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## Case Study Report

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# Sharing Innovative Approaches and Overcoming Barriers in Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes Principles

National Foundation for Educational  
Research (NFER)



# Sharing Innovative Approaches and Overcoming Barriers in Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes Principles

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Chichester College

Digital and Creative Centre Oldham

Pimlico Academy

St. Brendan's College

Walker Technology College

# 1 Introduction

*'Most of the providers didn't use work experience effectively' (Ofsted, 2014).*

Lorna Fitzjohn, Ofsted Director for Further Education and Skills, made this observation in her annual lecture for education and skills in 2014. Having noted that the 16 to 19 study programmes 'were developed to provide a 'step change' in provision for all young people', she reported slower than expected progress at institutional level.

Study programmes were introduced in 2013 so that every post-16 provider should offer their learners coherent study programmes with breadth and depth enabling learners to progress successfully to employment, apprenticeships or higher education. Study programmes should include: at least one substantial qualification; English and mathematics for those learners yet to achieve a GCSE at grade C or above; for learners not ready to take a substantial qualification – a traineeship or extended work experience; and non-qualification activity such as tutorial time and work experience where appropriate.

In light of the observed need to accelerate progress in the planning and implementation of study programmes, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned studies to identify and exchange effective practice. This report highlights 'what works' in terms of the work experience strand of study programmes and provides illustrative case studies. Specifically the DfE wanted:

- Demonstrations of how further education (FE) colleges; sixth form colleges; and schools with sixth forms have overcome common issues and successfully delivered work experience.
- The learning from the study to be shared and made accessible so that less experienced providers can benefit from the findings.

Alongside this case-study report we have published ['Top Tips for senior leaders'](#) for implementing work experience as part of 16 to 19 study programmes. This draws on the findings from across the case studies, and identifies key successes and enablers and how to overcome barriers to implementation, to provide a practical resource for schools and colleges. Additionally, a video recording of how case-study institutions have planned and implemented work experience and engaged employers will be available on the NFER website at the end of April.

Details of the research methodology can be found in section 4 of this report.

## 2 Overall findings

The six case studies summarised in this report highlight different aspects of effective work experience and how the schools and colleges have developed approaches to improve young people's employability skills. They identify barriers encountered and how they have overcome them and draw out the innovative and distinctive features of their approaches.

In summary, the following examples of implementing and delivering work experience have been highlighted as effective illustrations of providing young people with employability skills.

1. Schools and colleges' proactive response to the needs of local employers and **working in partnership** with leading firms.
2. The development of **structured programmes** of work experience, enterprise and/or work placement activities.
3. The **creative development of work experience models** where programmes provide potential mutual benefits for all concerned for example providers, young people and partners.
4. Active involvement of employers in **preparing young people prior to work experience placements**.
5. The provision of opportunities to experience the world of work within a **well-regulated and monitored system**, with benefits for students and employers.
6. The involvement of young people in **real pieces of work or projects that are valued and used by employers** and reflect current workplace demands.
7. **Tailoring work placements to the needs of students and employers**. For example, prior to embarking on work experience, college staff discuss opportunities with students (and their parents) to ensure that placements meet their requirements and interests.
8. The creation of **a dedicated team** that develops work experience as an institution-wide approach that enables young people to have more extensive experience of the world of work.
9. **Proactive leadership of the team**, and its drive to enable young people to have more extensive experience of the world of work **by a member of the institution's senior leadership team**.

These essential features are explored in greater depth in the following case studies and within the 'Top Tips for senior leaders'. We suggest that these should be read in conjunction with 'steps to providing quality work experience' ([Sims \*et al.\*, 2013, p 70](#)).

## 3 The case studies

### Case study one: Birmingham Metropolitan College

#### Section 1. Background

Birmingham Metropolitan College is a large FE college. It has four main campuses. Training is delivered at a number of satellite centres. The college has a number of business partnerships with companies. It also has some specialist training facilities in Kidderminster where the Centre of Sporting Excellence, and Centre of Excellence for



Foundation Learning are based. A significant proportion of the college's learners are from disadvantaged areas and over half of learners have a minority ethnic heritage. In Birmingham, the proportion of young people who gain five or more GCSE A\*-C grades including English and mathematics is 54.9 per cent. This is just below the national average of 55.2 per cent (Ofsted, 2011). The college delivers provision across all subject sector areas, with a focus on preparation for life and work; business and administration; creative arts; health, public services and care; science, mathematics and engineering.

#### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

Birmingham Metropolitan College has implemented a structured World of Work programme across the college. The World of Work programme aims to provide students with a range of opportunities to better prepare them for work and to develop their employability skills. The World of Work Programme combines work enterprise activities with work placement activities. World of Work activities vary in scope and scale depending on the student's level of study. Activities provided are designed to help ensure that students are: able to get the best out of work placement activities; better prepared for work; and supported to find productive employment following their studies.

Work enterprise activities include a mix of: practice 'application for work' skills (CVs, letters, application forms and employer interviews); Guru talks; organisational visits; workshops; and work shadowing. Work experience placement models vary across

the college. These include: traditional work placement activities; project-based work experience (for example, students planning, producing and serving at a Christmas dinner party for all staff at a local theme park); and project briefs. An example of the latter is where students studying creative arts subjects are given opportunities to develop their employability skills through project briefs. Staff utilise their network of industry contacts to obtain employment briefs. These have included students providing editorial design, website design, and branding for external employers/clients.

