

PRD project – case study

Building effective practice in partnership working to support young adults (18- 24) to progress to employment, including apprenticeships



Project title – A NEET future in Railways

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- A productive pathway for vulnerable young people to gain access to a programme of training leading to recognised qualifications with a living wage leading to employment.

Contact information

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Name of Peer Review and Development (PRD) group: Productive Pathways Railway

Participating organisation(s):

- New Directions (Reading Borough Council)
- Jobcentre Plus
- Train'd Up – apprenticeship and training provider
- Sky Blue Solutions – employment agency recruiting on behalf of rail employers
- Carillion – employer

What the PRD group set out to do and why

The project was developed to model good practice in enabling NEET young people to enter employment through a recognised training programme leading to an apprenticeship with a 'living wage'.

Partners worked together to recruit and prepare a group of selected unemployed 18- to 24-year-olds to access delivery of 'Get on Track' pre-employment training, leading to an apprenticeship with a large railway contractor which in turn would lead to the offer of a combined programme of work on the railway tracks at weekends with apprenticeship training.

The group agreed to provide 20 apprenticeship places with a guaranteed job income to those learners who met health and safety criteria and satisfactorily completed the necessary 'Get on Track' training. The programme would be run twice, with two groups of 12 maximum progressing from satisfactory completion into an

apprenticeship.

'Get on Track' is a recognised progression route delivered by Train'd Up Railway Resourcing Limited, a National Training Provider specialising in Engineering and Rail training delivered throughout the UK working with a large number of Rail employers. The programme meets all the requirements of the awarding body, the National Skills Academy of Railway Engineering (NSARE).

“Get on Track” training contents:

- Emergency First Aid training (certificated);
- Fire Safety;
- Manual Handling;
- “BTI” Basic Track Induction Programme (mandatory);
- “PTS” Personal Track Safety (mandatory).

This pre-employment training provides the qualification required to work as a Track Worker; both BTI and PTS are valid for two years.

Job opportunities for railway track workers had been identified in the Reading area and the project was part of a wider strategic aim to support young people who were NEET, based on a gap analysis which confirmed there was a need for provision. This project specifically targeted young people aged 18 - 24 who had been registered unemployed for up to 9 months and who were claiming benefit.

The funding did not cover the full costs of provision; funds from two other main sources were also allocated to this project. The project as a whole was therefore broken into separate parts and funding allocated accordingly.

What has been achieved so far

- Jobcentre Plus identified potential learners who were NEET, provided them with an A4 sheet of information regarding the opportunity and encouraged them to go forward by contacting Train'd Up for an initial telephone interview.
- Train'd Up conducted initial screening of 30 applicants via telephone interview to assess aptitude and suitability for the post of Rail Track Worker; no particular qualifications were required.
- New Directions advisers contacted those who were unsuccessful, to offer follow/up IAG help and support; some expressed interest in construction work and were offered the opportunity to undertake CSCS training.
- 16 young people attended an Information/Recruitment event which included literacy and numeracy assessments and a one-to-one interview with the recruitment agency, Sky Blue Solutions, on behalf of the potential employer; the young people were coached in advance and arrived prepared for the interview, wearing shirts and trousers.
- 2 young people opted to leave before the literacy/numeracy tests; both booked IAG appointments and were offered further support.
- Successful individuals attended a group IAG session conducted by New Directions and were offered one-to-one advice with individual action plans.

