

Developing a Work Placement Policy

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Summary

This case study is about the process Sense College worked through to develop a Work Placement Policy for supporting our work in developing work placements accessible for deafblind learners seeking to develop their employability skills. The outcomes of this policy were procedures to follow to ensure that:

- 1) Learners on work placements will be safe.
- 2) Learners' enjoyment and achievement and their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is increased alongside their employability skills.
- 3) Partnerships with employers and other groups will lead to real benefits for learners.
- 4) Work Placement providers will share with the college their views about the success factors for and areas for improvement regarding the work placement process.

Key lessons learned

- Identifying appropriate work placements for deafblind learners is a complex activity requiring a wide range of skill-sets and knowledge.
- The role needs to be recognised and fully resourced for it to be successful. Adding it as an additional task to another role is unlikely to be successful unless the components of the other role are complementary activities and can work alongside the work placement activity.
- Use of internal (to the organisation) work placements can be a useful 'stepping stone' for learners to develop confidence and work-related skills in a safe and secure environment.
- Appropriate use of accredited learning can support learner skills development.
- Full consideration needs to be given to the health & safety and legislative aspects of setting up a work placement to ensure minimum standards are met and both parties (Sense and the provider) are aware of their respective responsibilities.
- Use of symbols in our original work placement learner records of meetings implied a level of cognitive ability levels that our learners do not all have so we need to make the revision more inclusive.

Introduction

Sense College is an Independent Specialist College (ISC), operating in the East Midlands and the East of England. It is part of the national 'Sense' parent organisation, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, for deafblind people. Sense College operates on a geographically dispersed delivery model from eight (8) resource centre sites located in both rural and semi rural areas including small market towns. The centres are sited at Bourne, Dereham, Knapwell, Keech, Louth, Peterborough, Rothwell and Spalding. Learners participate on Education Programmes, Lifelong Learning Programmes or Recreation and Therapy

Programmes funded from a variety of sources including social services, NHS, direct payments and individual budgets.

Learning and achievement is evidenced against a specialist Sense College curriculum assessment framework delivered by staff trained in the teaching strategies for meeting learners' specific needs. Sense College curriculum for deafblind learners has a 'World of Work' domain that offers pre-vocational learning opportunities for all learners.

What we wanted to achieve

Sense College had worked with learners for several years in supporting their access to work placements opportunities. We recognised through our self-assessment activity that we needed a more structured approach to how we developed and implemented work placement activity.

We wanted staff to not only recognise the benefits of supported work placement activity but to also better understand the risks and responsibilities in setting these up. Redesigning the components parts of the process and presenting in a flow charted procedure, outlining key process stages and providing a set of work placement products supporting the process stages was an important part of what we wanted to achieve. The intended outcome was a policy on how to arrange a work placement.

Implementation

Planning our approach

- Identifying from self-assessment against the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (pre-2012) was a key driver to commence our planning.
- Volunteers from each of the eight resource centres were sought and a Work Placement Group was established.
- Terms of Reference for the group were developed by the Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum which clearly identified the task of the group, the composition of group members and encouraged practice sharing and innovative development.
- Progress was monitored through our Quality Improvement Plan on a monthly basis at the Education Service Managers (ESM) monthly meetings.

What we did

The Work Placement group were asked to undertake the following activities:

- Review all current work placements and provide a profile of these for the college.
- Provide a profile of the learners currently accessing work placements.
- Share ideas, good practice and contacts.
- Explore ways of increasing the number of work placements.
- Review the resource implications, staffing, training and transport.
- Review the role of the Job Coach.
- Review the transition of learners into work placements.
- Approach our existing work placement employers for constructive feedback of what worked well and what did not work so well from the employer perspective.

The group met monthly and worked on the allocated tasks between meetings. Progress was reported upon at each meeting with minutes recorded and circulated to group members, Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum and Principal. Monthly progress was monitored at the ESMs meetings.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved

The work attracted the interest of our Policy, Standards and Compliance Team who supported us in the writing of the policy and structured our input into a cohesive work placement policy that is now part of the Sense College Teaching and Learning Handbook.

What we learned that worked well

- Terms of Reference need to be revisited on a yearly basis to reflect the needs of the changing learner cohort.
- Scope of activity regarding internal and external work placements required different considerations and timescales for activities to be completed.
- A working understanding of terminology around work placement activity needed to be developed amongst staff.
- The work of the group generated interest in one centre for a school leaver who was interested in working in the voluntary sector and who came to us on a work experience placement from their school.
- The job coach role was under-resourced and the job description for the role needed to be updated.
- Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI) was considered to be an essential skill for Work Coaches.

What we learned that did not work so well

- Some small employers did not want the increased formality of the paperwork and processes and unfortunately ceased to offer work placements as the process became too labour intensive
- Consideration was given to a peripatetic job coach to work across two or three centres. Due to the rurality of the areas we decided this would not work because of the need to develop in-depth local labour market knowledge for areas that were not geographically linked in any way.

What we are taking forward

- The policy is to be updated in 2013 as part of the continuing quality assurance process ensuring the Teaching and Learning Handbook is current and reflects up to date practice.

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Sector coverage: Independent Specialist Colleges working with learners who have visual and/or hearing impairments alongside additional physical and/ or learning difficulties.

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