

Working with students with SEND: The benefits and challenges

Business Benefits

Supporting these young people on their career journey will benefit you and your employees. Employers who are already actively engaged in supporting SEND students tell us this.

Let's look at some of the benefits you could enjoy:

- **Increased employee engagement:** employees who believe they work for an organisation that cares and represents the society within which it operates are likely to be more engaged.
- **Employee development:** being involved in the planning and delivery of a work encounter or experience for students can improve skills such as project management, coaching, leadership and stakeholder engagement.
- **Improvements in the way you operate or how you market your products/services:** With 2.16% of adults in the UK having a learning disability, this demographic is possibly already part of your customer/consumer base, as well as part of your workforce. Therefore, supporting students with SEND can give you an insight into how people with learning disabilities communicate, learn and engage with others. You may discover a better way of marketing your products or services or identifying a clearer way of sharing information about your company. You may learn about what type of adjustments these students may need when they are employed and often, these adjustments will be beneficial to many of your employees.
- **Identifying a talent pipeline:** depending upon the nature of your business, you may find by developing a strong school/college relationship, you can work together to nurture specific skills that your business will need in the future.



Our time working with young people with SEND has helped develop our community outreach delivery. The team is now more aware of the diverse needs of young people and we have each developed our communication and delivery skills. From the wider business perspective, it has given us a far better insight into the challenges young people with SEND face when attempting to enter employment and just how much of an asset these young people can be to employers.

Chris Mossman,
RAF Chief Technician
MOD Kineton Barracks

Let's look at some of the benefits you could enjoy (continued):

- **Enhanced reputation:** by supporting your local community and demonstrating your organisation as a socially responsible business, you will appeal to customers/consumers, shareholders and investors alike.
- **Improving your diversity outlook:** by working with SEND students, you get to appreciate the different abilities of those with learning disabilities and the opportunities that could bring you as an employer who embraces a diverse workforce. Check out this [example from Buckinghamshire County Council](#).
- **Business growth:** the spending power of disabled people in the UK is £249billion. By being a fully inclusive and responsible business, you will be appealing to those customers/consumers with disabilities.

Beyond delivering meaningful work encounters and experiences of the workplace, you may not be fully aware of the number of benefits [employing people with learning disabilities bring](#). These include improved retention; increased productivity and reduced sickness absence. Supported employment is sometimes used as a model for supporting people with disabilities to gain and retain employment.

The Chartered Institute of Personal Development and Education and Employers produced a report in January 2021 about [The Value of Volunteering](#). The report connects the benefits for employers and employees of volunteering in schools and colleges, analysing different volunteering activities and different areas of benefit.



To find out more about the benefits of employing young people with learning disabilities, take a look at:

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities [Employers Guide to Employing People with a Learning Disability](#).

[A Dozen Brilliant Reasons to Employ Disabled People](#), a short book written by Jane Hatton, Chief Executive Officer of Evenbreak, a job board specifically for disabled people.

The [British Association for Supported Employment \(BASE\)](#).



A Case Study from Tom McAuslin, CEO of the Police Rehabilitation Centre, Flint House and Brookfields School

Flint House is a residential rehabilitation centre which provides physiotherapy and wider health care to serving and retired police officers.

The Centre is an ideal environment for young adults with learning difficulties to practise workplace skills particularly in the housekeeping, gardening and catering departments. We work on the premise of: "It's what they can do – not what they can't." We are now in our fourth year and over 60 students have undertaken our 6-week work-placement programme. We are also very pleased that we now employ 3 students, on a part time basis and I'm sure they won't be the last.

I would encourage employers of local organisations large and small to seriously think about giving these amazing young adults the opportunity to get workplace experience.



Measuring the Benefits

In this section we share the business benefits that many employers have experienced from supporting students with SEND and in the Evaluation and Review section, we include guidance on how you can reflect on and identify what benefits have been realised. It's important therefore, when you are within the planning stage that you consider what metrics you may want to focus on.

Here are some suggestions:



Employee disability awareness and confidence levels.



Skill development in employees supporting the activity.



Employee engagement.



Learning that has resulted in improvements in ways of working and/or processes.



Reduction in a skill shortage: this can be relevant if you are looking to develop a long-term relationship in supporting students.



Sales of your products/services: socially responsible businesses can be more attractive to customers/consumers.

A Little About the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from being discriminated both at work and in wider society. There are a number of protected characteristics under the Equality Act and disability is one of them

It's not necessary to know everything about the Equality Act 2010 for providing work encounters for SEND students, however, it's useful to have a broad understanding and Mencap have produced a helpful [factsheet](#).

Let the Careers and Enterprise Company Support You

This resource will support you from taking the initial steps of engaging with a school or college through to delivering a great work encounter or experience of the workplace, providing you with guidance and helpful tips. By engaging with the Careers and Enterprise Company, we can support you through this entire journey, providing guidance via our experienced colleagues and introducing you to other like-minded employers who can share their own experiences. To find out more about the benefits of working with us, click on [this link](#) and hear from one of our Cornerstone Employers via [this video](#).