## **Innovative and Distinctive Features**

### ***Academies***

Birmingham Metropolitan College launched its Professional Services Academy (PSA) in 2014. The PSA was developed in response to local research into the needs of employers and highlighted a *'skills crisis in the Professional Services Industry'*. Working in partnership with leading firms from the financial, legal, accounting and business community, the PSA is the *'first of its kind in the country'*. It is open to students studying AS/A Levels in law, accounting, economics, business studies and mathematics and those on apprenticeships in accounting, business administration and legal studies<sup>1</sup>. Students have the opportunity to join the PSA by application.

The PSA programme comprises a structured package of work enterprise and work placement activities that have been developed in partnership with local employers. It aims to ensure that students gain 'hands on' experience and develop the skills that local employers need.

#### **The programme provides:**

- a. Technical lectures - on topics such as online fraud.
- b. Soft skills development – business etiquette, presentation skills.
- c. Employer mentoring - one-to-one guidance and support from professionals in the sector.
- d. Employer site visits.
- e. Networking opportunities – via Membership of a Business network.
- f. Real work experience through opportunities to apply for an internship with one of the partner employers via a competitive process.

Birmingham Metropolitan College also has an Enterprise Academy. This operates using the same model as the PSA but is for any student with an interest in business. It is made up of a board of general employers. The Enterprise Academy enables students to develop work enterprise skills. Students from across the college work with employers to develop their employability skills.

### **Supporting Schools Development of PE and Sport**

The Sports' Directorate at Birmingham Metropolitan College has developed a work experience model where its students provide sports coaching and PE sessions in local schools.

<sup>1</sup> Birmingham Metropolitan College Website



Many schools are using the PE and Sport Premium funding from the government to hire specialist PE teachers and qualified sports coaches in school to improve the quality of the PE and sport activities they offer their pupils. Birmingham Metropolitan College took that model and applied it to their work experience programme. The college takes students into schools to deliver structured PE lessons that are planned and linked to the national curriculum.

To develop the model of provision, Birmingham Metropolitan College worked with a local provider of sport and physical activity provision in the city. The programme has potential benefits for all concerned: Birmingham Metropolitan College students gain opportunities for 'hands on' experience of working with young people in schools and a pathway to employment; schools have the opportunity to receive structured coaching and PE lessons but with the freedom to use their Sports Premium Funding in other ways; and the local provider of sport and physical activity assisting with the development of the model has access to a pool of skilled people for its services e.g. running school sports clubs, holiday clubs and coaching.

### **Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome**

#### **Consistency across a large college**

For Birmingham Metropolitan College a key challenge has been ensuring that the development of employability skills is consistent across a very large college. This academic year, Birmingham Metropolitan College has introduced a range of new systems and processes to ensure that work experience is rolled out to all vocational and 'A' Level learners by:

- a. introducing the formalised Work of World offer across the college
- b. implementing a structured recording and reporting process for all Directorates to log the time spent on World of Work activities and the types of activities being undertaken. This has helped to focus minds across the college on developing the employability skills of students
- c. producing separate handbooks on 'World of Work' for staff, employers and students and a Work Placement Charter. These help to ensure consistency in delivery and clarity of expectation. The student handbook includes details on what students should do before, during and after their work experience placement
- d. reallocating staff resource to give the World of Work co-ordinator more time to organise consistent approaches across the college
- e. training all staff to undertake health and safety checks. Health and safety checks undertaken are centrally logged by the college along with a date for review. This ensures that employers taking students from different Directorates across the college are not subject to multiple checks or repeat visits.

#### **Engaging Employers**

A further challenge for the college has been securing the engagement of employers. This is being tackled both top-down (through a centralised approach) and bottom-up (through innovative approaches implemented at a course level).

**Top-down** - The college is in the process of coordinating a centralised employer mail-shot organised by the World of Work co-ordinator. The mail shot outlines the range of ways in which employers can get involved.

**Bottom-up** - Staff are employing a range of strategies to secure employer engagement by:

- a. **being proactive** - and seeking out events and employment opportunities already on-going in the city that students could staff. This helped to facilitate opportunities for hospitality students to cater external events for example (live projects)
- b. **identifying employer needs and developing work experience opportunities that would address those needs** -for instance: students acting as sports coaches in schools that addresses schools' needs for structured PE and sports coaching activities; and the PSA programme that was developed in partnership with employers to meet the needs of employers
- c. **creating new pathways to employment** – for example the sports Directorate's model of providing work experience in schools is resulting in a new employment pathway for students to enter employment with a local provider of sports and active life programmes/ holiday clubs etc
- d. **fostering additional opportunities for work placement through the World of Work Programme** – by engaging employers who are coming into the college to do work enterprise activities e.g. mock interviews, Guru talks with students
- e. **using its network of contacts and links** – for example, some college staff held other roles in the city that they would use to foster work experience links for its learners. This included, for example, opportunities for learners to plan and host events that college staff were speaking at in other capacities
- f. **demonstrating and showcasing students' capabilities** – the Hospitality Directorate has its own catering facility. Employers are invited to meetings at this venue. Employers are able to observe the students in action. This helps to secure employer trust and confidence in students' abilities to staff their functions (live projects)
- g. **using existing contacts** – such as those of creative arts lecturers to secure live briefs for students to work on.

## Section 4. Emerging impact

Benefits and emerging impact include:

- a. increased engagement in learning
- b. progression to employment, training or continuing education
- c. increased confidence
- d. improved presentation skills
- e. awareness of how to create a good impression
- f. improved communication skills
- g. better knowledge of how to apply learning in the workplace
- h. demonstrable work-related skills
- i. maturity, initiative, emotional intelligence.

