

THEME **Working With Employers**

Other themes referenced in this work: Learner Voice

Salford Cluster **NORTH WEST REGION**

Cluster group Oakwood Academy Salford (Lead)
Fujitsu UK & Ireland
Oasis Media Academy Salford
Irlam & Cadishead Sixth Form College Salford

Title: Inspiration Days'

Background

Oakwood Academy is a secondary day special school catering for pupils 11-16 with a range of complex learning difficulties. It is a barrier free school and takes pupils with different types of physical disabilities. The school has Arts, Technology and Sports Specialist Status. The academy is very keen to broaden the opportunities for young people and forge links that will allow transition to the world of work and college placements.

Project Summary

Oakwood Academy is a school for pupils with Moderate/ Complex Learning Difficulties. The school works hard to give the pupils experiences of the world of work, but sometimes can find placing the students in suitable placements challenging. The Academy formed an alliance with Fujitsu, a leading Japanese information and communication technology (ICT) company. This company had recently appointed a Business Connector for Manchester. The role of this professional, Created by 'Business in the Community' (www.bitc.org.uk) is to create connections between the private sector and community organisations to tackle the issues of employment in the North West.



**BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY**

Business in the Community (BITC) is a British business-community outreach charity promoting responsible business, CSR, corporate responsibility, and is one of the Prince's Charities. BITC works with over 800 UK companies committed to improving their impact on society, and operates throughout the UK, BITC seeks to positively shape business impact on the environment, in the marketplace, in the workplace and in the community. It is an organisation that works with businesses to improve their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) credentials, offering advice and programmes tailored to meet their needs. BITC was set up in 1982.

Oakwood Academy wanted to raise the issue of low expectations for disabled young people entering the working world. To achieve this, it was decided to organise 'inspiration days' with a number of companies:

- to introduce Oakwood pupils to employers
- to allow employers to see these young people as potential employees.
- to give young people the opportunity to gain a practical overview of the work involved within a range of employment fields.

Students attended 'Inspiration' days arranged with:

- Timpson
- P.P. O'Connor Construction Ltd
- Fujitsu
- The Worsley Park Marriott Hotel
- Marks and Spencer



Project Aims

Oakwood Academy is very keen to broaden the opportunities for young people and forge links that will allow transition to the world of work and college placements.

The target group were young people with complex learning difficulties, who are recognised as having poor goal setting skills and low aspirations.



- To raise the aspirations around employment
- To address concerns by both employers young people
- To challenge assumptions and create a positive approach to employing disabled employees
- To challenge pupils low expectations and raise aspirations
- To help shape the curriculum for future post 16 provision
- To increase awareness of job options for pupils
- To identify and build employability skills
- To raising pupils' aspiration and confidence
- To forge sustainable links with local employers and give Year 11 students regular experiences of work.

Achievements

Wow, what an experience? Fujitsu staff undergo weeks of training before they are let loose at the service desk. Oakwood students stepped up to the mark taking calls and fixing problems along side employees. The pupils loved the experience and many decided a career in Information Technology (IT) was for them. Providing these experiences meant the students could gain an understanding of the workings of a global company. Many of the staff at Fujitsu



took the time to talk to the students about their journey from school to a career within the company and any future plans they had.

The intended impact was to show the students how many different roles there are within an organisation. A school directory has been produced giving a list of employers, their contacts and a model for the 'Inspiration Day' they are willing to organise.

Oakwood have now developed a full and robust policy for employer engagement. A rolling program of Inspiration days is now in the academy diary and will be part of curriculum delivery each year.

The 'Inspiration' days gave the students an insight into the world of work, gaining the right employability skills needed to gain a job.



These on site visits enabled students to gain insight into careers in retail, IT, hospitality, catering, construction and office administration. The students got to ask questions and observe staff doing the jobs they are interested in. Each visit helped students to understand more about the company's industry, the work that they do and the careers available within that industry.

Stronger links were forged with a vocational apprenticeship provider, to inform students about vocational training options available to them once they leave school. Again, the aim of this was to raise awareness and help students plan for their independent future lives.



"I loved the trip to Fujitsu, it was so good going on the call desk, I was so nervous at first but on the second go I fixed the call easy. I might work for them when I leave college".

Jake Challoner Year 11 pupil Oakwood Academy.

'Oakwood is a lovely school with great students, the displays are beautiful. We enjoyed the inspiration day and hope we can host another soon. Our staff would be happy to come into school to talk to the pupils about the construction industry.'

Lindsey Griffin PP O'Connor Construction Salford

'It has been my pleasure to work with Oakwood Academy to establish a programme of work inspiration days for year 11 students. Our aim was to increase student awareness of different career options, raise aspirations and provide some practical work experience.'

