Pathways to employment: supported internships

In 2011, the college became part of the Trafford Borough Council Pathfinder, one of 20 national Pathfinders testing proposals in the 2011 Green Paper on SEN, and the Supported Internship Programme was part of this. The college partnered with Pure Innovations, a charity that supports people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups to get into work and access community and leisure activities. Supported internships are employment-based courses giving SEND students the opportunity to develop personal and employability skills, with the aim of securing paid employment. The programme is based at Trafford General Hospital, where learners complete three work experience placements and work as part of a team with other employees.

Key points from the new legislation

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice states that the majority of young people with SEND are capable of employment given the right preparation and support. To prepare for employment, colleges should provide high-quality study programmes that raise the learners’ career aspirations and broaden their employment horizons using a wide range of imaginative approaches.

The Code of Practice says that apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships are the most effective ways of preparing young people with SEND for employment. Ideally, these work placements should be part of the study programme and the college should take care to match the learner to the available placements to ensure a positive experience for the learner and the employer. This can be achieved through a thorough understanding of the learner’s potential, abilities, interests and areas for development, and honest conversations with potential employers.

More information can be found in chapter 8 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 Years.

Factors behind this success

Key to the success of this programme are two factors – allowing plenty of time to develop partnerships and using a person-centred, team approach in all aspects of planning.

1. Allow time for developing partnerships and forward planning:

   • The programme has a committed steering group which meets bi-monthly to monitor, direct and evaluate the programme. A large part of the success of the programme can be attributed to the professionalism and passion of the people involved.
   • It is essential to develop strong relationships with all the partners involved in the programme, and tenacity and resilience are needed to deal with the many challenges.
that arise trying to meet the expectations of all stakeholders.

- Ensure the host employer/s can provide a sufficient number of work placements so the learners have the opportunity to develop a variety of work-based skills.

- Provide robust information, advice and guidance (IAG) as part of the recruitment and selection procedure, to ensure the prospective learners' aspirations are aligned to the outcomes of the programme.

- Ensure IT systems are compatible across the college and host employers to pre-empt problems further down the line.

- Good communication and a strong partnership with parents and carers will enhance the success of the programme by reinforcing the skills and attitudes required for employment.

“it’s not just nice to employ disabled people - it’s vital for local business.”

Kate Green MP

2. Working in partnership to ensure a person-centred approach to the supported internship programme

Close partnership working with Trafford Borough Council, Pure Innovations and Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is essential if the internship is to be a success. To ensure this:

- All information is shared between partners.
- Partners are all present at Open Evenings and recruitment.
- There are daily discussions to share information on how best to support individual students and match their skills to employer needs.

At initial stages:

- There is a thorough and detailed induction programme to both the college and the programme.
- In particular, staff need to ensure that each learner has the confidence to travel independently to and from the workplace, and include a comprehensive travel training programme in the induction training.

During the programme:

- Classroom sessions are planned to meet individual needs and are vital to encourage team-working and reflective practice and to promote independent thought.
- The college has a dedicated team based in a fully-equipped base room within the hospital. Students meet for an hour in the morning in this base room before going to work placement. The team comprises a tutor, a job coach and a full-time senior employment officer.
- Because the tutor and job coach work with students in both classroom and work placement environments, ‘real life’ examples are used to instruct and provide evidence for programme accreditation.

Job coaches are crucial to the smooth running of the programme. They are all trained in TSI (Training in Systematic Instruction) which promotes practice for minimal intervention in the workplace. This results in early withdrawal of support so that the learner becomes an independent worker as soon as possible. The job coach role includes:

- Working as Learning Support Assistants in classroom sessions.
- Supporting learners in the workplace.
- Providing necessary travel training.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

- Some of the host employer's staff had no experience of SEND learners and were initially hesitant. This uncertainty has been addressed through regular feedback from job coaches and regular contact with managers to highlight difficulties and look at ways in which they can be addressed. Employers and their staff were soon converted by the student cohort and their skills, abilities and personalities. In some cases, hospital staff have become champions for the programme and have developed additional mentoring skills.

- Sometimes managers have been reluctant to make complaints and have been overprotective with SEND students, treating them differently from other workers. Regular contact with college staff has encouraged them to treat these students in the same way as any other employer, such as not accepting inappropriate behaviour. Workforce staff are encouraged to report small issues immediately so they can be addressed promptly and not left to develop into bigger tensions and a potential breakdown in working relationships.

- There were some initial IT system
compatibility problems but these were promptly overcome. The off-site location of the programme brought further data protection issues which had to be addressed.

- It is necessary to work closely with employers to highlight the merits of more flexible recruitment processes for this type of learner, such as working interviews and work trials.
- Inexperienced job coaches could be a drawback as their work is varied and underpins the success of the programme. The college ensures job coaches are experienced specialists.

Some next steps

- Feedback from learners and partner organisations is used to regularly review and further develop the internship programme. The first cohort was very successful and the college is now working with the second cohort.
- The college aims to engage more employers and is planning a further employer event in the spring to showcase the success of the programme. Experience has shown that one of the best ways on engaging employers is by enabling them to have direct experience of working with people with learning difficulties and disabilities and realising the value they can bring to the workplace. Hence input from young people themselves will play an important part in these events.
- The team is planning to work more closely with the cross-college Apprenticeship Unit so appropriate opportunities can be identified and matched to learners’ skills and aspirations.

The impact of the programme

- The ten learners all achieved their primary qualification and by the end of the course 70% had secured employment with the remaining 30% continuing to be supported with on-going interviews and recruitment processes. This should be compared to the national statistic that only 7% of people with learning disabilities are in paid employment, although 65% want paid employment. (http://www.mencap.org.uk/workexperience week).
- Employment outcomes include:
  - Two students employed by Trafford Council
  - One full-time job at Central Manchester Foundation Trust
  - A student applying to and gaining a job at his preferred employer, McDonalds
  - One student being offered paid employment in the Trafford Centre training store of Marks and Spencer
  - One student offered a contract with Premier Inns
  - One student being offered a position as Digital Champion at the Centre for Independent Living

“This is my dream come true.”

William Phipps (on getting paid employment at McDonalds)

- The impact on the learners has been profound, with multiple examples of life-changing outcomes: increased confidence and self-esteem, realising life-long goals, travelling independently and moving in to their own home.
- The programme has proved to be an excellent progression pathway for students on LDD programmes as it provides a bespoke, focused employability programme with key, measurable outcomes.

“This throughout the year I have built up my confidence and improved my communication. It has been the best experience ever.”

Tom Stephens, student

- The programme has enhanced partnership working with key stakeholders and has enriched relationships with local businesses/employers.
- The programme is now a key pathway for local young people with LDD and is fully embedded in the local offer.