Student feedback on work experience:

*'It gives you a taste of what work really is. If you're given the chance to do something... that makes what you are learning make sense'.*

*'It's a lot easier... because when you're actually working with an employer, a real industry client... deadlines are really important. There are real deadlines. There are no extensions. It helps you towards working with deadlines and application. I know a lot of work is like that'.*

### Key contact:

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## Case study two: Chichester College

### Section 1. Background

Chichester College is a large FE college, with 15,000 students, based mainly in the city of Chichester, but with a rural centre in the Sussex Downs. Ofsted rated the college as 'Outstanding' at its 2014 inspection. There is a wide variety of vocational courses at Levels 1, 2



and 3 and A Levels, as well as provision of community facilities. There are also opportunities to study at Foundation Degree level. Students are drawn from the surrounding rural area as well as urban centres, and the college also takes overseas students. There is a large service sector in the area, but no heavy industry. This case-study visit was based in the Service Industries faculty (Hospitality, Hair & Beauty, Travel & Tourism) and the information relates to that department.

### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

The ethos of developing employability skills is embedded in the way in which the college operates, with a focus on every student on vocational courses, at all levels, being prepared for entry to their chosen industry. The Head of Learning for Service Industries described how, *'making students work-ready and enabling progression into work has always been a key focus'*. The college has a large apprenticeship programme, and has traditionally had strong links with local employers. Level 3 students had assignments linked to certain employers, so there was an element of employer input into assessment.

The college has a restaurant which is open to the public, as well as a barber shop and hair and beauty salons, and these are regarded as particularly valuable for providing a realistic work environment for Level 1 students, within a familiar setting.

All students are given the opportunity to expand their vocational and social skills through a programme of events, which take place both inside and outside the college. Examples of this include the 'week-end takeover' at a hotel, where students can work in a variety of areas, such as the restaurant and kitchens, the reception desk, and the housekeeping department. They are on site from Friday evening until Sunday and must apply to take part. Providing a three-course lunch menu on a set day at a local restaurant is another popular event with students, as is the opportunity to take part in functions at a local hotel. There are also master classes in catering at

other local venues, visits abroad to France, Italy and Spain, training days by local employers in the college, and participation in local festivals.

All student work experience is monitored, with hours of activity logged and an on-line Enterprise Passport for each student, where they can reflect on achievements and skills learned. These can then be used for job or Higher Education applications.

### **Innovative and distinctive features**

The variety of opportunities provided by a large number of local employers and organisations, including hotels, holiday and festival organisers give students valuable experience. Students interviewed were very enthusiastic about the insight into working life that these opportunities provide, as well as the skills that they have gained through participation. A BTEC Hospitality Level 3 student explained how much he had enjoyed the opportunity to help manage the campsite at a local festival and the value that he felt such activities gave him.

*'Flexibility is really important, because providing a two-week block placement is not what suits some employers, and we have to be mindful of what employers want'. [Student]*

Providing high-quality work experience through one-day and weekend events, means that students do not miss much of their course, and can catch up more easily on any classes they have missed. It also fits well into the college's aim of creating flexibility in their partnership with employers.

*'The industry needs people with experience, so this type of activity helps a lot – it gives you transferable skills'. [Head of Service Industries]*

An employer described how successful the hotel 'weekend take-over' was.

*'We can take 20 students and give them a real insight into a career in Hospitality when they are resident here from Friday to Sunday and working shifts like an employee'. [Employer]*

This employer also made it clear that good preparation of students, and the fact that they applied to participate and so were enthusiastic and ready to work hard, contributed to the scheme's success. So too did the support given by college staff, who were present at times over the weekend.

*'it's important to get employers onto the college site, show them what we do, and emphasise that we want to work in partnership with them'. [Employer]*

### **Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome**

**Staff time:** the Head and Deputy Head of Learning for Service Industries agreed that developing and maintaining strong relationships with employers was time-consuming and required a lot of energy and initiative. It was a large part of their work, but they had the advantage of building on existing partnerships with employers and the introduction of the work experience strand of Study Programmes had given an

impetus to further engagement with employers. They organised employer forums and events for employers at the college to bridge the gap between education and the work environments.

An important part of their role was:

*“bridging the gap between the education and work environments”, and this could be assisted by ‘opening doors and getting employers in’.*

So the college staff for example, provided master classes for employers. It was also necessary to emphasise the mutual benefit of a genuine partnership with employers, so employers sponsored prizes and their logos were used to advertise events, they gained positive publicity, and felt they were playing their part in developing the future workforce. As a result the college was now *‘inundated with requests from Hospitality providers’*, to work with them.

The college has a full time work experience coordinator, who processes the paperwork required once placements and events have been arranged. She has two health and safety advisors who carry out risk assessments, and she checks on employer insurance cover. She makes sure that employers are aware of any special needs that students may have. This role removes a considerable burden from college teaching staff.

Variability in gaining work experience opportunities across all courses: while the staff interviewees did not face any real challenges in developing employer partnerships within the Hospitality industry, the department head described opportunities in Hair and Beauty as more variable, with the Production Arts element, in particular, being more difficult. This was because there were fewer large employers available. This barrier was overcome to a large extent by having a hair and beauty salon and a barber shop on the college site. These were well used by the public, and so provided a realistic working environment. The barber shop had been opened recently and the college was the first to have a facility credited by the British Barbering Association. The difficulty of finding opportunities for Production Arts students was tackled by thinking creatively – looking out for any events locally that could be linked into. For example, students provided theatrical make-up for a ‘murder mystery week-end’, ‘medical’ make-up for the local hospital, and beauty therapy at local care homes.

