

TEACH TOO LOCAL PROJECT

A case study on the Teach Too local project in Newcastle upon Tyne led by Newcastle College



Project overview

This project focussed on SEN students and their support needs in relation to accessing, starting and attending industry work placements. We hoped to further broaden our placement offer for this particular group of students, by increasing the number of employers we worked with. We also wanted to research the needs of new placement providers, especially in relation to offering opportunities for industry work-experience in a range of settings. Ultimately, the focus of the research project was to explore the placement, progression and employment opportunities available to SEN learners, to explore what factors make them successful and establish stronger links between organisations which would make progression into employment or onto an apprenticeship more informed and effective.

The project worked with three distinct groups:

- **students** (SEN, Level 1 and Level 2 vocational)
- **teaching staff** (Work Experience Coaches, Lecturers; both SEN specialists and vocational, Managers and Improvement Practitioners)
- **employers and work-placement managers** (small organisations, local council and local education authority)

The project also planned in learning activity for staff, alongside employers, to upskill and improve their understanding of the support needs of SEN students attending work experience. This activity has yet to be executed, but is in the planning stages with specialist Teacher Education staff at Newcastle College. Staff support and CPD was discussed with the employers who were involved in the project, and although they acknowledged the benefit of this, they felt that they were not able to take it up at this time. They did, however, highlight the important factors related to supporting SEN students in the workplace, and although these were individualised and specific to the students at their organisations, learning from them was shared with other employers and college staff.

Project aims

The aim of this project was to explore how employers and education providers in the local area could work collaboratively to improve employment and progression opportunities for learners with SEN. The original purpose of the project was to:

- Develop links between Newcastle LEA and local further education providers to create a supported process for learner progression, with a focus on routes into Apprenticeships
- Engage local employers to offer a wider range of work placements using a Teach Too approach, with a hope to broaden the opportunities available to SEN learners

- Develop employers' understanding of the needs and benefits of employing SEN learners and broadening the awareness of the needs of SEN learners, to allow them to progress successfully in to work.

Positive outcomes and impact

Everyone involved in the project engaged extremely well with it; students, staff and employers were keen to share their experiences and knowledge. The purpose of their participation was to inform future students and employers of the challenges faced by starting and being successful in a work placement, and to share the individual strategies used to support students and staff to ensure success. Student input specifically helped to create resources to share with other students – 'information' leaflets, which identified possible student placement concerns, how input from staff can provide support, guidance and development of skills and competencies for placement success. The leaflets also included advice and guidance from the students themselves about managing possible placement concerns and/or problems, and in one curriculum area, the level 2 students plan to share their leaflet with level 1 students, in a session which will be activity-based and further develop their own skills and confidence.

The sharing of experiences highlighted areas for improvement and development across a range of contexts and settings:

- the leaflet production allowed College Work Preparation staff to adapt their scheme of work to include topics the students had identified as being of concern
- the review of student induction and setting up of specialist equipment allowed the manager to ensure that when the students was located at other sites, everything he needed to be successful was already in place
- the sharing of experiences in different placements informed all staff involved in preparing students for placements and supporting them whilst on placement of the possible areas for concern or needed support
- discussions with a wide range of employers and employer organisations to identify/create a model/strategies to encourage the offer of placements.
- setting up partnerships to create best practice processes for offering and delivering successful work placements for SEN students
- establishing a shared responsibility between providers and employers to design and deliver successful work placements and subsequent progression opportunities for SEN learners

Future activity

Activities will continue to explore the needs of SEN students in relation to being effectively prepared for and successful in their work experience placements. Review of the requirements and capacity of employers, and how to best match students to work placements, will be ongoing; it is vital that the support and development needs of individual students are used to identify the most appropriate employer to match them for their work placement.

The students have really enjoyed producing the information leaflets, and these will be shared with the project participants. Employers, mentors and teachers will carry out similar activities in their organisations to pass on the experience and knowledge of the students in their curriculum area / context.

Completion and sharing of the leaflet in LDD / Supported Internship; this is currently in draft stage.

Further develop working relationships with employers and organisations in the area; offering support and guidance for employers to enable them to effectively support the students they work with, whilst sharing best practice and successful strategies for working with students with SEN / LDD needs.

Recommendations for developing local collaborative arrangements

Develop effective methods for contacting and communicating with employers within the local area—making better use of existing contacts and building on these further.

Making use of the key players within the local area who are influential and are able to assist with making further contacts; for example the local LEA, health service contacts, strategic level business partners and a wider range of vocational / curriculum areas.

Being flexible and be prepared to work in a variety of ways to suit the different needs of local organisations.

Make use of the needs of the local area to develop collaborative arrangements that will support challenges faced in recruitment to encourage “buy-in” to take SEN learners on placements and apprenticeships.