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Inclusive Employer Engagement Tool in Action

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Inclusive employer engagement tool in action

(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

Hampshire County Council is an 'Employer Spoke' for the ETF SEND Centres of Excellence. During our work with ETF we co-designed a [recruitment tool](#) to help the construction sector engage with young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This tool has since been developed into webpages following feedback from our Community of Practice (CoP) to encourage greater engagement from employers: [Diversifying your workforce | Jobs and volunteering | Hampshire County Council](#). The information from the tool was then used to plan, prepare and deliver an ETF mock interview event for Hampshire Achieve learners.

Implementation

The recruitment tool was used to inform us how to approach the mock interviews in an inclusive way. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate the practice to employers and how it could be embedded. We shared the questions with the learners in advance, and they used these in lessons to practice their responses, as well as taking it in turns to play the role of the employer. At the start of the mock interview session, our employers introduced themselves to all the learners in an informal way, so the learners were aware who would be interviewing them. Considerations were also made to the room e.g. the blind was pulled down to stop passersby distracting the interviewees, it was a well-lit room and the walls were plain.

At the start of the event, we discussed the benefits of inclusive recruitment with the employers and explained the techniques we had put into action to encourage them to embed the inclusive practices within their own recruitment.

In total 39 Hampshire Achieves learners received a mock interview and six employers engaged with the event. Two senior tutors and 4 job coaches supported the learners. When required the job coaches attended the interview with the learner but in most interviews the learners were confident enough to attend independently.

We needed to consider the time the learners would require reviewing the questions in advance and think about their answers. This needed to be included in the curriculum planning and formed part of their employability lessons. The learners were also based in Basingstoke and Fareham, and the mock interviews were held in Winchester. This was viewed as a good opportunity to incorporate travel training, as it is likely the learners would need to travel for a real interview. The room where the interviews were conducted was booked prior to the event to allow the learners time to visit the location and see the layout.

Implementation (continued)

One barrier we did have was sharing photos of the interviewers before the event. As these were volunteers and some did not confirm until quite late, it was not possible to request their photographs which is recommended in the recruitment tool. As an alternative, the employers went to meet the learners before the start of the event and introduced themselves. It was also not possible to plan who each learner would be interviewed by. Therefore, they met with all the employers and then had the opportunity to request a specific employer if needed.

Outcomes

The employers were sent a survey following the event by ETF and the learners were asked to provide feedback during their lessons. This feedback was then gathered, and the learning is being used to plan future events.

Feedback from Hampshire Achieves Senior Tutor:

"I believe it was an excellent opportunity for all SIP learners to experience what an interview entails and to integrate this exposure into their course. This experience has undoubtedly boosted their confidence. The entire day, including the travel, simulated what a real-life interview process might involve. Although the learners were initially very nervous, the employers and staff made them feel at ease. The learners initially doubted their ability to succeed, but they exceeded their own expectations, and I was very proud.

It would be highly beneficial for them to have more opportunities like this. While they engage in written work and receive career support, the most valuable experience comes from actual practice. Providing more of these experiences would significantly enhance their confidence in interviews and better prepare them for future real-life interviews.

I found the day to be well-organised and executed and great thanks to those employers who gave them the opportunity to do this."

Feedback from learners:

"Nervous at first but enjoyed it in the end because I've spent 20 mins talking. Found it beneficial. Would like to have them once a month."

"The mock interview built my confidence."

"I found it okay and enjoyed who interviewed me as he was calm and made me feel happy enough to talk freely as I'm usually shy about talking to new people."

Feedback from employer:

"The event was well organised and well attended. The learners were engaged and, although it was a mock interview, presented themselves professionally and took it seriously."



Impact and Next Steps

Learners found the mock interview a positive experience. Many were nervous prior to the interview but came out pleased they had taken part and happy to do another one again in the future. Hampshire Achieves would like to include mock interviews in their curriculum planning moving forwards as they could see the positive impact it had on learners. Employers were shown the simple steps that can be made to make the recruitment process more inclusive and took away a link to the recruitment webpages to find out more.

Following the positive experiences at the mock interview event, as a team we decided to embed the learning from the recruitment tool into our own recruitment practices and have successfully recruited a Participation Officer. This will allow us to share our experiences with employers and show how simple the adjustments are and the benefit they bring firsthand.

The recruitment tool & webpages, along with the mock interviews have had a positive impact on employers, learners and future curriculum planning. All involved have taken away knowledge that will support young people with SEND to have better access to the workplace. It has also improved our recruitment practices as team.

Key Learning

The case study emphasises the importance of inclusive recruitment practices for young people with SEND. Key learning points include the benefits of advance preparation, such as sharing interview questions with learners beforehand and familiarising them with the interview environment. Adjustments to the interview setting, like controlling distractions, also played a crucial role. Engaging employers and demonstrating inclusive practices should encourage them to adopt similar approaches. Feedback from participants was essential for evaluating the event's success and planning future improvements.

