

EmployABLE – Successful Employability for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities

Cambridge Regional College Cluster



Summary

Strategies to gain employment outcomes for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities and supporting operational documents that promote the development of partnerships and employability.

Key lessons learned:

The importance of:

- Planning a curriculum that doesn't just happen in the classroom.
- Having a Learner-led business.
- Promoting employability.
- Promoting partnership working with existing and new partners.
- Being both inward and outward looking to gain employment outcomes.

Introduction

What we wanted to achieve:

To use the Cambridge Regional College Valued Partnerships structure to produce key materials to support other organisations across the region and country to provide better opportunities for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities to engage in high-quality work activity, delivering best practice models based on partnership working in these key areas:

- Course design incorporating work placement for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities
- Contracts which enable colleges and employers to provide regular work placements for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities
- Safeguarding materials for external organisations (to FE colleges) to use when working with vulnerable learners
- Learner-led business enterprises
- Materials for parents/carers to explain how young people can undertake work placements and supported employment e.g. travel plans and benefits guidance
- An exemplar tool, the Passport for Success, for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities to record their work-related skills enterprise activities and confidence.

Implementation

Planning our approach:

The project was allocated a dedicated lead professional implementing an action plan with senior staff from partner organisations.

Initial meetings identified appropriate partners to complete the project outcomes, which were to:

- Produce draft Passport for Success tool – Papworth Trust/CRC
- Share user-led Individual Learning Plan (ILP), referral process and governance, and easy-read health & safety documentation – The Prospects Trust/CRC
- Share health & safety, safeguarding, contract and course design materials – Cambridge Sports Lakes/CRC
- Draft best practice model for learner-led business enterprise – College of West Anglia/CRC.

The project partners are both providers of on the job training and employers. The partnership initiatives have offered a number of innovative features including extensive on the job training in real work environments such as a manufacturing enterprise, country park, high street café and organic farm.

The exemplar materials were to be produced, tested and refined during the project and made available in a final form for the project completion.

What we did:

Partners worked to produce exemplar materials relating to appropriate project outcomes. In addition to existing use within the partnership, these were shared with special schools, other colleges, third sector organisations and employers at the Regional Cluster Day on 1 March 2013. Refined draft exemplars were made available to a similar range of stakeholders at the Regional Cluster Day on 9 May 2013.

Over time, as the project progressed, the outcomes developed as:

- A 'How to' guide, giving an overarching view of things that make supported employment for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities successful, an exposition of what to look for in a placement, how it sits in the framework and how it will be presented.
- Course design including on- and off-site provision, how off-site partners are affected by having learners in college one day a week, on-site considerations, qualifications and progression points.
- Exemplar contracts between college and partners outside of Further Education including college finance and programme agreements.
- Recording of wider skills in employability in an end of course capture document – the Passport to Success tool.
- Risk management with regard to safeguarding and health & safety from the perspective of a new partner – information, training tools and responses to frequently asked questions to overcome barriers to provision.
- Materials to parents with clear, encouraging information for under 25s including signposts to sources of latest information and a parent/carer agreement relating to communication procedures, independent travel and progression to employment if offered.
- Evaluating transferability of skills from college learner-led enterprise by way of enterprise/employability qualification, using the College of West Anglia experience as a phase rather than a final model for on-/off-site provision.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved:

- A 'How to: Guide' giving an overarching view of things that make supported employment for LDD learners successful, an exposition of what to look for in a placement, how it sits in the framework and how it will be presented.
- Course design including on- and off-site provision, how off-site partners are affected by having learners in college one day a week, on-site considerations, qualifications and progression points.
- Exemplar contracts between college and partners outside of FE including college finance and programme agreements.
- Recording of wider skills in employability in an end of course capture document – the Passport to Success tool.
- Risk management with regard to safeguarding and health & safety from the perspective of a new partner – information, training tools and responses to frequently asked questions to overcome barriers to provision.
- Materials to parents with clear, encouraging information for under 25s including signposts to sources of latest information and a parent/carer agreement relating to communication procedures, independent travel and progression to employment if offered.
- Evaluation of transferability of skills from college learner-led enterprise by way of enterprise/employability qualification, using the College of West Anglia experience as a phase rather than a final model for on-/off-site provision.
- Development of an on-going sustainable partnership.
- The setting up of a blog.
- Continuing improvement of employment-based courses.

What we learned:

- We have a wealth of experience and expertise to pool and share within the partnership.
- It is important to take time to share good practice and to reflect.
- We have all become efficient bloggers through the development of the project blog EmployABLE.
- We are all committed to identifying and providing the appropriate and most effective employability options for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities.
- We would all be willing to work together in the future.
- It is important not to over-reach: have a clear idea of what you want to achieve and stick to it!
- We need to continue to improve responsiveness and resilience to change.
- It is important to have balance in staff:learner ratio.
- Having real work expectations is essential.
- Programmes need to include maintenance of skills as well as new learning: repetition of straightforward tasks reinforces achievement and competency.
- To make use of other Cluster information.

