

Strategic Action Groups

Cornerstone Employer Case Study

Background

We have a large Cornerstone Group of 12 employers which can make it more challenging to ensure all voices are heard and that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. The Group had also become accustomed to responding to Hub requests, rather than proactively driving solutions in response to the challenges outlined by the Hub.

Aims

To increase the sense of ownership and engagement that Employers have in relation to the Cornerstone Group in the West of England.

To encourage Cornerstone Employers to proactively develop solutions based on their insight and experience, not just respond to Hub requests.

To maximise the impact of the Group, so that all young people have opportunities to engage with employers, whether through the curriculum, in the workplace or in other opportunities.

Actions

Reframed our Chairing of meetings:

- Moved to employer chaired meetings to secure further engagement.
- Initially introduced a system of rotating chair from Cornerstone Employers.
- CEC briefed each chair to help them prepare for the meeting, helping them to understand the Hub's strategic objectives and needs.
- Moved to single Employer Chair to improve consistency of sharing and increase engagement with the Chair for direction and policy.

Developed Groups to increase activity and participation from all:

- Task and finish groups were started pro-actively to respond to actions, building on shared interests - these reported back to the main meeting.
- Revised the Commitment plan and worked with the chair to identify key priorities – with actions taken forward for development.
- Formalised strategic action groups have replaced the task and finish groups. All Cornerstone Employers are part of a group. The groups meet 3 times per year (in addition to wider group meetings) and ensure all activities are aligned to key priorities.
- The action groups are: Influencing Strategic leaders; supporting Careers Leaders and Employers to engage; and supporting disadvantaged students.

Relates to Careers Hub Coordinated Actions



Amplifying technical and vocational routes



Removing barriers



Building leaders for the system



Employers build long term sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships with schools and colleges

Relates to Gatsby Benchmarks

2 Learning from career and labour market information.

3 Addressing the needs of each pupil.

4 Linking curriculum learning to careers.

5 Encounters with employers and employees.

6 Experiences of workplaces.

How did the work align with the Cornerstone Employer role?



Helped to promote the hubs and the role of careers and education



Helped to tackle disadvantage



Helped to achieve better outcomes for young people



Helped attract and retain EAs

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Outcomes

Early Wins:

Output from smaller groups has been positive, with stronger relationships between the groups, and more effective prioritisation leading to more action. Groups identify actions for implementation then use the main group for sign off and dissemination of actions.

The outputs of the informal Task and Finish groups included:

- A guide for virtual work experience for use by Career leaders with their own pool of employers, providing an opportunity to have school-led Virtual Work Experience, rather than through other providers.
- A draft common evaluation for employers to use when delivering activities. This has been shared with another Combined Authority project, benefitting businesses, including SMEs, who are developing their school engagement.
- An activity linked to International Women in Engineering Day – delivered virtually, accessible to all schools in the Hub.

Emerging:

The 3 new formal Action groups are operating effectively and have planned their activities for the coming academic year.

Learnings

Cornerstones need to be enthusiastic as individuals as well as the right businesses for the area. However, there also needs to be clear commitment from the business, not just enthusiastic individuals.

A rotating chair can be a good way for all Cornerstone Employers to be brought closer to the Group's aims but, ultimately, a consistent employer chair drives better engagement.

Ensure the ask from the Careers Hub is clear, and that the Commitment Plan reflects the needs and priorities of the Cornerstones as well as the Careers Hub. This takes time!

The Cornerstone Employer Chair can be key in setting the agenda and needs to understand school/college needs as well as business needs. A Chair who is also an EA is a great mix.

Action Groups are a good opportunity to ensure everyone is engaging and active, and can be heard. The mix of personalities in each Action Group is also important – ensuring there is someone who will lead at least at this level. Look for specialities.

Next Steps

Actions will be rolled out in the next academic year, with monitoring to assess the effectiveness of this approach in achieving impacts. The Group have committed to the following activities:

Influencing Action Group: Run a symposium with Headteachers (or Academy Trust leaders) to understand barriers for schools and employers, identifying what good interventions look like and modelling this with key schools.

Supporting CLs and Employers Group: Create materials for employers and their supply chain to demonstrate the benefits of Work Experience and increase engagement.

Supporting disadvantaged students: Provide training on working with students with autism; develop materials demonstrating the benefits of working with/employing students with learning difficulties.