- 13 Candidates passed railway medical including drug and alcohol screenings; 12 were invited to be the first tranche to undertake the 'Get on Track' pre-employment course.
- All 13 candidates regularly met with New Directions advisers who prepared individual action plans; some young people had four action plans to indicate their progress and planning and New Directions advisers conducted some 30 individual one-to-one sessions with these young people.
- 12 learners attended two days induction to cover rail-specific awareness and employability topics. Of the 12, three had been unemployed for 12-18 months and four described themselves as having disabilities.
- All 12 candidates completed the pre-employment two-week programme to cover personal track safety and basic track induction (prerequisite for working on rail infrastructure), emergency first aid (certificated), fire safety and manual handling.
- New Directions staff provided mentoring support to encourage attendance regularly and on time and helped with travel costs, benefits including housing enquiries. Daily refreshments/lunch was provided to those who attended the pre-employment course to ensure they had at least one good meal a day.
- The project sustained 100% retention and achievement of the initial agreed introduction (medical screenings), health and safety, personal protection and railway personal track safety.
- All continued to receive JSA while undertaking 'Get on Track' training.
- 12 learners have been awarded their PTS cards, a significant achievement which they would not have individually been able to finance for themselves; the PTS card is a specific requirement for employment on the rail network.
- All 13 have been provided with individual references, should they wish to apply for a position with Sky Blue Solutions as an 'On Call Track Worker', signed by the Head of New Directions; the references confirm completion of the 'Get on Track' training and possession of their PTS cards as well as comments on their conduct, timekeeping, attitude, relationship with peers and relationship with their mentors.

What still needs to be done

The young people who have successfully completed the pre-employment course are waiting to hear from the employer of a potential start date. Despite having a Service Level Agreement with Train'd Up which states "*The Partner is responsible for ensuring smooth transition from the pre-employment training to the Carillion apprenticeships*", the apprenticeship offer was unexpectedly withdrawn and a way forward is under discussion.

Three of the successful learners with PTS cards have been offered work through Sky Blue Solutions on their standard employment contract. Conversations with Network Rail are taking place to consider the models of training and development and current practice to introduce new entrants into the sector.

The young people feel very let down and some have vented their anger and frustration through emails and comments to New Directions advisers who have

continued to maintain contact under difficult circumstances. One learner sacrificed a part-time job and some turned down other job opportunities while undertaking 'Get on Track' training; all still require intensive mentoring and IAG support. They have all been invited to a 'Foundation Learning Fair' in Reading on 20th July which has been arranged specifically to attract young people who are NEET.

The project partners worked together as a 'virtual group' with communication largely through email. Whilst each partner had an important part to play with clear objectives and a shared desired outcome, there has been no opportunity for a round table discussion. New Directions has taken its lead role seriously and is working strategically and operationally to resolve the impasse. Each partner is considering the impact of the project and its current outcome.

Resources to be shared with the sector

- JCP flyer;
- literacy/numeracy assessment test weblink;
- Rail Engineering (Track) Framework weblink;
- Train'd Up website re 'Get on Track' course;
- 'Get on Track' Induction book content;
- action plan, etc. paperwork.

Key learning points

- The project clearly demonstrated that, with the **right** support, NEET young people can achieve. The support supplied was intensive, not only to ensure the learning achieved the required qualifications, but also to help the young people with their levels of resilience to cope with their own barriers to progression.
- New Directions advisers made repeated attempts to contact and speak to the young people, daytime and evening, sometimes speaking to other members of their households, also using text and email.
- The project costs were known at the outset as being higher than the Challenge Fund so the lead body identified a number of funding streams to cover the additional costs associated with recruitment, retention and individual support provided to the learners.
- Reading Borough Council was in the best position to act as the lead accountable body and grant agreements and service level agreements were negotiated and signed.
- The group established ways of addressing issues such as data sharing and simplified administration. Templates were used for the routine forms required for tracking by each partner, eg Jobcentre Plus, Train'd Up and New Directions IAG support.
- The 'advocate' role was key in ensuring the needs of the young people remained at the heart of the project; New Directions mentors advocated strongly on behalf of the young people to ensure they actually received their PTS cards.

- The outcome demonstrated how crucial it is to have direct contact with the potential employer and not just rely on intermediary working through a training provider or employment agency.
- Working and communicating as a 'virtual' group has its drawbacks in that key decision-makers are often not available in times of crisis to meet face to face.