

# LSIS Supported Employment Project

## REPORT ON BUSINESS BREAKFAST held 20 March 2013 at Henshaws College



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### BACKGROUND

Henshaws College has hosted a number of successful Business Breakfasts in the past and it was agreed this would be a good vehicle through which to inform and support local employers in fulfilling their corporate social responsibility through responding to the needs of people with disabilities. The event would illustrate how to grow business and to comply with equality legislation through a diverse workforce and the ability to meet the needs of disabled customers and visitors. Moreover, the event would provide a good opportunity for networking over delicious bacon butties, fresh orange juice and coffee!

### AUDIENCE

Over 100 businesses were contacted by email or telephone across all sectors and industries and the event was publicised through the December newsletter of the Leeds Business Education Partnership.

Although on the day there were only 10 employers present, there were representatives from hospitality (Bradford Central Premier Inn), higher education (Leeds Metropolitan University), national retailer (Marks & Spencer), public sector (NHS), transport (Transdev), legal (Ison Harrison Law), voluntary sector (Jennyruth Workshops, Mencap) and not-for-profit social enterprise training provider (Paperworks).

### ORGANISING THE EVENT

#### The Invitation

The wording of the invitation was designed to provide employers with a good rationale as to why they should attend – see Appendix A. A similar wording was used for the statement publicising the event which was included in the Leeds Business Education Partnership.

#### The Venue

Henshaws College offered to provide the venue as it had past experience of organising such events. It also has the advantage of its own catering team to provide the breakfast, and also students following the college's Hospitality Pathway to serve bacon butties, orange juice, tea and coffee to those attending, thus illustrating the capabilities of young people with disabilities. It is also fully accessible to disabled people.

#### The Invitees

These were selected from contact lists of organisations the College and Mencap has/had links with, but filtered according to the vocational goals popular amongst young people in the area and also to reflect the local job market. Details of the event were also circulated to, for

example, members of Henshaws's Board of Trustees with a request that they pass on the information to any suitable contacts.

## The Speakers

These were invited with a view to:-

- Demonstrating to employers that young people with disabilities have a lot to offer in terms of skills, and are willing and able to speak about their experiences in front of an audience
- Employers who have offered work experience and supported employment placements to young people with disabilities and can therefore give a frank and honest account of the process
- It was felt important that employers should be aware of sources of help and advice, hence the invitation to an Access to Work Adviser, who it was hoped would offer some very practical advice in order to reassure employers that support is in place to enable them to enter into this type of activities with confidence. In the event, whilst this person was unable to attend due to industrial action, she did provide some leaflets for inclusion in the information packs handed out on the day.

## THE SPEAKERS

An Access to Work Adviser from the Department of Work & Pensions had agreed to attend the meeting as a speaker but, due to industrial action taking place on the day, was unable to do so.

Nicki Eyre, Henshaws' Managing Director of Education & Training, welcomed visitors to the College, emphasising the importance of employment and work-based training opportunities for young adults with disabilities.

Joanne Armstrong, Talent Business Partner – North, of The Co-operative Food and a partner in the project, also spoke of the importance of promoting employment opportunities to encourage a diverse workforce, and of the mutual benefits to both employer and student. Work placements provide the opportunity for students to explore the world of work, from initial interview process to the responsibilities of actually getting to work and doing the job.

“We are supporting this project because we feel both employers and students can benefit from supported employment and work placements. It gives students that opportunity to explore the world of work, from the initial interview process to having that responsibility to get up and arrive at work on time.”

“At Cooperative Food, we have seen real benefits during work placement students' time with us. As an employer, it challenges you to think about making small adjustments to make work accessible to people with learning disabilities, whether this is during the interview process, induction or in day to day aspects of the job.”

Next up was Darran Bilton, Manager of local sports shop Up and Running (national retail chain). Darran spoke about how he has supported Henshaws student Nathan during a 10 week work placement. Nathan was involved in a very broad range of activities, from counting and banking the day's takings, to visiting head office to see behind the scenes how the organisation operates. Not only did Nathan learn a great deal from his experience, but also Darran stated that the organisation learnt from Nathan too.

“Nathan got involved in anything from counting up the day's takings and taking them to the bank, to coming with me to our head office to see behind the scenes how the firm operates. We really did get as much out of Nathan as he got out of us.”

