

Preparing for Adulthood



Case Study - 'EmployAbility Let's work together'

This case study outlines the 'EmployAbility - let's work together scheme' led by National Grid, whereby students of Round Oak School were able to gain valuable work experience as part of the programme.

Introduction

Round Oak School is a broad spectrum 11-19 special school; all students attending have a statement of special educational needs. Difficulties range from moderate to severe learning difficulties, autism, profound and multiple difficulties and associated complex needs. Their aim is to cater for individual needs within their school community and to provide a quality learning environment. Three years ago at Round Oak School, they began reforming their curriculum offer to provide more work based learning opportunities for students with additional learning needs and disabilities. Their aim is, to equip students with the confidence, skills and determination to find competitive paid employment.

National Grid is a UK registered utilities company. It manages high-voltage electric power and gas transmission networks in the UK, interconnects under sea to France, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man and provides energy to the north east US. National Grid is dedicated to being the world's premier network utility, primarily focused on delivering energy safely, reliably and efficiently,

employing over 20,000 people. National Grid became aware that there was a significant gap in the number of disabled people in employment (46.3%) in the UK labour market compared to the number of non-disabled people (76.4%)¹. They recognised that there was an opportunity to improve the employment rate of disabled people, which could boost the UK economy by £13 billion, knowing that they themselves employ a relatively low proportion. They also recognised that the average cost of a reasonable adjustment to any business to accommodate a disabled person is £75, and that most reasonable adjustments are free.

This case study explains the journey that Round Oak School and National Grid had to develop 'EmployAbility Let's work together', which is led by National Grid. 'EmployAbility Let's work together' aims to increase National Grid's involvement in the community and widen their recruitment talent pools. It is also increasing their disability confidence and respect for those who are different from themselves.

Thier Journey

Round Oak School's journey with National Grid started over three years ago when National Grid agreed to accept one of their year 11 students on a two week supported work experience placement. The impact for their learner was incredible, far exceeding their expectations. He finished the two weeks with a hunger and determination to gain paid employment.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-facts-and-figures>



It also far exceeded National Grid's expectations as they found they also learnt and developed from the experience. The passion, drive and determination they witnessed from the student made any work-based adjustment they needed to make more than worthwhile. They also found that mentoring and supporting a young person with a disability brought out management skills in their workforce, giving staff a greater sense of worth and fulfilment and helped them to increase their disability confidence. This small scale project broke down barriers and preconceived ideas about people with additional learning needs and the role they could play in a successful corporate environment. What everyone realised is that, given the right support in the right job, disabled young people are incredibly capable of working.

This positive experience created an excellent springboard for Round Oak School to develop their partnership work with National Grid. They formed a positive working relationship with National Grid who provided some excellent industry experiences for their students, which included work experience placements and mentoring, Business Enterprise days and a Work Inspiration week. Work Inspiration week involved a group of 12 students spending one week within National Grid experiencing a variety of roles and working environments. Employees on the National Grid graduate scheme were set the challenge of designing the week for the students to give them a varied experience of realistic employment opportunities, and in doing so raise their confidence and long-term aspirations. National Grid found that there were tremendous benefits for them. Managers observed the graduates project managing, mentoring, nurturing and enabling, all skills they would look for in successful managers within their company.

Work Inspiration week was an unqualified success. Without exception, students completed the week with a clear sense of direction and drive to gain employment, preferably in a hi-tech dynamic environment such as National Grid. The response from the departments the students spent time in that week was overwhelming. They found the students inspiring, interesting and full of potential. It was very apparent that the benefits to each organisation were in equal measure. Work Inspiration week is now part of National Grid's Graduate Development Scheme, and in February 2014 doubled in size, offering the opportunity to 24 students from four different special needs schools.

With such successes under their belts, they felt that the natural progression would be to expand this partnership to a longer more intensive project in the form of a supported internship programme. National Grid is determined to be the employer of choice for disabled people and Round Oak School is determined to raise aspirations and longer term goals of their students. Collectively, they appreciate that supporting students into work makes good business sense!