## **Section 4. Emerging impact**

The department head said that although work experience was by no means new to the college, it was *now ‘more formalised and auditable, so no student can slip through the net. Staff wanted a clear policy, with no grey areas about what is approved experience. We have clarified the number of hours per student and ensure that each student has a personalised path’.*

Staff interviewees thought that there was a positive impact on students, because a variety of experience *‘validates their classroom learning’*, and they picked up soft skills, gained in confidence and absorbed useful information. They were encouraged to reflect on their progress, or what they could have done better, and an event such as the ‘hotel take-over’, gave insight into areas of hospitality that they might not have

considered, or helped them realise that a particular path may not be the best for them. Students interviewed confirmed this, reflecting on the advantages of working in top-class venues, seeing professionals at work, learning new skills and developing confidence.

The students themselves all felt that they had benefited from their experiences and the staff said that more Level 3 students were now applying to university and Level 1 and 2 students were staying in college to take further courses. Some students obtained part-time jobs as a result of their work experience, and two of those interviewed were intending to apply to a recent placement for a full-time post. The employer interviewed commented on the way members of the public had commended students by name, and how this had boosted their confidence.

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## Case study three: Oldham FE College

### Section 1. Background

The Digital and Creative Centre at Oldham College provides a range of flexible pathways for 14 to 19 year olds including high-quality academic and vocational qualifications and practical work-related experiences. The Centre is housed in a purpose-built £9 million digital skills building and contains varied faculties offering a wide range of industry related courses, specifically tailored to the local, regional and national labour market needs in this sector.



### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

Developing employability skills is at the heart of the Centre's approach to preparing students for their chosen destination, be that higher education, employment or further training in the technically and creatively driven industries. An interviewee observed:

*'We're generating a real buzz and energy about work and we provide students with an exit plan – everything around the college is geared towards getting students a positive outcome, not just a qualification – it is the next step that is the goal.'*

Within this emphasis on providing 'a line of sight to employment', development of employability skills is embedded in the ethos and mindset promoted by the Centre, and through mechanisms and processes of curriculum design and delivery. This has numerous manifestations in the approach, policy and practice of the Centre, including, for example, the central place of employability skills in the new behaviour policy. This is orientated around the types of behaviours and attitudes employers will expect, culminating in a code of conduct for students.

An employability and workskills programme operates across Oldham College as a whole (enhanced by the establishment of a Job Shop service) and within individual faculties and curriculum areas within the Digital and Creative Centre. College-based Business Advisors support faculty tutors to enhance their ability to improve students' employability skills. On-going discussions with employers help ensure clarity of understandings about the skills required from future employees and prospective work experience students. Teaching and learning approaches are focussed towards supporting the development of these skills. This is achieved, for example, through the encouragement of independent working, problem solving and task-orientated curriculum delivery, underpinned by high expectations from staff.



## Innovative and distinctive features

### Employers Advisory Board

The newly established Employers Advisory Board (EAB) consists of 20 local business representatives and has been highly effective in strengthening relationships between the Digital and Creative Centre (a faculty within the college) and industry personnel. Crucially, this supports dialogue around curriculum delivery in terms of what is required for the award/qualification and what skills, competencies and abilities employers need in their future employees. The EAB has, to date, informed curriculum delivery, modified individual units, improved career pathways and integrated the development of behaviours expected by employers into the curriculum to support students' employability. A college interviewee observed:

*'The industry is rapidly changing and the college has to reflect this and be flexible in what it offers its students to make them employable.'*

The EAB is also a mechanism through which senior staff work with employers to encourage their support for the Centre and its students, including developing assignment briefs for students, providing work experience placements and offering continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for college staff.

### Active involvement of employers prior to work experience placement

Prior to embarking on a work experience placement, employers have come into the college and provided master classes and other forms of employability-related support and guidance to students. In addition, to raise the profile and status of work experience, students have also been required to submit CVs and be interviewed for a placement, reflecting the process and competitive nature of securing employment.

### Placements are structured to provide real work experience

Work experience placements are flexible to meet the needs of employers, but are generally for a week block which gives students the sense of the regularity of attending work five days a week. This also facilitates the project/task-focussed nature of work experience where placements are frequently based on undertaking a particular project/piece of work to reflect the real world digital creative industry sector.

*'[Employers] want to call it a work assignment. A specific project so that they [students] don't just go in and drift around. [Employers say] "This is what you have to do in a week, find the right resources, talk to the right people and deliver". That matches the nature of the creative industries – project based and with deadlines.'*

## Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome

### Scale and logistics

*'The scale of it [securing work experience] is quite massive – we're not going to get them [employers] all in one go'.* As the Digital and Creative Centre is in its early stages of development, significant efforts are being made to build the infrastructure, (networks and relationships), necessary to source and facilitate work experience placements for over 500 students across a range of faculties and subject areas. Going forward, this could involve releasing a tutor from some teaching responsibilities to concentrate more on work experience, and to work alongside the college's other resources, such as the Job Shop service's staff. Work experience placements are prioritised according to the needs and circumstances of individuals, with those intending to secure employment directly after finishing college taking precedence over those intending to progress to higher education/further training.