The event also included a presentation from Jackie Keir, Deputy Manager of Paperworks, a local social enterprise offering employment and training to people with disabilities. Jackie, explained that, through the work experience they offer for those wishing to gain work skills, the support provided can enable them to progress from volunteering into paid work as skills develop.

“We offer real work experience for people who want to train in work skills. Often, people come to us as trainees, and with support they can progress from volunteering to paid work as their skills develop. It’s about putting that time in at the beginning to teach people, and giving them support which matches their level of need.”

Jamie Lynas, a former student of Henshaws College who has a severe visual impairment, then told of his experiences and progression with Paperworks. Following a work placement with Paperworks as part of his employability training, Jamie enjoyed it so much that he returned as a volunteer on leaving college. When the opportunity for a paid job arose in the finishing department he applied, gained an interview and was offered the position. Jamie now works on 2 days a week and continues to volunteer in a customer-facing role which further extends his skills.

“I first came to Paperworks on a work placement as part of my employability training, and I enjoyed it so much I didn’t want to leave. I returned after college as a volunteer, and when a paid position came up last year I thought I’d grab it with both hands. I applied, went for an interview and was offered the job.

“I now do 2 days paid employment a week, working hard to complete jobs such as attaching labels to key fobs or finishing print products. I’ve learnt that it’s crucial for both the quality and quantity to be right – our products need to go out to the customers at the standard they expect. I also still volunteer here once a week which gives me a chance to have a more customer facing role including answering the phones and working on the front desk. I’m really enjoying it and I’ve never looked back.”

Hawabibi Rawat, Service Manager with MENCAP in Leeds, then gave an overview of how Mencap can help. For the disabled person seeking work, person-centred and in-work support, as well as travel training and employment workshops, can be provided. In addition to this help for the job-seeker, the employer receives disability awareness training to provide guidance and reassurance to support the process.

Following the presentations, there was opportunity for networking and also the chance to visit Henshaws College’s new Media & Information Technology (IT) Centre, which includes a state of the art IT suite, two recording studios and a print centre, providing additional opportunities for students to take part in vocational training and prepare for their future.

## AT THE END OF THE EVENT

- Information packs containing factsheets and case studies were handed to guests, who provided excellent feedback on the event.
- A short list of useful websites is included in Appendix B – bearing in mind that employers are busy people.
- All attendees confirmed they felt better informed about disabled people seeking work and that they could offer work experience or supported employment to a disabled person.

- Whilst positive outcomes from the event may not be immediate, 3 of the organisations have expressed interest with a view to offering work placements or supported employment.
- In summary, although the numbers of employers were small, the event clearly provided not just information but also reassurance to those present.
- All participants considered the event to be a huge success and which provided a model which could be replicated in future.

## ON REFLECTION.....

What could we have done to improve the event?

- Made a DVD of the event for future reference
- Provide case studies of those who spoke at the event; inclusion of these in the information pack could act as prompts to employers
- More lead-in time for planning would have been useful

Lynne Gilland  
Transitions Manager, Henshaws College

## Appendix A

Dear Colleague

### DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT – HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We are hosting a Business Breakfast at Henshaws College on Wednesday 20 March 2013 from 8am to 9.30am to give advice and practical support on providing supported employment to young adults with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The event is designed to help you, as an employer, to fulfil your corporate social responsibility targets through providing for people with SEND and encouraging a diverse workforce.

At the event you will:

- Find out about the support available when employing people with a disability
- Meet employers who are benefitting from Access to Work grants
- Hear from young disabled people who are now in employment
- Have the opportunity to network over a delicious cooked breakfast!

The event will be run by Henshaws College in conjunction with Leeds City Council, Broomfield South Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre, Leeds City College, Mencap and The Co-operative Food. It is part of a Learning & Skills Improvement Service project looking at Pathways into Supported Employment for local young people with SEND.

We are hoping to support businesses to join the growing number of employers offering work experience or employment to young adults with disabilities.

For further information or to book your breakfast, please contact Liz Connall by Friday 8 March 2013 on 01423 886451 or email [liz.connall@henshaws.ac.uk](mailto:liz.connall@henshaws.ac.uk).

## Appendix B

Useful websites:

[www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)

[www.mencap.org.uk/employment](http://www.mencap.org.uk/employment)

<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/resources/pfa-resources/supported-internships>