



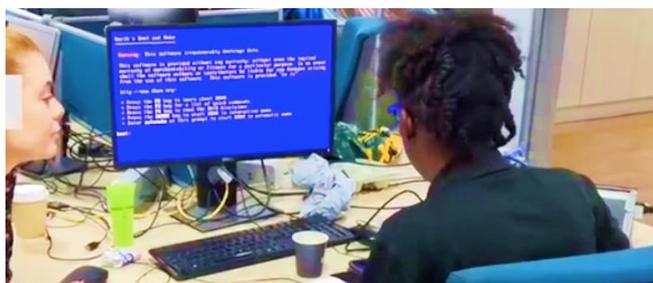
## Case Study: Dudley College & Employer Engagement

This case study looks at Dudley College of Technology's Supported Internship programme, and how they have maintained communication during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dudley College of Technology has an inclusive and supportive Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) department where they are dedicated to increasing the independence of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and supporting them to access the world of work. The College has had a Supported Internship programme since September 2018. They work with the UK's leading express parcel delivery company, DPD, as a host business. Internships are offered in a range of departments including: IT, marketing, warehouse, logistics, and transport. Seven students were on placement with the company before the Covid-19 lockdown started in March 2020.

Prior to lockdown, Dudley College of Technology tutor Sophie Robins, who acts as the job coach for all interns, had worked with each of the interns and DPD to provide a bespoke learning experience both inside the classroom and whilst at placement. All the interns were doing well, and Sophie had begun to spend less time with each of them in the business as part of the phasing of support that well-supported employment practice requires.

Within DPD, the Director of IT is a passionate and strong advocate for recruiting employees with SEN and is keen to support their progress in any way that is beneficial. Such is the commitment to making everything work that DPD have set up an *Inspire* programme within the company to develop supported internships. This is run by the People & Talent department; Paul McDonald (Apprentice Manager) is a dedicated work experience, internship, and apprenticeship manager who oversees placements, ongoing support, and development.



During this period when Covid-19 has restricted so much of the interns' activities, the company has taken the view that the programme has simply paused and all the young people will be able to return to activities pick up where they left off in the near future.



- Sophie has delivered weekly online learning sessions linked to each intern's role and department at DPD and the skills they need to perform well at work.
- Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) meetings have been held via Microsoft Teams and have been attended by staff involved with the intern at college and at DPD.

Communication between DPD staff, Dudley College, and all the Inspire Interns have been maintained in a number of helpful ways:

- Via Microsoft Teams, all the interns can send messages to the manager of the Inspire programme and to their job coach, departmental manager, and colleagues.
- Staff have called the interns to check their progress on a regular basis.
- Paul has organised tailored development sessions for the interns that include presentations and videos online. These allow for discussions afterwards and students to feedback on their engagement with the materials.
- The company's website for online training has been made available to the job coach who is based at Dudley College, so that she can develop individual learning plans based on personal interests and skills that young people need to acquire.

Best of all DPD has committed to offering employment to all the current interns once they have completed their internship and has agreed to take on another cohort of four learners in the new academic year.

The Covid -19 environment means that our current strategy will have to have some flexibility to ensure the safety of all parties. We will not place any interns into substantive posts until it is both safe to do so and a transitional period can be agreed.

In the meantime, College Chief Executive, Neil Thomas, believes the partnership which has been created between DPD and the College is a blueprint for other businesses to follow saying:

*"The ability to progress all learners into meaningful career pathways is of importance to Dudley College. By working with inclusive employers such as DPD we can help our SEND learners enter the world of work and find rewarding employment for the future whilst building a wide skillset. My hope is that more companies look at DPD and emulate their approach to internships for the future."*

*This case study was published in July 2020.*