### Employer engagement

The lack of an established tradition and culture of work experience placements (as opposed to internships), coupled with many businesses in the creative and digital industries being small and medium-sized enterprises, are potential barriers to engagement. To overcome this, the college has been successful in providing various opportunities to build relationships with the local business community, especially through the EAB. This entails significant dialogue that highlights the mutually beneficial elements of employers providing work experience placements. Ensuring an employer focus, and promoting a flexible approach are key to this.

*'Employers want the students on work experience placements when they [employers] want them, so if work experience is part of the curriculum, then there needs to be flexibility around the curriculum that meets the employers needs.'* [College interviewee.]

## Section 4. Emerging impact

### Impact on students

Students have bought into the ethos of employability and code of conduct promoted by the Centre, illustrated through improvements in student behaviour and the presentation of professional, work-like attitudes and action. Crucially, alongside the development of academic and vocational skills, students are now seen as being closer to work. An interviewee observed:

*'Previously, work seemed like a long way off in the future, now it's brought it closer to them'*

### Impact on employers

There is a closer integration between industry and the college through which employers are more likely to be able to recruit future employees with the specific

skills the creative industries need. College staff and employers are linked together in networks that benefit the local business community and enhance the positive pathways available to students.

### **Impact on college staff**

Enhanced relationships with industry have provided opportunities for staff CPD, through for example, attending employer meetings and occasional day placements in industry, to help maintain connections within a rapidly changing sector.

### **Key contact:**

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## Case study four: Pimlico Academy

### Section 1. Background

Pimlico Academy is a co-educational secondary school and sixth form with academy status, located in the Pimlico area of Westminster, London. Young people submit application forms and attend interviews for places in the sixth form.



The Academy was awarded an 'outstanding' grade by Ofsted in 2010. Ofsted noted that the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals was twice the national average. Additionally, one third of students (above the national average) were noted to have moderate learning difficulties, dyslexia, behavioural, emotional and social needs and/or disabilities; and/or statements to meet their special educational needs.

The Academy's Raising Aspirations Programme aims to encourage, and support all of its students to set their sights high and broaden their ambitions. More specifically, the objectives of the programme of activities led by the Raising Aspirations Team are: to create belief/confidence; to create excitement not dread; to dismiss 'not for me' attitude; to include all staff, students and parents; to record impact and experiences; to promote a 'what is possible for me' attitude; to broaden horizons; to widen perceptions; and to ensure young people don't rule anything out or close doors with their choices.

### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

Students in the sixth form largely follow an academic programme with the vast majority studying A Levels. However, there is recognition that gaining experience of the world of work is highly relevant to all young people. The ethos within the school supports the Raising Aspirations Director's assertion that attitudes towards work experience have not changed as a result of study programmes; rather change has been stimulated by: *'the need to better prepare young people for the world of work'*.

Work experience or 'experience of the world of work' - the Raising Aspirations Director's preferred term - forms an integral part of this programme. A member of the Raising Aspirations Team explained that key to effective work experience is preparation both by the employers and the young people. Relationships with employers are well-developed so that the school is confident that the employers are ready for the young people and have a programme of activity lined up for them [although the Raising Aspirations Director did point out that activity such as 'a bit of photocopying' was fine as: *'young people need to learn that not all of life is exciting'*.

'*Smart matching*' between the young person and the placement is vital in terms of, for example the interests of the young person and the skills targeted for development (such as hard knowledge-based skills or softer employability skills). A member of the team also explained that ensuring that the young people have the right '*mindset*' is important: '*They need to be active rather than passive. They need to ask questions. They need to be inquisitive. They need to think about how they present themselves. They need to consider: What can I learn and what do I want to learn from this experience?*' We also work hard to encourage them to reflect about their experience and what they have learnt.' She explained how the school encourages them to take responsibility for their actions and gave an example where one young person walked out of a workplace because she was asked to make tea. On return to school she talked her actions through with a member of the team and *she* phoned the employer to apologise.

The young people felt that they had acquired worthwhile skills from their placements such as: '*how to interact with children [in a nursery placement]*'; '*how to deal with problems*'; '*how to write and deliver a PowerPoint presentation*'; as well as general confirmation that the area of work was one they wanted to pursue.

Other activities organised by the Raising Aspirations Team include: a mentoring scheme, for example where employers from a large corporate provide one-to-one mentoring for the young people; career fairs where employers from sectors (previously identified by young people as being of interest) attend and inform young people about their area of work; career 'chats' where all young people in Year 12 have one-to-one interviews with a member of the Raising Aspirations Team where their aspirations and future plans are challenged.

The young people clearly valued the one-to-one career chats. One explained:

*'I was really challenged. I was asked questions like: why do you want to do that? Have you had any experience of the type of work? How do you know you want to go down that route? Have you considered other alternatives such as apprenticeships?'*

### **Creative and innovative aspects**

Key aspects of the ways in which the Academy develop employability skills include:

- having a dedicated Raising Aspirations Team led by a senior leader
- emphasising the holistic approach, through a range of activities, to developing employability skills in contrast to 'work experience'
- ensuring that each young person has constant and consistent engagement with a member of the Raising Aspirations Team who uses advanced emotional intelligence to inform what that individual young person needs
- understanding that raising aspirations starts from Year 7.

