

An outline of model and provision

The Learning4Life suite of courses delivered by Hackney Community College offers a variety of options for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

One of these, the Vocational Explorer 16-19 Study Programme was developed by Hackney Community College in partnership with Bel Waters and is designed to improve progression of SEN learners leaving special schools at 16.

This one year 16-19 Study Programme develops employability skills and an understanding of local employment opportunities. The learners experience three vocational areas chosen from a possible six (Tech and Creative Media, Retail and Customer Service, Construction, Fashion and Textiles, Catering and Hospitality and Performing Arts) which are fully supported with work visits, work tasters and other links with local employers, alongside their vocational and Functional Skills qualifications. All the vocational areas offer progression routes within the college including a programme of supported internships or employment.

A key element of this project is the partnership with local businesses, local authority services, social enterprises and Peabody. This has allowed our project schools and colleges to create a good range of high quality professionally led programmes which use local employers to enhance the vocational and skills element of the curriculum. The 16-19 Study Programme partners have helped to develop work-place visits and extended work experience and this has strengthened the range and network of employer engagement and support for 16-19 Study Programme planning and delivery.

The Vocational Explorer 16-19 Study Programme is now seen as an example of good practice and is attracting learners in increasing numbers.

Challenges and how we responded to them

Making partnerships work

"Establishing partnerships with local employers to provide supported employment or internships is essential if time consuming. The logistics of creating joint planning opportunities between college staff and partner employers can be a challenge. For instance colleges usually plan an academic year in advance and have regular breaks for holidays whereas employers tend to work to shorter timescales and can lack understanding of the school year and the timings of holidays."

"Sourcing relevant employers and developing employer-provider partnerships was greatly supported through the help of Peabody and other organisations with existing work-based learning links. We were also able to create other supported work placement pilots through working with the local authority and Young Hackney (our integrated Youth Support, Youth Offending Team and Youth Service). We realised early on that the employers involved in the Vocational Explorer would need to have existing experience of working with this cohort. It has been helpful to work with providers who can help provide access to this type of employer."

Understanding the importance of effective communication

"Overcoming the resistance of some staff to change was a challenge. Involving delivery staff in the planning of the programme has helped break down any resistance to change and has ensured that staff are happy to deliver the agreed programme."

The need to create a sustainable curriculum

"Patience and persistence help us overcome the different expectations of college and employer staff."

Bel Waters

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