

TEACH TOO ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

A case study on the Teach Too organisational development projects at Stansted Airport College (part of Harlow College)



Project overview

This exciting organisational development project was linked to the opening of the new Stansted Airport College, based on the airport and established to provide direct employment into the many careers in and around the airport. Central to this new college was close collaboration with a wide range of employers in and around the airport, ensuring that they led on what we did and how we did it.



Project aims

The project sought:

- to increase employer engagement and collaboration in skills development
- to develop an employer-led model for the new curriculum that involves them at every stage of the process (steering - design – skills delivery/professional exchange), linking to company growth and innovation
- to gain commitment from on-airport employers to work placements, employer set project briefs and other industry exposure for students, providing a clearer line of site to the workplace
- to enable college staff to renew their skills by spending time in the workplace.

Positive impact and expected outcomes

This project has enabled the college to capture the most effective approaches to working with employers, involving them in curriculum design, project briefs for the learners, specialist talks and visits and work placements. The college has now adopted this approach in other areas of the college as it identifies opportunities for curriculum development and change. This includes

planning longer lead in times for engaging employers prior to changes being made or new curriculum being developed. Also a strong focus on what employers want to gain out of the collaboration, offering flexibility in ways of working. Aspects of the project have become embedded into college procedures including the use of volunteers and induction and training for staff transferring from industry to teaching.

Importantly, this approach was clearly visible to Ofsted when they visited and found,

‘Leaders and managers work successfully with an extensive range of organisations and employers to meet local and regional skills priorities. For example, the recently opened campus based at Stansted Airport enables learners to study qualifications that prepare them for a career in the aviation industry. Employers play an important role in shaping the design of the curriculum.

As a result, learners and apprentices gain the skills, knowledge and behaviours required by employers.’ Ofsted January 2019

Employer forums and presentations to employers formed the starting point to most of the employer engagement. It was an advantage that one strategic employer, Manchester Airport Group (who own Stansted Airport) were fully committed to the project and so were able to encourage the involvement of other employers.

Each curriculum has been developed through advice from employers in respect of the most appropriate qualification, the most appropriate units of study and the co-creation of projects or ‘live-briefs’. In engineering an employer designed a sheet metal project around creating a service hatch for an aircraft. Another project involved planning for the moving of a small aircraft across the airport, onto the campus and stabilising it on its hard standing. Employers have also advised on the equipment the college needs for specific units of study and donated equipment where appropriate.

As much as we have sought guidance from employers on what to teach we have also taken their advice on the behaviours and attitudes that we need to engender in our trainees. We asked employers what makes for a successful employee and why staff they employer sometimes don’t work out. They emphasised the need for staff to be used to variable shift patterns, to be very strong on customer service, whatever part of the business they work in, and the need to be strong communicators who can problem solve. These have become an important part of the ethos and operation of the college.

We are now working closely with employers on their recruitment campaigns to fill their apprenticeship and other vacancies and we expect to see many of our trainees progress into apprenticeships and other employment with our local employers over the summer.

Three of the staff from our employer links have become ‘volunteers’ working on a regular basis and many others are regular visitors giving guest talks etc. Three have applied for employment at the college, one has been appointed to a full time post starting in September and two are being paid for their industry specialist inputs.

Staff new to teaching have been supported through the strengthened college induction programme which includes specific sessions for those new to teaching on classroom management, pedagogy and staff code of conduct along with opportunities to study professional education and training qualifications.

300 students are undertaking qualifications that have been designed in collaboration with employers. This means the choice of units and projects reflect those that employers feel will best prepare students for employment in their sector. There have been 75 industry exposures to students since September 2018. This included whole class sessions on employer visits, visiting speakers, employer led projects through to small group and individual opportunities to experience 'a day in the life of', attend an employer conference or employer recruitment and training sessions as observers.

All students are also planned to complete one week of external work placement. Requests to make use of our new building for employer training are met with a request for some of our students to be allowed to take part or attend as observers. As a result students have been involved in the training of the drug and cash dogs at the airport, have sat in on interviews for jobs with a local logistics company, attended human factors and conflict management training and will attend the AGM of the BBGA (British Business General Aviation association). Both staff and students have attended dementia awareness training run by MAG (Manchester Airport Group).

Students are reporting a greater understanding of the workplace and feel more confident in engaging with employers. At least 20 students have already secured industry specific part-time employment at the airport, including those with close links to their curriculum.

“As I have finished this term I wanted to thank you for all of the support you have provided me this term and all the people you brought around. I am sure that it is not an easy job to bring so many companies and employers around, thank you so much for your effort to push us forward.”

Future activity

The project has enabled us to make great inroads into employer engagement and specifically creating an employer-led curriculum and employer-led Gatsby-style episodes for our trainees. However, we have learned through the project that time is needed to maintain these relationships and to build on what we have achieved so far. Moving forward we will seek to:

- Establish new partnerships with local businesses
- Maintain & strengthen existing partnerships with employers
- Explore sponsorship initiatives
- Establish an employer-trainer mentoring programme
- Develop measurement tools to ensure continual review of impact
- Continue to explore and trial different approaches to working with employers

Recommendations for developing organisational arrangements

- Work back from the time you want your changes to be implemented and start at least six months in advance. This will provide time to seek approval to run new qualifications, run briefings with employers and provide cpd to teaching staff to deliver new qualifications, new projects etc.
- Involve employers from the start and keep reminding them of how working with you will solve some of their problems, filling vacancies, addressing skill shortages, improving their staff skills as trainers.

- Where possible embed the work with existing organisational arrangements for example annual curriculum review cycles, staff development days. This will make the activity more achievable and also increase the awareness amongst other college managers and staff.
- Adopt a strong solutions focussed approach to avoid traditional ways of working getting in the way of innovation.
- It is always easier to make changes with a new cohort of learners who know no different rather than change practice halfway through a course.
- Remember to celebrate what you achieve with employers and with your students.