local employment offer for young people – eg: give examples of successful employment

Facilitating partnership working across different providers:

- Developing stronger partnerships with key school and college staff to ensure **effective**

information sharing.

- Developing a '**joint offer/approach**' to working with employers. Sharing and utilising contacts for quality work experience and employment outcomes. Linking this work in with the wider Coventry Offer to Businesses being developed with key strategic partners.
- Being a **source of advice and guidance on employment options** - for other professionals, students and parents.
- Developing working relationships with **other employment providers and funding streams** i.e. Access To Work, Work Choice providers and other specialist services.

Contributing to strategic planning and development:

- Contributing to **strategic development on preparing for adulthood and pathways into employment**, for example, to support partners developing other associated support such as job coaching.
- Collecting **data to feed into strategic and operational review and planning**. This includes the number of young people with SEND progressing through school and college in order to establish likely demand for services, and on the numbers of referrals and outcomes achieved through the EMW role i.e. how many people move into paid employment, hours employed, sectors employed in and support required.

Why has it been developed?

The impetus for developing the EMW role came from partners identifying that young people, their parents/carers, providers and employers all have difficulty in navigating the increasingly complex maze of education, training and supported employment provision and services. The result is that young people are not able to access clear and coherent pathways into employment and independence.

It is already well documented that despite a range of efforts and interventions across providers, a high proportion of young people with SEND fall at the hurdle of getting into sustainable employment, entering a 'revolving door' moving from provider to provider, losing both skills and motivation along the way. They are deemed too able to access some forms of support yet not employable enough to access others.

We also know that there is even greater competition for jobs with high youth unemployment and the barriers individuals encounter from employer attitudes makes accessing 'real' work increasingly difficult.

The Coventry Ability Works cluster partners have made a commitment to share expertise and resources in order to build capacity, develop greater collaboration and assist young people in preparing for adulthood.

The inclusion of a work-based learning partner recognised that referral between school/college and work-based learning could be more effective for those young people for whom this option is the most appropriate. It also acknowledged the support required by a significant number of young people within work based learning organisations who have a range of learning, behavioural/emotional and other difficulties that have not been formally identified or declared.

The EMW is now testing out a way of addressing these issues, as well as facilitating a more

coordinated approach to employers and improved collaborative working across providers as part of the Coventry Employment Pathway.

The EMW role includes referral to Supported Employment where appropriate. The Supported Employment model has been used successfully for decades as a personalised model for supporting people with significant disabilities to secure and retain paid employment. The model uses a partnership strategy to enable disabled people to achieve sustainable long-term employment and for businesses to employ valuable workers. Increasingly, supported employment techniques are being used to support other disadvantaged groups such as young people leaving care, ex-offenders and people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse.

How has it been developed?

Partners were agreed on the broad purpose of the EMW role at the outset of the project. Translating this aspiration required significant commitment to overcome a number of challenges including:

- Local authority austerity measures that impacted on the capacity of The Employment Support Service (TESS)
- Internal change and development within Alice Stevens School
- Redundancies within Whitefriars Housing
- Delays in funding decisions for individual student progression routes
- Delay in meetings of the local authority led Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities 16-25 strategic group

These significant challenges were tackled by:

- jointly agreeing to use LSIS project funding to pump prime a part time EMW role, thereby avoiding the role becoming a 'casualty' of funding constraints in partners' own budgets.
- TESS and Hereward College taking the lead in developing the role, recognising that if it could be established by them initially, the 'reach' could be extended to Alice Stevens School and, if possible, Whitefriars Housing.
- continuing to raise the work and SEND agenda within the local authority and wider strategic partners to maintain profile and impetus for tackling key practical issues such as the timing and nature of funding decisions.

The role, split across two workers, was established in April 2013, based in Coventry Council's TESS. Currently, 20 students from across Hereward College and Alice Stevens School are being supported.

The work to develop the EMW post also resulted in additional new collaboration, including the creation of a paid 'Project Administrator' post. This post was recruited from within the pool of Hereward College students, involved a full selection process and is funded through a Coventry Council initiative to increase employment for disabled people.

The legacy – how is it being taken forward?

Having successfully established the EMW role, partners are determined to continue to develop and extend this role so that additional young people are able to benefit. Key elements of the partnership's legacy plan include:

- **tracking the students** currently being supported through the EMW role and drawing on this and other evidence, **evaluating the impact of the role** and any changes/developments that should be made to increase further the effectiveness of the support. This will also link to the work to continually develop the Coventry Employment Pathway.
- **constructing a business case for the EMW role** – to help attract further funding, as well as helping to widen the reach of the role to include new partners with SEND young people. This includes exploring opportunities for an EMW presence within Coventry's city centre Job Shop.
- **continuing to feed in and influence at strategic level** – through Coventry local authority's 11-25 Strategic Partnership, the Solihull SEND Pathfinder and to colleagues in the Departments for Work and Pensions, and Education. This will include raising key issues arising from the cluster's work with regard to the implementation of the SEND elements of the Children & Families Bill and the Disability Employment Strategy, as well as access issues for young people who are unable to meet the Level 2 requirements for Apprenticeships.
- **working jointly with the Employ Ability partners on a range of developments**, including increasing the job coaching capacity and expertise within the partners and using the Employ Ability website to promote and develop the pathway.

What's the intended impact and how will it be assessed?

- **For young people:** a better understanding of how to move successfully into working life and adulthood, and support to make it happen.
- **For employers:** a high quality, coordinated supported employment system, including access to training as required.
- **For parents:** understanding of and confidence in a pathway to employment that can help their child move into work and become independent
- **For partners:** achievement of organisational objectives (eg: Hereward College has a strategic priority to enable 100 students to move into employment in 2013), as well as new opportunities for collaborative development
- **At strategic level:** contribution to strategic planning, improved co-ordination, reduction in duplication

mpact will be assessed through a variety of means including student destination tracking and analysis (further education, employment, volunteering etc.), employer feedback, parent/carer feedback, partnership development plans, Solihull SEND Pathfinder feedback and involvement.

Destination tracking forms an important element of project legacy, not only in terms of identifying the success and impact of the EMW and other project developments, but also embedding and evidencing partnership work that enables a supported 'handover' for young people from one provide to another.

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