

Review of Peer Visit to MINT by staff from Colchester Institute



The content of this document is a report of a peer visit to MINT employment agency by Colchester Institute.

Whilst Colchester has an established employment agency, it does not have the sustained results that MINT demonstrates.

The report gives a good insight to MINT's success as well as key learning points, and should be useful to any organisation that are considering starting or wish to improve on their employment agency when supporting those who have a barrier to work.

The report will also highlight the good relationship forged with City College Norwich (CCN) and Colchester Institute and the value of collaborative work.

Overview of MINT employment agency

MINT is an entry level employment agency. It focuses on getting young people, aged between 16 & 25 years old, who have a barrier to work, into sustainable paid employment.

MINT believes everyone should have the opportunity to gain employment and through its work, aims to help make this happen.

MINT prides itself on offering a unique and flexible service to all young people and employers.

MINT offers job coaching to support the young people and employers through the process of training the new employee to ensure a smooth transition into work.

Requirements

- Not be in education, training or employment
- Be aged between 16 & 25
- Have a barrier to work (Learning Difficulty, Mental Health Issue etc.)
- Be an independent traveller or willing to learn
- Be able to work independently after an agreed period of job coaching
- Be referred by a professional organisation/person

MINT can support a person through the job searching process and into work and offers a flexible service to meet their requirements/needs. It can provide a job coach who can help train and teach the job in the work place with the aim to help secure and for the individual to keep their job. MINT also can put a person in touch with other partnership organisations if they require specific help.

Key to MINT's success is to support an employee for as long as necessary as well as help with travel training to help employees get to work and once in work, a job coach can return to the workplace and help an employee learn new skills at any point.

Some key Employers

Mint has established relationships with a range of local and national employers. Jarrolds, B&Q Holiday Inn, WH Smiths John Lewis, Tesco, Parcel Force, Shoe Zone Pizza Express, Ego, Right Choices, KLM, The Range are to name but a few.

Preparation for Peer Visit

The rationale for visiting 'MINT' was to explore how CCN's supported employment model operated. It was agreed that an open and honest professional dialogue would be key to this visit's success i.e. to enable effective sharing of good practice and to critically analyse features of the supported employment provision across the two organisations.

Description of Peer Visit

Prior to our visit, discussion took place between staff at Colchester Institute & CCN to ensure both parties were clear about the aims of the visit and key themes to be explored. This extended to agreeing which additional members of staff from each organisation and managers with operational responsibility should be present.

The visit was well planned and the agenda for the day was extensive. This included an exploration of factors that contributed to a high achievement of employment outcomes and meeting with front line staff. All members of staff participating were open to discussion and keen to share good practice.

Knowledge and Skills gained

MINT was established in August 2010 using funding secured by the Local Skills Council (LSC). It is an entry-level employment agency specifically for young people, aged 16-25, who face barriers to employment. MINT is located in the hub of the city centre in a well visited public building which contains an eclectic mix of exhibitions, events, activities, catering, shopping and learning opportunities. Its central location, detached from the college, is a key factor to MINT's success as it has successfully engaged learners who were not attracted to learning in a formal college environment.

The use of a 'roll on, roll off' enrolment system has enabled MINT to respond to learner demand and offer a flexible service. Use of non-regulated funded learning aims and additional learning support enables the development of highly individualised learning programmes which lead to the achievement of positive employment outcomes. A high proportion of learners have succeeded in gaining and sustaining valuable paid work as a result of their learning experience.

MINT has successfully engaged a wide range of employers which include large, national companies and small local businesses. Whilst it is recognised that the current economic climate presents challenges identifying paid employment opportunities, MINT markets the benefits that their services offer to the employer, paired with the benefits of employing their learners. This includes on-going support for trainees/employees in the workplace and a reduction in marketing and recruitment costs.

The use of job coaches to provide support alongside the young person in the work place has proved highly successful whilst employability training undertaken in a nearby training suite to MINT has facilitated the development of employability, personal and social skills; this includes travel training and route planning if appropriate. Mint ensures all requirements are met, through a tailor made support system that will be sustained for as long as necessary.

Colchester Institute staff valued the opportunity to develop knowledge regarding MINT's journey to date which facilitated the evaluation of their own provision.

Colchester Institute – Work Plus

Established in 2007, Work Plus is a person centred inclusive programme for learners who have a real commitment to undertake work experience or supported employment within the local community. It is a part-time programme, undertaken over one academic year and focuses upon preparing learners for mainstream employment. In addition to attending two days at college, learners also undertake up to two days per week voluntary work or work experience working towards paid employment. As part of their programme of study, learners work towards the achievement of an entry level 3 employability qualification and literacy/numeracy awards at an appropriate level.

