

Case study: What does a gold standard college look like?

Fair Train and Havering College

Havering College is renowned for providing high quality work experience to its 2,200 full time students. But how has it been so successful when other colleges have given work experience a back seat?

Assistant Principal Catherine Foley explains: *“The college has refocused its priority to employability. At the end of the day we are training people for work rather than training them to pass exams, and this is reflected in all aspects of our work”.*

As with any organisation, this top down approach from senior management is essential to effective delivery. Work experience is taken seriously and seen as more than just a two week placement. There are five enterprise and work placement co-ordinators dedicated to sourcing placements, but the whole college is encouraged to get involved, from finding placements to delivering sessions on employability, and all full time students undertake a study programme which includes work experience.

Havering College is the first in the country to create a coherent work experience programme based on the Barclays employability passport. This 15 hour programme, created in the college’s enterprise hub, is designed in response to the top skills employers look for when they recruit. All learners work through the passport in dedicated ‘enterprise hours’. Alongside this is a teachers’ resource pack – delivering the programme has helped them to understand the benefits of a team approach.

Other areas of good practice include intervention grading for how well employability is embedded in lessons, briefings through faculty and curriculum meetings, and termly reports for governors. Catherine said: *“Getting learners into work is a whole college approach and everyone’s responsibility! The Work Experience Quality Standard accreditation has focused us to pull everything together and across all team members.”*

The college’s latest Ofsted report states that: *“The Principal and governors promote a highly supportive culture and are committed to providing students with a wide range of opportunities”* and that: *“Employer engagement is outstanding”.*

To maintain its relationship with employers, the college regularly invites them to host industry insight days and take part in employer forums. Employer feedback on the curriculum is valued, which is why there’s a forum for each subject area. Feedback on the curriculum for legal services has resulted in standards being rewritten based on what employers require. This shows that the industry is being listened to and is able to give something back.



Industry days can take the form of interview practices with employers, CV workshops, panel discussions, and breakout sessions to encourage learners to 'open up'. A recent motor vehicle industry day resulted in learners securing employment at the end of their 'mock' interviews! Catherine added: *"We prep students prior to employers coming in, and encourage them to develop their networks through the contacts they meet by creating a LinkedIn page."* The college also hosts events such as apprenticeship levy briefings tailored to SMEs and large employers, and makes an effective resource of its own alumni who come in to speak to prospective and current learners.

Sectors such as legal, catering and hairdressing have 100% of their learners out on placement and the college has developed strong industry links with Wembley Stadium, Toni & Guy, and the Houses of Parliament. Its relationship with Sue Ryder has allowed learners to undertake a range of roles such as the refurbishment of shops, local schools and hospices. The latter allows learners to spend 4-5 weeks working in an end of life care setting, which gives them a different perspective on their working environment, alongside building facilities for neighbourhoods; giving something back to the community.

For those with learning difficulties, the college has a dedicated ROSE (Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment) programme, which places learners in work to improve their employability skills. The college recognises that extra support is needed in this area and provides dedicated job coaches to help learners gain independence.

As well as work experience placements, the college runs 31 apprenticeship frameworks for approximately 600 learners and hosts apprentices as an employer. Again, the learner is very much at the centre of this provision, which is also covered by the Work Experience Quality Standard accreditation.

The college offers a free recruitment service for employers offering apprenticeships, by pre-screening candidates and delivering sessions on initial assessment and interview techniques. At this stage if a learner is not quite work-ready they can be signposted to alternative provision. Head of Apprenticeships and Traineeships, Steve Lee, said: *"The key is to be flexible and responsive to employers. Our apprenticeships start all year round which means that we deliver maths and English at different times throughout the year, but that's what works for the employers. This structured approach means that employers want to work with us – it's all about managing expectations. It also means that if a learner isn't enjoying the placement they have the flexibility to change and will have hopefully developed some soft skills along the way."*

The Enterprise and Work Placement Co-ordinators spend a lot of their time on employer engagement. They fed back that many employers have a genuine interest in wanting to support local young people. Little things to show employers that they are valued, such as providing them with a certificate of participation, help. The college's employability focus is having a big impact with learners, as more good news stories are shared between peers, school leavers know if they come to Havering College they can get a job – and who wouldn't want that outcome?

Havering College

An award winning centre for lifetime learning and training, offering a diverse range of qualifications from entry level through to postgraduate degrees across part time, full time and apprenticeship frameworks. Our mission is to deliver high quality education and training that responds to the needs of employers and individuals. All new courses are developed in conjunction with employers to ensure learners have the opportunity to gain the relevant skills required for their chosen industry.

Fair Train

A national charity which champions the benefits of work experience and employability programmes, including traineeships and apprenticeships. Fair Train works with colleges across the country to support and develop high quality provision through the national [Work Experience Quality Standard](#) accreditation.

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