Perceived Barriers and Misconceptions

The challenges that schools and colleges face in securing work encounters and experiences of the workplace for their students with SEND, are very often due to a number of barriers and misconceptions. Several are not barriers at all, and the rest can be easily overcome by using this resource to guide you as an employer and enabling you to feel confident and in control. In fact, the social model of disability says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference.

Barriers & Misconceptions	Solution
<p>Communication: worries over how to communicate, what to say and using the right terminology, as well as how to act and behave around SEND students.</p>	<p>The best advice is to use simple and clear communication, avoiding jargon, abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms. Our Tips for Effective Communication provides more guidance.</p> <p>Over the years, the terminology used to describe people with learning disabilities has changed, so it's no wonder people worry as they don't want to say the wrong thing and cause offence. People/a person with a learning disability is generally an accepted term, but the best tip is to speak to the teaching staff to find out what terms are acceptable for their students.</p>
<p>Premises: a view that your premises or working environment won't be suitable for students with SEND.</p>	<p>A risk assessment carried out will ensure any risks for students visiting your premises are identified and controlled. It may be that certain areas of your premises will be off limits, but it is likely that some aspect of your working environment will be safe for students to experience. Our Health and Safety guidance on Page 9 of our Choosing an Activity guide provides further details on risk assessments.</p> <p>Don't think that students have to experience your business 'hands-on' to benefit. A classroom-based discussion or activity can be just as beneficial in delivering an inspiring experience and these can also be delivered virtually.</p>



We are a local food factory with high standards of hygiene and health and safety and during my time as an employer consultant (prior to becoming HR Manager at Bumble Hole) the main barrier to employing people with individual needs was the unfair assumption that these elements would be compromised. We know that simply is not the case.

Quote from Bumble Hole Foods Ltd Case Study

Barriers & Misconceptions	Solution
<p>Nothing to offer due to the professional/skilled nature of our business: a misconception that just because you employ a highly qualified/skilled workforce, you won't be able to offer a suitable work encounter or experience of the workplace.</p>	<p>Every employer has something to offer, so it's about choosing an activity you are comfortable to deliver. These resources (see Appendix) include information on the large range of activities that employers can choose to deliver, so consider the following, which are some activities that don't focus directly on the nature of your business:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Delivering an activity related to employability skills • Job seeking support e.g. CV writing, interview skills • Become an Enterprise Advisor.
<p>Too much paperwork to complete to ensure the experience is safe.</p>	<p>There will be some paperwork to complete if the students are visiting your premises and this will be a risk assessment. The process is no different to completing a risk assessment in your normal line of business. Our Health and Safety guidance on Page 9 of our Choosing an Activity guide provides details on risk assessments.</p> <p>There will be no additional insurance you will need to put in place over and above your existing public liability (and employers' liability if you are offering work experience).</p> <p>Your existing health and safety induction for visitors to your premises should be sufficient, however, check with teaching staff in case you need to adapt how this is communicated to the students or if any additional measures are required, for example, evacuating the building.</p>
<p>Resource: a misconception that it will take a lot of your employee's time to deliver a work encounter or experience of the workplace.</p>	<p>As with the misconception that you may not have anything to offer, there are a wide range of activities you can engage in with students. These resources (see Appendix) include information on the large range of activities that employers can choose to deliver, so consider the following, which are some activities that don't require a lot of employee resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring. • Give a talk or presentation at an assembly or in a lesson. • Record and share a video on a particular topic such as: their job; interview skills; employability skills. • Attend a careers speed networking event. <p>The majority of activities can also be delivered virtually, eliminating travelling time for employees.</p>

Barriers & Misconceptions	Solution
<p>Leadership approval will be needed.</p>	<p>Many of the activities discussed within these resources do not demand large amounts of employee resource or cost. You would just need to secure line manager approval for your employee's volunteering time. Early engagement with the school/college will enable you to assess how much employee time is needed. If you believe leadership approval will be needed due to the commitment of resource and/or cost, refer to page 3 of our 'Gaining support' guide for further details on gaining Senior Leadership buy-in.</p>
<p>Training: a misconception that employees will need specialist training to be able to effectively engage with SEND students.</p>	<p>Employees do not need any training to be able to deliver meaningful work encounters or experiences of the workplace. This view often comes from lack of confidence and concerns from employees that they may say or do the wrong thing, or that they will need to deal with challenging situations. First and foremost, staff at the school/college can answer your questions and allay any specific concerns that employees may have, so don't be afraid to ask for their guidance. If any of the students have behaviours that could be challenging, the school/college will most likely inform you beforehand, but if you're concerned, ask the question. If they do arise during the activity, the school/college staff will deal with it.</p> <p>This said, there is a benefit to your organisation in improving levels of disability confidence and awareness amongst your workforce. There are many providers of this training such as Disability Rights UK, who offer Disability Confidence and Awareness Training, which can be tailored to your specific needs.</p>

