

# Camtree Digital Library



## Innovative strategy to support employment

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## Innovative strategy to support employment

**(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 on the key theme of Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) looking at how ETF's Employer Spoke, National Star College, supported a young person's transition into a career pathway.

National Star College is a large independent specialist residential and day college for students with high needs that is part of the National Star registered charity. The college caters for students from 48 local authorities and has sites in Cheltenham, Hereford and Wales. The organisation currently provides education and support to over 200 young people attending the Cheltenham and Hereford sites. Students are aged 16 to 25. Students at National Star College have complex physical disabilities and medical conditions, including autism spectrum disorder and other learning, behavioural, sensory or physical disabilities. All students have SEND support requirements and the majority have active EHCP's.

Looking for work can be daunting for anyone, but couple that with having some barriers to learning and work, access to transport and establishing links with employers, this becomes even more challenging.

The number of disabled people in work since the COVID-19 pandemic has dropped according to the latest Government figures. Only 4.8% of adults with a learning disability are in employment (NHS Digital, 2022). This figure for the team delivering work-based learning is stark and evidences the incredible challenging labour market for the people we support.

## Implementation

The Work Based Learning pathway has a team of Job Coaches whose role is to get to know students and their aspirations, build links with employers and then match the two. This can also involve working with employers to support them to identify ways to job carve meaning that students are able to complete some elements of the key role. This means the job gets done but also the students can develop work-based skills within a real working environment.

Many students attending National Star do so for three years, moving from their home location to reside in Gloucestershire. Those students accessing work-based learning courses have a requirement, and a longer-term aspiration to achieve a work outcome which is either paid or voluntary.

One of the challenges faced is when students access a placement and excel but then need to leave to return to their home location. Because of this, we have taken a strategic approach to sourcing placements with national employers. Based on our student assessment and their long-term aspirations it became clear that working with national employers, especially those providing hospitality services, are of interest to a lot of students.

## Implementation (continued)

To that end a relationship was built with Holiday Inn. The local hotel is within 5 miles of our campus and through relationship building by Job Coaches placements were set up. Several students attended the location for a taster session, understanding roles within the hotel and helping students make more informed choices about future placements/careers.

For one student, Jamie\*, it was clear that he saw his long-term career working within this type of hotel. As a day student Jamie was moving back to his home location in summer 2024 and so the work began to support a transition from one hotel to another. Working closely with the hotel manager the team were able to evidence the value of Jamie working within the team, gaining new skills but also teaching others within the team about his additional needs and developing a great rapport. We started the conversation early about the possibility of building a link with the Holiday Inn in Jamie's home area. The local manager was very supportive of this, putting us in touch with the team but also advocating for Jamie, and explaining the benefits and impact of continuing to offer a placement.

Through joint working, including visits to the home area and the hotel Jamie was able to secure a longstanding placement which over time may lead to paid employment. This is an approach we will continue to build on with other students who don't permanently reside in our local area.

## Outcomes

At National Star we use an ongoing range of quality measures to track the impact of our work. These include:

- Informal feedback
- Student perception of college questionnaire (SPOC)
- Curriculum Quality Audit (CQA)
- Employers feedback

Through all these mechanisms it was clear that both Jamie and the employer benefited from these working relationships. Jamie was able to achieve his long-term aspiration, and we will check in with Jamie over the coming months and years to understand the sustainability of this. The hotel chain has also benefited greatly. Their feedback covered not only their pride in supporting Jamie and recognising the potential for other placements in the future, but also the strength in working across their own portfolio. Jamie and the job coaches were able to offer support and guidance about how the employer could work with other students, but also how to best support customers who are neurodiverse or have a physical disability.

## Impact and Next Steps

The impact for Jamie has been clear; he has learnt skills in one location and then been able to transfer location but continue to develop in his placement. There was a good handover between locations so that whilst Jamie was working with new people he was able to expect a level of consistency in relation to his support.

As an organisation we are now working more strategically and looking for partners with an increasing number of national employers to support more young people like Jamie. Knowing the tangible and longstanding impact of this work it is a clear area of good practice to be shared and replicated.

\* not students' real name