### **Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome**

Current challenges are identified as:

1. The timing of the work experience week. As the school is largely academic, work experience is held as a week block placement in late June after exams are finished. This does not always suit employers. The suggested solution is that schools are held accountable for the development of their students' employability skills – this would increase the emphasis on work experience.
2. As the Academy is located within the heart of London there are a number of larger companies, who have corporate social responsibility (CSR), who are willing to offer work experience. However, there is a recognition that small and medium sized companies (SMEs) are harder to recruit. It was suggested that if SMEs could identify where they might need some input from a young person (for example, help with social media or excel spreadsheets), and suitable matching could be achieved, this would benefit both parties.
3. Engaging all teachers in the raising aspirations agenda is important, albeit challenging. The Raising Aspirations Team is setting up a work party group with a representative from each faculty in the summer. Teachers are very supportive of this development. Although teachers' focus is on achieving high academic grades, there is recognition that a change in mindset to further prepare young people for the world of work is important.
4. Young people in Years 7 to 11 are increasingly encouraged to understand the importance of developing employability skills. For example they have experienced work place visits and a Careers Fair in Year 9. There are further developments planned, for example next year all the Year 7 after-school clubs (which are compulsory after school for year 7) will have key employability skills linked to each club. Abespoke programme to develop employability skills with the three primaries in the Future Academy family – Pimlico Primary, Millbank and Churchill Gardens will be introduced.
5. There is recognition that SMEs in particular need one point of contact within a school and this has now been addressed by the appointment of the Raising Aspirations Director earlier in the academic year.
6. In London, securing arts, medicine and sports placements are challenging. Plans are in place to target these sectors.

#### **Section 4. Emerging impact**

There was a general perception from the Raising Aspirations Team that work experience, employer engagement and the systems and processes used to develop employability skills had improved over the last year largely due to having a dedicated team led by a newly appointed Raising Aspirations Director. The Director felt that young people were more aware of the importance of developing employability skills. They were reported to be more reflective; to be using the language of employers more (e.g. 'problem solving' rather than maths); and to appreciate the importance of expanding their networks of people who could help them progress. Students reported valuing work experience:

*'I learnt a lot of skills'; 'it's motivating and encourages you to work hard'; 'it gave me a deeper understanding of work'.*

In essence, the Director explained: *'the school is trying to achieve for their students what independent schools and middle-class parents achieve for their young people'* [i.e. social capital – educational, social and cultural advantages.] One way they monitor this is by their 'Futures Award'; students need to 'collect' a range of experiences both inside the classroom and outside and on reaching certain landmarks they achieve a staged award. The component elements are: qualifications; experience of work; volunteering; leadership; team work; extra reading; extra-curricular activities. Additionally, this year the school has introduced carrying out a baseline survey to benchmark young people's attitudes at the outset of the sixth form and will carry out future surveys to track young people's progress.

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## Case study five: St. Brendan's College

### Section 1. Background

St Brendan's is a Roman Catholic Sixth Form College in Bristol. It has 1,700 students, drawn from the city and surrounding areas, including Bath. It has a strong Christian ethos, although most of its students are not Catholics. There is a wide variety of courses available, mostly Level 3, with around one third of students taking a combination of A Levels and BTECs. The college was graded 'Good' by Ofsted at the 2012 inspection.



### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

The college works with Career Academies UK (CA) to provide employability opportunities for Level 3 students. CA is a national charity, which aims to bridge the gap between the world of work and education, by providing a range of experiences for students, including internships. In the case of business studies students, these are undertaken over a period of six weeks, during the summer holidays, at the end of Year 12. Students must complete an application process, which includes an interview with their prospective employer. If they are accepted, they are matched with a mentor, usually from the industry, who acts as a critical friend.

The internship involves the completion of one or more projects, which are designed to allow the student to apply their subject knowledge, and to provide something of value to the employer. For example, one of the students interviewed had worked at an insurance company, where he had evaluated the company's graduate trainee programme from a young person's perspective and presented a report at the company HQ.

In each area where CA operates, they establish a Local Advisory Board (LAB), which includes local employers and representatives from the schools and colleges involved. In the Bristol area, the LAB includes employers from large companies, such as banks, which are able to pay their interns. This is not always the case for all students.

Students in the Sports Studies department also undertake an internship, but these placements reflect the different nature of their industry. They are expected to carry out volunteer work, for example achieving coaching qualifications by working with junior teams, and these can be completed over an academic year.

This year (2015) the internship opportunities are being extended to students in the Performing Arts and Media Studies department. As this industry often includes



charitable organisations and small-scale operations, these students are not likely to be paid.

### **Innovative and distinctive features**

The opportunity to work for a sustained period of several weeks, as a paid employee, carrying out challenging and useful tasks to both student and employer, is a distinctive feature of this scheme. The partnership between CA and the college provides these opportunities within a well-regulated and monitored system, with benefits for both students and employers. The students interviewed, who had all completed their internships in the summer of 2014, were very enthusiastic about their experiences. Two of them had worked at a bank, and one described how she had: *'interacted with customers, but I also attended meetings. I was doing a proper job, and that will be very helpful for when I apply for jobs in the future'*. The other had worked across two sites and described *'carrying out client visits and doing data analysis, so I gained a really good overview of what banking is about'*.

The provision of a mentor, who can answer questions about future career prospects and give support and encouragement on an individual basis, is another important feature of the scheme.

An employer interviewed explained that in his view, this scheme was innovative,

*'because of the length of time that the intern is with us. After six weeks it really feels like working life and they can see what the business is all about. They start to speak to older people [adults] that they have never met before and have to find their way around the building. They are also doing a real piece of work and leaving a legacy behind them'*.