With shared ambition, they agreed to run a pilot one-year supported internship programme for five students, which started in September 2013. Using all the lessons learnt over the three years, they recognised that supporting students in their roles was the key to success. The students, a part-time teacher and two job coaches were based at National Grid in Warwick full-time for the entire academic year. The job coaches were trained in systematic instruction (TSI), which is a coaching method specifically designed to help people with complex learning difficulties learn new tasks. They worked with sponsoring departments to carve jobs





2013/14 interns with their Chairman's award. From Left to right, Alex Morgan, Leamington Spa, Asif Ali, Coventry, Philip Lockwood-Jones, Warwick, Taurai Horton, Leamington Spa, Jonny Shaw, Warwick.

for the students and then provided one-to-one support in their job roles. As part of their role, job coaches worked collaboratively with departments to look at how and where reasonable adjustments could be made.

Each student did up to three internships across the academic year. Extended work placements included Reception, Safety, Sustainability and Resilience, Gas Transmission, Reprographics, Customer Liaison, and Corporate Affairs and Information Systems. As well as the extended work placements, the students studied for a BTEC in Skills for Life, Skills for Work as well as functional Maths and English.

The results of this programme have been nothing short of life changing for the interns. They have grown significantly in confidence, developed their social and emotional skills as well as developing some incredible work based skills. They have also helped National Grid develop a lean approach to job carving. More than anything, the interns now dare to have ambition and feel that they have the right to aspire to a fulfilling and successful future. One key lesson learnt is that although on paper these interns do not have the qualifications for the roles they were doing, in practice they can more than fulfil the job roles.

Philip Lockwood Jones, an Intern from Warwick said, *"When you have special needs doors close. This programme has given me the opportunity to show that I have got skills and abilities"*. Taurai Horton, another Intern also from Leamington Spa also added, *"This programme has given us a platform to develop and learn important life skills in an environment like no other. The programme's impact on us has been life changing and will give us the best chance of leading a fulfilling and rewarding life"*.

In recognition of the success of this pilot year, the programme was awarded the National Grid Chairman's Award for Inclusion and Diversity in June 2014. One lucky intern, alongside National Grid colleagues, attended the ceremony and received the award on behalf of the rest of the team. This was an incredible experience for the intern, but also recognition of the immensely positive impact that this programme is having on the interns, Round Oak School and National Grid.

Following such success the programme is growing, offering more internship opportunities to students in the Coventry, Warwickshire and Hinckley area. In September 2014 12 new students started internships across 2 National Grid offices. Over the coming years, National Grid is intending to share and further extend these and other best practices in disability recruitment and employment, both internally and externally.

They are thrilled with the developments their students have made this year studying and working at National Grid. They have developed in so many ways and have proved to all that they have the skills and abilities to be highly successful in the workplace. They are delighted that 80% of the interns now have job opportunities at National Grid and supply chain partners, with 2



interns offered permanent contracts, 1 intern offered a summer contract, and 1 intern just starting to work on a project for them on a contract basis.

Nick Winser, Executive Director and Executive Sponsor of 'EmployAbility Let's work together' said:

"I'm thrilled to be welcoming students into National Grid, knowing this opportunity will strengthen their confidence, and provide valuable work experience. This will greatly improve their future job prospects. I want to see this succeed here in Warwick and be replicated in other sites. It has been a transformational experience."

Further information about 'EmployAbility Let's work together' can be found on their website - <http://employabilityletsworktogether.com/>

This case study was produced by the Preparing for Adulthood programme (PfA). PfA is a programme funded by the Department for Education as part of the delivery support for the SEND reforms. PfA is delivered by a partnership between the National Development Team for inclusion and the Council for Disabled Children. www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk
info@preparingforadulthood.org.uk

