

TEACH TOO LOCAL COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

A case study on the Teach Too local collaborative project at Bishop Auckland College





Project overview

Whilst Bishop Auckland College has good working relationships with several local employers, the focus of this Teach Too project was to further develop the nature of these relationships to provide meaningful collaboration across County Durham that would have a significant impact on students.

The project investigated strategies to engage employers in collaborative approaches to curriculum planning and the on-going quality improvement of technical education at the college. This was important to ensure that courses respond more accurately to the needs of local employers. The project also researched the most effective strategies to develop the ‘Two-way street’ partnership between college staff and local employers.



Project aims

The project aims were to:

- Provide an opportunity for employers to engage with the college in a meaningful way to enable them to influence curriculum developments
- Run joint events and activities for employers and providers which would support dual professionalism for both employees and provider staff

The project included a range of strategies and activities to facilitate these aims. These were:

- Setting up of a steering group
- Employer business breakfasts
- Industry insight opportunities for college staff
- Producing technical training segments in collaboration with employers
- Employer involvement in the college curriculum and quality planning cycle

Example of working with one local employer

A local high profile, multi-national employer has used the College for a number of years to deliver apprenticeship training in engineering. The relationship had been on a transactional basis with minimal interaction beyond that required as part of the apprenticeship framework. During a visit to the centre a representative from the employer identified that industry standard equipment was available for use but that training on this had not previously been an element of the chosen apprenticeship framework. The equipment mirrored closely that in use in the company and employees within the company had some expertise in its use. Through discussion it emerged that teaching staff had some specialist knowledge which was complementary to that of the company's permanent employees and that a reciprocal arrangement would benefit both parties.

There were two issues which could be addressed through this relationship. The College had highly technical equipment which had not been utilised to its fullest potential, both as a result of limited staff knowledge, and also through lack of innovation in curriculum design and the employer had struggled to find appropriately skilled trainers, to help develop in house capacity for programming Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs). An opportunity for a mutually beneficial project was identified focussing on pneumatics and PLCs. The company released staff to spend time upskilling teaching staff in pneumatics and teaching staff delivered PLC training. Following this the curriculum for the apprentices was revised to include both pneumatics and PLC training making them more productive for the employer and increasing the apprentice's transferrable skills

The positive impact from this project being a strengthened relationship with the employer, a revised and updated curriculum and upskilled teaching staff as well as a level of dual professionalism of employer's staff. A further unintended but very welcome consequence of the project was the commitment of the employer to recruit an additional four apprentices but with full ownership of the recruitment process passed to the College Group. There were 400 applicants for the positions, shortlisted down to 45. The 45 were put through the College Group 'select a head' and screening process with 17 eventually being invited for interview and skills tests. The four successful applicants are in the process of being signed up. The employer provider relationship is truly symbiotic.

This working relationship with this employer will be used as an exemplar for others to follow. There is already a second project underway with another large multi-national employer. Through visits to the training facilities, they have recognised that a robotic resource in the centre replicates exactly in miniature an element of their pharmaceutical production system. They have requested that the curriculum be shaped around this and planning is underway.

Positive impact and expected outcomes

The Steering group, which was established to oversee this project in spring 2018 has continued to support strategic direction for the College Group in its work with employers and to ensure the curriculum matches business requirements. The membership includes key local employers who provide a valuable insight into emerging industry developments to ensure that the college direction is aligned with local skills plans.

Collaboration with employers has been 'collaboration with a clear purpose'. This has included significant input into curriculum design and delivery. The production of training segments to exemplify technical skills and up to date technology used within a range of local employers. Industry insights for college staff have helped to build capacity and further develop staff knowledge and skills, enabling them to provide a contextualised approach to their delivery in the classroom.

The success of the Business breakfasts has had a significant positive impact of the project and its partners. These meetings have provided an opportunity for employers to network with each other as well as with college staff. A range of guest speakers have delivered presentations at these events and discussions have been wide ranging.

Future activity

Activities initiated through this project are continuing and being extended as they are now part of the culture of the organisation and its relationship with employers.

The value of inviting employers into college buildings to view resources and facilities and discuss the use of these with teaching staff is immense and such tours will now be offered following the Business Breakfasts.

Recommendations for developing local collaborative arrangements

- Involve the correct people in developing plans
- Engage an advocate to support progress
- Focus on key skills gaps
- Be flexible in designing and agreeing solutions