### **Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome**

Finding placements for Performing Arts /Media students was more challenging than for those taking Business courses. The combination of many disciplines, such as dance, drama, music, and film studies, and the diverse nature of potential places of employment, required a great deal of time and effort to achieve suitable internships. The college was pioneering the inclusion of Performing Arts in the CA programme, and the senior manager at the college said that the challenge was considerable, but worthwhile because of the way in which a new group of students would be included. This sector did not have the advantage of large companies that could absorb interns in the way that Business students could be accommodated, but the Performing Arts department was fortunate in having members of staff with wide-ranging contacts, who had worked very hard to achieve the placements required.

The other main challenge was extending the internship scheme to other students. At present, each year there are 12 places available for Business students, 12 for Sports students and 11 for Performing Arts students, so making the opportunities more widely available was a college aim. The senior manager explained that the college was looking into the possibility of linking with a company in another area that was also working with CA, with the potential to create further placements.

For students in other departments, there was also the aim of extending placement opportunities. A cross-college audit of work-related activity was currently taking place, so senior staff could see where the gaps were and how to progress. Departments such as Health and Social Care traditionally had a well-developed programme of work experience, but as the Health and Social Care senior manager pointed out, the assumption that students taking A Levels and applying to higher education, didn't need to do so had now changed. Extending work experience opportunities for all students was now a priority, and progress was being made in a number of ways. These included linking Modern Foreign Languages with Business Studies, and providing events which could be used to develop students' work-related skills and understanding. An example of the latter was the way in which A Level History students had taken part in an event commemorating the First World War, where they had worked with historians and archivists to search data bases and track the progress of individuals, and presented their research. As the senior manager explained, this might not look like work experience, but it had provided the opportunity to carry out real research and develop skills, in the same way as traditional placements would do.

#### **Section 4. Emerging impact**

The impact on the students who had completed internships last year was clear from the interviews with them. All had valued the chance to become paid employees, doing real work, for a sustained period of time. They commented on the increase in their self-confidence, the acquisition of work-related and social skills, the insight into their potential career area and the benefits for future job applications and their university application personal statements. They commented:

*'It was great for meeting new people and it lets you learn how to communicate with adults other than your own family'.*

*'I was nervous at first, but having to use my initiative and meet lots of people was very good for me'.*

*'As well as confidence, it helped me with my IT studies, because I was able to make links'.*

From a staff perspective, one of the teachers interviewed commented on how much better the higher education application personal statements of ex-interns were compared to other students, in addition to the obvious gains in self-assurance. While from the employer point of view, *'There are benefits for the company – enthusiasm and fresh thinking can be very helpful, and these young people bring energy into the office'.*

#### **Key contact**

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## Case study six: Walker Technology College

### Section 1. Background

Walker Technology College, in Newcastle, is a larger than average size secondary school with a high proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The sixth form through which work experience is provided was judged by Ofsted as offering 'good quality, inclusive provision' enabling 'students to



thrive and achieve well'. The introduction of a broader range of subjects has led to a growth in the sixth form and has provided students with a more diverse range of pathways and progression routes (Ofsted report 2014).

### Section 2. Approaches to the development of employability skills

Developing employability skills is a central strand of the college's approach, underpinned by a commitment from senior leaders to make students 'work savvy'.

The school recently relocated to a new build site which included 'The Works' – a vocationally-oriented area of the school housing the Business and Industry faculty. This contains workshop and training facilities to support the delivery of catering, construction, engineering, textiles and hospitality courses as well as related academic subjects, such as computer sciences. Work experience placements are embedded in the Level 2 and 3 courses on offer and reflect the post-16 school demographic which is skewed towards students studying vocational courses. In developing the suite of courses to be provided, college staff researched the needs and wants of students in the area to ensure that provision would attract students in the area looking to progress to employment or secure apprenticeships or other work-related training/education.

The work experience offered encompasses the range of curriculum areas available across the faculty designed to correspond to the particular sectors where students are likely to find work. Work experience placements are provided by a range of employers, including large national and corporate businesses and small and medium- sized regional and local enterprises. Placements are available in shops, construction and engineering businesses, motor mechanics, restaurants and nursery schools, for example. In addition, the local council offers a significant number of quality placements across several directorates within the council.

Contingent with the high-profile vocational offer, students' employability skills development is also supported through comprehensive support packages tailored to

meet individual learners' needs. Including a focus on tangible skills – CV writing, interview skills as well as meeting social and emotional needs via pastoral support to raise student confidence and aspiration. Employers contribute to providing this support.

### **Innovative and Distinctive Features**

The following elements and dimensions of the college's approach to work experience placements were identified as being innovative and particularly effective.

#### ***Immersion and embedding of work experience***

The current approach to work experience placements replaces '*the old fashioned way*' of offering week-long blocks with the opportunity for a longer, deeper immersion in work experience. Placements are now generally one day a week throughout the academic year, providing students with greater regularity and consistency in their placement, '*rather than it being them going out for a week and that's it*'. Employers also recognise the benefits of this, whereby students gain enhanced understanding of the world of work, and the specifics of their role, as well as the opportunity to build up relationships with workplace-based colleagues. This is seen as a key element of making students '*work savvy*'.

