

4.16 SEEVIC College

Supported Internships as a means of promoting learner success

SEEVIC was one of the first organisations to become involved in the piloting of internships. Based on a model whereby a job coach would coach students on aspects of the job so that they could sustain employment, the college was excited by the chance to be able to meet the needs of young people who had moved through their Essential Skills programme and needed to take the first steps into work. It promised to overcome the Catch 22 of just being 'work ready' without the experience of having worked and thereby not being aware of the realities of employment.

SEEVIC has close links with the Transition Pathways team in Essex County Council and a number of SMEs and large employers including Sainsbury's, Morrisons and Halfords who were able to support the process. Crucially, SEEVIC developed its own provision through cooperation with the Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment (Rose) programme at Havering College whose staff advised on the recruitment of job coaches and provided training in systematic instruction.

At the time of writing the college has 48 students aged 16 to 24 on its Supported Internship programme. The Supported Internships programme, focused on employability, has learners one day a week in college studying English and maths at a level which is appropriate for them, which can include GCSE, Functional Skills, or work-related pre-entry level English and maths so learners can function in the workplace. In addition, all students do an employability qualification, with some also doing personal and social development. The pre-entry learners undertake non-accredited studies but are still able to sustain work. The majority do Functional Skills and are making excellent progress, some this year have already moved up one level.

In addition, the college also offers roll on roll off internships for students, including some 16-year-olds, referred by Transition Pathways, who have found learning in a traditional classroom very difficult, have statements and prefer practical, hands-on learning. The college ensures that they are working towards focused outcomes of either employment or voluntary work.

The college is delighted with the outcomes of the internships, which have now been running for three years. In the first year, 10 out of 15 learners moved into part-time or full-time employment. In the second year 20 out of 30 learners progressed to part or full-time employment or onto apprenticeships. The number of learners accessing Supported Internships has increased substantially year-on-year and the college aims to maintain or improve on their impressive 75% progression rate with the current cohort of learners.

One hearing impaired student, who had been turned down at interview eight times, was able to sustain employment through the programme. Supported Internships offer a way of

breaking down barriers and improving equality and diversity for learners.

Essex County Council Transition Pathway Service offers an endorsement of the programme:

“The course is definitely needed for targeting young people with SEN to develop their employability skills. There are employability skills courses around but they do not specifically cater for students with SEN and they do not offer work experience within the course whereas this does. Having a work experience placement suitable to an individual's career needs and that is willing to take on a student with SEN can be extremely hard to find but the college has managed to do this very efficiently.”

Central to the college's success is the nominated coordinator, who follows through with the employer and builds close working relationships with students, other staff and external bodies. With a deep understanding of the needs of both students and employers, the coordinator is well placed to engage with staff to address the needs of both. In turn, the delivery teams are able to contextualise learning and, through their work with Functional Skills staff, embed these skills whilst making the studies as relevant as possible to the students' workplace.

One of the college's learners, Zak, features as a case study in the DfE 'Supported Internships' Advice (2014).

Zak, who has Asperger's Syndrome, had completed an Essential Skills course, had a 100% attendance record, demonstrated a variety of skills that would be valued in the workplace, was keen to work and already volunteering with a local charity. The staff established that he enjoyed cooking at home and that he would like to work in catering. Whilst the team searched for an appropriate employer, a temporary placement was arranged for him in the college restaurant. He made excellent progress and a tailored support package, including job coaching, was arranged for him, involving college staff, the catering manager and his colleagues. Zak (pictured opposite) successfully completed an apprenticeship with his employer and has now gained paid employment with them. His progress was summarised by his mother as follows:

“The Supported Internship has given Zak a brilliant opportunity to start an apprenticeship in an area that he loves. The support from the college, the catering staff and the manager has been brilliant,

even now since he has started the apprenticeship. He has become more confident and he eats more as he never used to eat. He wants to experiment with cooking. Every Sunday he helps me with the dinner and he tells me that I am doing it wrong and tells me the correct way to cook things. I can't put it into words what it has done for Zak, he is brilliant and I am so proud of him.'

The key to success is a very close working partnership between parents, employers, students and the college. The college sees its role as a facilitator, ensuring that everyone shares perceptions and agrees the expected outcomes. Much of the work of the team is around matching perceptions and expectations, sometimes offering guidance when parents' expectations are too low or too high, ensuring that what is proposed is both realistic yet challenging. For some learners it is about taking them out of their comfort zone, for others it is about finding the right niche.

In addition, teaching, training and learning is tailored to what each individual learner needs to be successful at work. This may mean bringing in pieces of equipment to help the learners make sense of a job task; it may be something small that is making them fail. The team needs to be very good at paying attention to detail in their students' learning and thoroughly know their needs. Tutors also have to challenge perceptions - for example, some parents believe that their child will never be able to work.

Another key element of the success of the programme has been the preparatory work undertaken by the coordinator who identifies placements and interviews the students, up to one year, before they join the college. The support is then offered by the five job coaches who each work three days a week. These are recruited from learning support, industry and commerce because of their understanding of learning difficulties and disabilities and are an indispensable part of the success of the programme. Together they make up an effective team that is always positive about the potential of young people, something which helps them overcome the barriers they inevitably come across with potential employers.

While training for employers has been largely informal, they have been able to access first aid and food hygiene training at the college (which has helped to build working relationships) and the college has also supported some employers with the costs of specialist training. A particularly pleasing aspect of the programme is that the college has been able to provide Supported Internships without huge structural changes within the study programmes framework.

SEEVIC is an FE college.



Zak at work in SEEVIC's restaurant.