What we are taking forward:

Project partners are continuing to develop successful employability programmes for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities.

- **Cambridge Regional College** is expanding its range of provision under the New to Work banner to include office-based work placements within college.
- **College of West Anglia** is investigating the possibility of enterprise using a pop-up shop on the college site while continuing discussions for a new location for the manufacturing enterprise.
- **Cambridge Sports Lakes** is considering extending its partnership provision to include apprenticeships.
- **Papworth Trust** is committed to developing our social enterprise model (based on our partnership with Cambridge Regional College) to better enable replication in other geographical areas.
- **The Prospects Trust** will be working in partnership with key training and education providers within their catchment area to ensure a smooth transition from classroom to farm field using the methods highlighted within this project.

How we are sharing it:

Project outcomes are being, and will continue to be, shared through the Centre of Excellence for Learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities Employability; a sustained partnership initiative which meets regularly to share updates and best practice; at regional events; through the Excellence Gateway and via the blog EmployABLE. An identified repository for these, and other, exemplar documents produced by projects across the region/country needs to be identified for access by future employability projects/partnerships.

The blog at <http://supportiveemployment.wordpress.com/> is open to all and will be updated with continuing progress, ideas and good practice.

What advice we would give to others

- Partnership working takes time: it is essential to allow time to meet, work collectively and share the workload.
- Never re-create the wheel: by working collaboratively we have been able to share best practice based upon our experiences.
- Don't expect next year to be the same as this one – plan for the unexpected!
- Stuff happens! Be prepared for flexibility on the day at the partner site - learners are not a replacement for employed labour but they do give added value. Maintain standards and expectations, it's not a simulated work environment – decide in advance if, or how much leeway you may be prepared to give.
- Keep it flexible – what you achieve may be different from your plan.
- Plan in areas of responsibility/some time for learners to do tasks with minimal supervision to a required standard – creates time for dealing with the unexpected and to for individual progress reviews to be carried out.

About the partners:

Cambridge Regional College is one of the most successful and technologically-advanced Colleges of Further Education in the UK with over 4,000 full-time and 6,000 part-time students. CRC provides a full range of courses across many subject areas at a level suitable for all abilities and future needs. Courses provide a fantastic opportunity for students to progress whether it is in to further learning in the college, at university, in a career, to provide the right skills to secure a first job or progress to a new one. www.camre.ac.uk

College of West Anglia is one of the largest and most successful education and training providers in the Eastern Region and amongst the top colleges in the country. Across our three campuses in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire - King's Lynn, Isle and Cambridge - and local learning centres, we offer the widest choice of learning opportunities in the region. This project has been part of the remit of the Centre for Foundation Studies. The Centre works with LLDD to ensure they are working towards a real progression, via one of their Bridges: The Bridge to Independence, The Bridge to Education, The Bridge to Inclusion and The Bridge to Employment. www.cwa.ac.uk

Cambridge Sports Lakes is located close to the centre of Cambridge. At 220-acres, it will be one of the country's largest purpose-built sports facilities and competition venues for rowing, triathlon, BMX, cycling and canoeing while preserving essential green space for the region. Milton Country Park is situated adjacent to the eastern end of the main Sport Lakes Site and includes a network of paths suitable for bicycles and wheelchairs as well as those on foot; picnic areas; play equipment; fishing; a regular programme of events and a Visitors' Centre including a large function room available for hire. www.miltoncountrypark.org
www.cambridgesportlakes.org.uk

Papworth Trust is a leading disability charity. It supports over 20,000 people each year through a wide range of services. Papworth Trust has around 530 staff throughout the East of England, of whom 16% have declared they have a disability. There is also a fantastic and dedicated group of more than 200 volunteers working with the Trust. www.papworth.org.uk

The Prospects Trust at Snakehall Farm is an 18-acre organic care farm in rural Cambridgeshire growing people alongside produce. Established in 1989 the registered charity and social enterprise provides supportive work placements and training opportunities to people who have learning difficulties, physical disabilities and those with varying health needs. Working to organic accreditation, the Co-workers of Snakehall Farm are involved in all aspects of horticultural growing, from seed selection to produce grading for onward sale within the on-site Farm Shop and to a local supply chain of wholesale customers. The Prospects Trust also runs a professional garden maintenance service within a 20-mile radius of the farm, enabling their Co-workers to work off-site in customers' gardens putting their green-fingered talents to the test. www.prospectstrust.org.uk

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