Appendix

Opportunity	What it involves	Level of commitment
Visit/virtual visit to employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting a group of students and teachers to visit your organisation. • Sharing information about your business, what you do and the types of jobs you have. • Usually includes a tour/virtual tour of your site. 	LOW
Visit/virtual visit to school/college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees visiting the school/college. • Sharing information about your business, what you do and the types of jobs you have. • Usually includes a tour/virtual tour of the school/college site. 	LOW
Sharing your career/employability resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may already have resources that you use to engage with schools/colleges that you can share. Consideration should be given to the content and whether this is suitable for SEND students and the school/college can advise you. 	LOW
A Day in the Life of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information on the day in the life of one of the types of jobs your business offers. Where possible, this should be aligned to the types of skills and abilities the students have or could develop. The school/college will support you with this. 	LOW
Work-related project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting a project for a group of students to work on, supported by employees. • Ideally the project should align to the work you do and where possible, be a real activity/problem to solve. • Students can be assigned various roles to encourage them working together as a team. 	MEDIUM

Opportunity	What it involves	Level of commitment
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees mentoring individual students. • This can be an arrangement that discusses work-related topics such as employability skills such as communication and problem-solving, or it could discuss other areas such as wellbeing. This will be dependent upon the employee's background/skill-set and the school's/college's advice. • The school/college will be able to match employees to the students. • Typically low resource requirement, for example, 30mins-1hr per month during the academic year. 	LOW
Business enterprise day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees working with a group of students to improve their employability skills by creating a product/service to sell. An example would be making a craft item such as Christmas cards to sell at the school's/college's Christmas fair. Or inviting them to your office/site to sell. 	MEDIUM
Setting up a business enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A longer term commitment where employees with the relevant skills, work with the students and their school/college, to set-up and run a business enterprise. An example would be a coffee shop on the school premises, or an allotment where they can grow produce to sell. 	HIGH
Deliver a lesson/ assembly that links your job tasks to the curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a core requirement that schools/colleges must try to achieve so they rely on businesses to get involved. Depending on the nature of your business, there will be a link to a school subject, for example, you may travel to a variety of countries and be able to talk about different cultures in a geography lesson. • Employability skills is another subject you could deliver a lesson on, covering areas such as communication and problem solving. 	LOW

Opportunity	What it involves	Level of commitment
Work experience (block or extended)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined as a placement with an employer in which a young person in either year 10, 11, 12 or 13 carries out a range of tasks in much the same way as an employee with the emphasis on learning from the experience. Typically there are two types, block or extended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Block work experience placements are usually 3-5 days long. – Extended placements are usually 1-2 days per week for up to a year and are aimed at students studying vocational courses that require a longer period of work experience. 	MEDIUM - HIGH
Work shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This involves a student shadowing an employee, to give them an insight into the job role without being hands-on. 	LOW
Design a competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting students to work within a team to solve a business challenge that is either real or similar to a real work scenario. You can set a task, then provide support throughout, providing feedback and advice. If there are several teams involved, you can award a winner and hold a celebration. 	MEDIUM
Job seeking support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can include advising on interview skills, including how to prepare for an interview and you could run a mock interview or assessment style centre for students. • Dependent upon the age of the students and their likely career path, you could advise and support with job hunting and applying for jobs. 	LOW - MEDIUM
Careers event/fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend a careers fair with a stand and be able to provide information and advice on your business and the types of jobs you employ, along with the skills needed. Share what career opportunities and pathways you have for young people into your organisation. 	MEDIUM
Careers speed networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to students for approximately five minutes on your job role in a carousel style format, answering any questions the students may have. 	LOW

Opportunity	What it involves	Level of commitment
Supported Internship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are structured study programmes based primarily at the employer's office/site. They enable young people aged 16-24 with an Education, Health and Care plan to achieve sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills they need for work, through learning in the workplace. Supported internships are unpaid, and last for a minimum of six months, but usually last an academic year. 	HIGH
Teacher/career advisor experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome a teacher/career advisor to your workplace for a day or more of work experience to provide them with an insight into your sector and how they can link it to their teaching. 	LOW
Becoming an Enterprise Advisor - Careers programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an Enterprise Adviser you'll work directly with a school or college's senior leadership team to develop their careers programme. Suitable for individuals who have a passion for raising the aspirations of young people and the strategic skills to help put opportunities with local employers at the heart of a young person's education. 	MEDIUM
Attend a parents evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some schools/colleges will welcome employers coming to talk about their business and employment opportunities at parent's evenings, as it helps to raise aspirations of the young person and their families/carers. 	LOW