#### ***Tailoring of work experience placements to suit student and employer needs***

Prior to embarking on work experience, college staff discuss opportunities with students (and their parents) to ensure that a suitable placement that meets their requirements can be found. This is based on the employment opportunities available in the locality, which are also reflected in the vocational courses on offer. It is seen as critical that the work experience placement functions as a component of the overall offer made to students through ensuring the interconnectivity of curriculum content and work placement experiences. Similarly, work experience undertaken by students has to be seen by potential employers as relevant and fit for purpose in preparing future employees or apprentices. A college interviewee observed:

*'People offering apprenticeships or jobs want young people who have had experience. It has to be relevant. The key thing is that the work experience has to link to a trade if it doesn't, there's no point doing it.'*

#### ***Realistic and aspirational work experience placements***

Work experience placements are designed to mirror the 'real world of work' as far as possible to achieve maximum benefit for students and employers. This includes, for example, ensuring that the placement day starts and finishes at the same time as regular employment, not college times and the placement activities are as 'hands on' as possible, within health and safety parameters. In addition, a key provider of work experience highlighted the need to be cautious about offering placements in areas where there were not likely to be any employment or apprenticeship opportunities in the near future so as not to falsely raise expectations or set students up to fail.

### Section 3. Barriers and how they have been overcome

The most significant barrier to providing work placements relates to employer engagement, especially in the context of increasing demand for placements from other schools and colleges in the area. Securing work experience placements in certain sectors – for example retail and travel and tourism – have proved particularly difficult despite these being significant sources of employment. The college has made considerable inroads into securing the involvement of a wide range of employers through networking activities and a strategy of persistent, targeted contacting – especially face-to-face visits. One large employer suggested that this recruitment strategy has been successful because of the time invested in building and maintaining relationships with employers before, throughout and following work experience placements. There is a sense that employers and the college exhibit a mutually beneficial partnership approach to ensure that the needs of both students and employers are met through work experience. This centres on comprehensive dialogue and information exchange so that placements can be matched effectively, progress reviewed and modifications put in place quickly if necessary. As the work experience programme continues, increasing evidence of the impact and benefits of offering work experience will encourage other employers to participate.

Other barriers included the initial administrative workload, such as ensuring employers met the necessary health and safety, insurance and safeguarding requirements. As the work experience programme evolves, systems and organisational structures will develop to streamline this process, especially as the pool of existing employers expands. Concerns were also raised about the financial barriers faced by students in accessing their work experience placements, often a considerable distance from their home. Currently, the college is able to provide some assistance with travel expenses and personal protective equipment if necessary.

### Section 4. Emerging impact

Although in its early stages, the work experience programme is delivering positive impacts for the students taking part. Crucially, employers, college staff and the young people themselves note that their employability has increased as a result of their placement. This includes the development of technical skills and expertise that reinforces the learning taking place in college that is required for future employment in their chosen sector. Students and an employer reported that the chances of securing an apprenticeship in a particular area were greatly enhanced as a result of undertaking a work placement and the real world experience it provided. Enhanced social skills, confidence and maturity were also highlighted as key outcomes of work experience placements, involving developments in communication skills, attitudes and perspectives on work. A college interviewee observed:

*‘that real world experience really helps their [students] communication skills – being in the work environment almost forces them to improve their skills’.*

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## 4 About the research

The overall purpose of this study was to provide direction and support to providers to achieve the full implementation of the 16 to 19 study programmes. The DfE's aim was to drive change in the sector by facilitating exchange of effective practice ('what works') so that providers can learn from each other and improve their provision. More specifically the study objectives were to:

- Demonstrate how providers have overcome common issues and successfully delivered against the key delivery strands within the following themes: strategic approaches and quality of teaching; work experience; English and mathematics provision; employer involvement in qualification activity/delivery; students with special educational needs and disabilities; sharing knowledge and best practice to ensure continuous improvement; and providing practical support for teaching and learning.
- Provide suitable methods of facilitating this shared learning so that less experienced providers can benefit.

***The DfE commissioned the NFER to identify effective practice in terms of the five work experience strands of study programmes:***

1. Delivery of work experience as a core aim for students following study programmes at level 1.
2. Work experience for students following academic programmes at level 3.
3. Delivery of work experience in subject areas where there are significant skills gaps and few work experience opportunities, for example engineering and construction.
4. Delivery of work experience within highly deprived and/or rural areas with little access to industry or choice of employers within the locality.
5. Delivery of work experience as part of large academic/vocational programmes and/or within a school sixth form curriculum.

The methodology used by the NFER to carry out this study was as follows.

- We independently selected, screened and recruited providers with innovative and effective practice for case study visits. We consulted independent bodies (such as the 157 Group of colleges; the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and London Councils) to identify providers demonstrating innovative and distinctive approaches to providing young people with work experience.

- We carried out a total of six case-study visits to: three further education colleges; two schools with sixth forms; and one sixth form college. Within each institution we interviewed the senior leader responsible for study programmes; course leaders; work experience coordinators; practitioners; partners and/or employers and young people.
- We developed an analytical framework to draw out the approaches that providers are using to develop young people's employability skills; the innovative and distinctive features of these approaches; the barriers providers have encountered and how they have tried to overcome them; and any evidence of emerging impact on young people.
- As well as this case-study report we have produced ['Top Tips for senior leaders'](#) on how to develop young people's employability skills. Additional information, for example a video recording of how case-study institutions have planned and implemented work experience and engaged employers will be available on the NFER website.
- We have used different media and dissemination channels to convey the key research messages, and deeper understanding of how to develop meaningful work experience for young people, including to less experienced providers. Channels have included publishing the outputs on NFER's website and directing providers there via the Association of Colleges; ASCL; and NFER Direct to schools.

*This study was carried out between January and March 2015.*

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