The course aims to support learners to:

- realise/work towards their long term vocational goals and aspirations
- gain work experience within their chosen vocational area of mainstream employment
- develop employability, personal and social skills
- increase level of independence

The programme is fully inclusive and customised to individual learner needs. Class teaching is undertaken in small groups, with support from a learning support practitioner (LSP), whilst work placement support is provided by job coaches who use a 'train and fade' model to develop skills for independence. This includes breaking activities into core tasks, duties and responsibilities with steps for development and mastery clearly laid out. The utilisation of behaviour-modelling techniques to develop appropriate work behaviour is also undertaken in addition to fading techniques to encourage and gauge levels of independence. In addition, a high level of pastoral support is provided in order to minimise barriers to employment and maintain levels of engagement.

Learner case studies

Rachel's story

Hello, my name is Rachel and I'm currently on the Work Plus course. I live in Colchester with my mum, step- dad and my brother.

When I was on my previous course in college I had a work placement in Brantano. They offered me a part time job, which I'm really proud of.

I'm still working at Brantano, receiving support from my Work Plus Job Coach if needed. I help with deliveries, marking off the stock and putting it out on the shop floor. All the staff are really friendly and helpful.

Since being on the course and at work my confidence has improved and I can talk to lots of different people. I've almost finished my Level 1 training booklet at work (with a little help from my job coach and staff) and hope to get it signed off soon. At the moment I'm currently being trained to use the fitting machine to measure feet. Next month I'll have my proper training where I'll be shown how to measure feet by using the hand held device, which goes on each foot and is used for little children's feet. I'll also been shown how to check if the shoes fit properly and what you have to look out for. I'm feeling a bit nervous about it but I really want to push myself to it because it's a good skill to have. I know if I'm worrying about it, I can talk to my Job Coach or members of staff.

Alongside my work I attend my college course, Work Plus, which is a course that helps me to improve my maths, English and employability skills. When I started the course I hoped to improve my maths and English skills and have done so well with them that I am being entered

for my E3 level maths and English exams at the end of the month. I also wanted to become more confident and I wanted to learn how to create a C.V.

During the course I feel I have grown up a lot and have been helped to talk to people I trust if something is bothering me. If something was bothering me, I used to keep it to myself and hoped it would go away. I now realise that it doesn't make things any better. My tutor has helped me build up my self-confidence and to stop doubting myself all the time. I have also really enjoyed cooking lots of different things on the course because it's helping me learn to cook for myself, to become more independent.

I've really enjoyed my time on the course and have learnt a lot. However, I still feel I have a lot to learn in order to become independent and therefore, applying to do the 2nd year of the course, where I will learn more work skills. I'm a bit nervous but I'm looking forward to it.

Collaborative partnership with Colchester Institute and City College Norwich

Next steps/Action Planning

Following the peer visit, Colchester Institute staff identified the potential to review current practice and to increase the number of paid outcomes as well as develop learners' skills and experience relevant to jobs available in the local labour market. This was actioned by adjusting the curriculum to enable the development of more specific vocational skills such as food hygiene, customer service and Information Technology skills at entry level 3 and exploring scope to develop Work Plus as a Supported Internship programme. It is too early to see if the changes will have a positive impact on paid outcomes and well as sustained employment, but it is hopeful given the success of MINT.

Impact

Value of sharing a good understanding of another provider proved of great benefit and inspired those who attended. Furthermore, having the opportunity to engage in a peer visit enabled staff to reflect on their own practise with a more 'critical eye'.

It is expected with the change of programme design that there will be a positive impact in paid sustained and sustained employment. This in turn will create further referrals and interest from employers as they will see the benefits of supported employment for those who have a barrier to work. This has been the success of MINT, who believes everyone should have the opportunity to gain employment. It is hoped that Colchester's work programme will follow suit and share the same success this coming year.

Opportunities for further partnership working

The Curriculum Manager for Learning for Living and Work at Colchester Institute identified good opportunities for front line staff within the organisation to undertake further peer visits to MINT.

Whilst there has already been a change of programme design and delivery, there will also be a review of current practice at Colchester, which will coincide with a further peer visit to MINT. The aim is to influence the development of the supported employment programmes. Each member of staff will be expected to identify key strengths to take away and develop, as well as work collaboratively to enhance the sustainability of paid employment. Following MINT's model, staff will be given targets to take ownership of outcomes. MINT has shown by working closely with the employer and employee, offering support and further staff training has aided good relations and successful outcomes.

The importance of raising aspirations and the sharing of good practice, as well as not reinventing the wheel is key to our work. It is anticipated that partnership work will not limit itself,

but is merely a starting point for sharing other good practice, which will aid the improvement and support for those who have a barrier to work or learning difficulty.

The relationship built already with CCN and Colchester Institute is really valuable and it is recommended that all Colleges should remove barriers, such as regarding each other as 'competitors', and work together as partners to share good practice and improve provision.

Website details for more information www.mintnorwich.co.uk