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Inclusive employment in the hospitality sector

(FE) ETF Employer Spokes Events: Employer Spokes foster partnerships between FE providers and employers that evidence best practice in meaningful employment for people with SEND.

Introduction

This case study focuses ETF's Employer Spoke London Southeast Colleges (LSEC) work on the key theme of Preparation for Adulthood (PFA).

London Southeast Colleges (LSEC) is a large further and higher education college, with campuses across Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich and Lambeth. Their specialist Nido Volans centres, which offer high quality, discrete provision for 16–25-year-olds with SEND, we have been delivering Employability programmes effectively for over 25 years. Up to 50% of learners on our supported internships progress into employment, against a London average of 6%. This project will build on and extend this practice.

The [Business LDN Stakeholder survey](#)  shows that 91% of hospitality companies are struggling to fill vacancies, much higher than across other sectors, and carry a bigger skills gap than that identified by any of the other priority sectors.

Meanwhile, one in five of the working-age population are classed as disabled, but only 5.1% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work (NHS Digital, 2021), compared to 80% of their peers – when 65% would like a paid job.

London Southeast Colleges is bringing together quick service restaurant (QSR) employers, local authorities and SEND-specialist schools, colleges and organisations. The aim is to raise awareness, break down barriers and encourage employment opportunities for young people with learning disabilities including autism, in the QSR industry.

Implementation

A series of key events were designed to reach and inform QSR employers and form new partnerships with organisations advocating inclusive employment. There was an in-person attendance at Chopstix head office in Central London to learn how they have implemented key benefits and a supported internship program for colleagues with learning difficulties across their business.

LSEC brought together a core team of partners to plan and deliver an open online event, promoting inclusive employment by sharing good practice and signposting support. This was held in person at our Chef's Table Restaurant at our Bromley Campus, where the food is cooked and served by our learners with SEND in our specialist Nido Volans provision.

Implementation (continued)

Partners included:

1. **Bromley Mencap** - works in partnership with London Southeast Colleges to deliver the Supported Internship Programme and supports students including Vocational Taster and Employment Preparation students.
2. **CASPA** - Community Autistic Support, Pride & Advocacy - provides invaluable support and enriching experiences to autistic individuals and their families.
3. **DFN Project SEARCH** - is a one-year transition-to-work programme for young adults with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both. Partnering with organisations across the public, private, and voluntary sectors, they create supported employment internships for young people in their last year of education, helping them to take positive first steps into the world of work.
4. **Local London** - a partnership of local authorities in London and the Local London Work and Health Programme, has helped thousands of local people get into work and provides up to 21 months of support for people who have been unemployed for 24 months or more or have long-term health conditions and/or disabilities.
5. **Chopstix** - a national fast-food chain, that has successfully implemented key benefits and a supported internship programme for colleagues with learning difficulties across the business. This initiative reflects their commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace, where every team member can thrive. Individuals with learning difficulties are empowered to build meaningful careers - ultimately fostering a culture of inclusivity that aligns with their values and drives success.

We attended an in-person inclusive workplaces event to learn more about workforce development through inclusivity and connect with employers and organisations committed to diversity and inclusion and those wanting to know more. LSEC presented our Employer's Toolkit at the event and networking provided an opportunity for us to engage with new employers and organisations - sharing our leaflet with details of our own online event in March.

We will then be attending the International Food and Drink Event at the Excel, London. This will provide an opportunity to meet with QSR employers directly and promote our online event. This open event is aimed at QSR employers, presented by LSEC and the ETF, with guest speakers from industry, education and the charity sector.

Planned Outcomes

- Increased employer engagement partnerships with 8 new businesses.
- Improved advice, guidance, support and training to employers.
- Increased number of employment opportunities that are both progressive and sustainable.
- Increase interaction, confidence and belief within learners, parents and families that meaningful employment is achievable and beneficial.
- Greater understanding with employers regarding the benefits of employing a young person with a learning difficulty/disability.
- Creation of a blueprint for effective employment skills and sustained outcomes delivery for other SEND providers to adopt.



Key Learning

This case study demonstrates that through collaboration, employer engagement, and targeted support, meaningful employment opportunities in the QSR sector for young people with SEND, can be significantly increased.

Employer engagement is crucial: Engaging directly with QSR employers through events and partnerships has proven effective in breaking down barriers and misconceptions about employing individuals with SEND.

Collaboration increases impact: The success of this initiative is driven by collaboration between education providers, employers and specialist organisations like Bromley Mencap, CASPA, and DFN Project SEARCH.

Supporting employers is key: Many employers are open to hiring individuals with SEND but require tailored guidance and practical resources, such as an Employer's Toolkit, to successfully implement and sustain inclusive hiring practices.

Sustained support needed for all: Dedicated job coaching and ongoing mentorship are essential for both employers and employees to ensure success and job retention.

Recommendations for Good Practice

- **Building on previous inclusive practice projects**, including relationships with existing and new partnerships.
- **Developing and sharing practical toolkits** to help and support employers, along with bespoke training and raising awareness of the benefits of an inclusive workforce.
- **Strengthening industry partnerships and collaboration** between employers, educators, charities and other specialist organisations.