Kelly Metcalf Fujitsu Business Connector September 2012 - May 2013



This project has been invaluable to the school and all involved. The pupils have gained valuable experience, the parents have seen aspirations and confidence raised, the employees have commented how they have enjoyed working with the students and the staff have gained experience and understanding of what the young people of Oakwood require to enter the working world.

'The LSIS project has been the catalyst to develop an outstanding work experience and transition programme within Oakwood Academy. Through excellent partnership work from Oakwood, Connexions Salford, Fujitsu and Irlam & Cadishead Academy we have built a legacy to ensure that Oakwood students with learning difficulties and disabilities will have access to a wide range of employment opportunities and feel better informed of vocational options as they move towards adulthood.'

David O'Sullivan Personal Advisor Salford Connexions

Key Learning Points

Employers are wary of taking on pupils with SEN. Some of the reasons that possibly put off employers are a lack of knowledge of SEN students and health and safety issues in the work place. Through being introduced to a Salford Business Connector, access to businesses has been opened up.

The role of the business connector was crucial to the success of the project. It is important for employers to understand that so many disabled learners can perform successfully within the workplace and should be considered as serious candidates. Our project broke down barriers, informed misconceptions and opened doors of opportunity for young people.

'Without the help of Kelly the business connector it was so hard to speak to the right people within companies to gain work experience placements'

Liz Capell Transition Adviser Oakwood Academy

What advice would we give to others?

- Have a model mapped out to show a simple programme rather than expecting the employer to come up with ideas.
- Start small, for example with an inspiration day, once the employers meet the students they will be hooked.
- Involve the employers in school activities to create more of a two way relationship rather than the employer feeling it's all one way.

What we are taking forward

Oakwood is now working with more employers including Marks & Spencer. The Academy has established a structured retail development programme with Marks & Spencer which will see 8 year 11/12 students benefit from practical training delivered by Marks & Spencer's staff, in all aspects of customer service and the retail industry. Having completed 7 x ½ day training events within Marks & Spencer stores, distribution centre and in-school, students will then complete a 2-week work placement in a local store, to put all of this learning into practice. This programme has been designed specifically to ensure that students will be able to demonstrate they meet the criteria for entry level retail jobs and will provide them with practical experience to help them secure future work.



Due to the success of The 'Inspiration Days' the model of these days will be used to approach other businesses to offer similar days giving a real breadth of realistic jobs to the learners.

Inspiration days and further work with employers are now included into the school development plan, and a major overhaul of the work experience programme has taken place to create a formalised program of work experience from year 9, 10 and 11.

Oakwood is now working with the new Business Connector Charlotte seconded by Marks and Spencer to help move the experience on through other retail opportunities.

The school is looking to run its very own shop with the help of a professional whose background in the retail industry will give the students an incredible opportunity of hands on training.

Store lends a hand to help pupils

www.bitconnect.org/connectors/salford/posts/39-store-lends-hand-help-pupils-published-16052013

Oakwood Academy is a school for 11-16 year old special needs' students. The school places great emphasis on helping students to develop their aspirations and plan for their future independent life beyond school.

I am delighted that as a result of introducing Tim Dodd, Regional Finance & Operations Manager from Marks & Spencer, to the school, he and his team will be running a retail development programme for a group of students. Delivered as a partnership between Marks & Spencer and the school, this programme will be a fantastic way of students gaining work experience and relevant training to a future career in retail.

Eight students will benefit from the first iteration of the programme which will involve a variety of activities. They will learn about the different job roles within Marks & Spencer; gain an insight in the store itself and behind the scenes; experience practical training in customer services and visual merchandising. In addition, students will: learn how Marks & Spencer works with their supply chain; visit a distribution centre; have the opportunity to practice applying for Marks & Spencer's job vacancies and complete 2 weeks work experience in a local store.

Speaking about the programme, Tim says: 'When I first met Oakwood, I was really inspired by their creative approach to vocational education and was keen to see how Marks & Spencer could help. I'm delighted that our staff are able to share their skills, to help students gain real-life experience that will put them in a strong position to gain employment in the future.'

Liz Capell, Transition Advisor, Oakwood Academy says: 'We are delighted that Marks & Spencer have chosen to put together this programme for us. The work experience combined with relevant training will be invaluable to our students in growing their confidence when they move into the world of work'.

Resources & information to support this work

- Case Study Report
- Information Sheet about BITC
- A model of an Employer Directory with descriptions of the 'Inspiration' days
- DVD Fujitsu Film highlighting the difficulties in finding work experience, and the model Fujitsu has delivered.

Documents and resources linked to this work are available to download at:

www.oakwoodhighschool.co.uk

Contact details:

Oakwood Specialist School

Liz Capell

Transition Adviser

E mail: ecapell@oakwoodacademy.co.uk

Marks & Spencer

Charlotte Lloyd

Salford Business Connector

E mail: charlotte.lloyd@bitcconnect.org

Salford Connexions

David O'Sullivan

Personal Advisor

E mail: David.O'Sullivan@connexionslive.com