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## Outstanding collaboration with employers: Foxes Academy

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### Brief description

High standards, high expectations and outstanding collaborations with employers ensure that many learners with learning disabilities at Foxes Academy are prepared exceptionally well for their progress into paid, supported or voluntary work. Learners develop occupational expertise and confidence through sustained practice that is individualised to build on skills acquired; meet personal, social and vocational needs; and support personal ambitions.

### Overview – the provider's message

'Foxes Academy is a very special place where we achieve great things! It is a safe, caring and happy environment. We have very high expectations of everyone who walks through our doors and foster a culture of, 'we can.'



We believe the most important factor in excellent vocational training for our learners is that the training takes place in a real-work environment with the public as customers. Instilling the work ethos and its attributes such as punctuality, teamwork, customer care and personal appearance lead the way to sustainability of work once learners have left the college. Professional chefs, restaurant managers and housekeepers fulfil their hotel duties in the real

environment, at the same time supporting learners to progress in a practical way towards nationally recognised qualifications.

Underpinning the success of our learners is the integrated, highly-skilled therapeutic approach that empowers resilience in our young people and enables them to achieve their learning outcomes, long-term employability and potential. We have a passion and culture to ensure our learners get the 'best' vocational education enabling them to get jobs and join the workforce.

*Kerry McCarthy, Funding and Marketing Executive*

## The good practice in detail

All activities at the Foxes Academy help increase the employability and independence skills of learners with learning disabilities to encourage them to take personal responsibility for their choices and decisions. As identified in the [inspection report](#), the realistic work environment, excellent use of the wider community and the diverse curriculum provide a wide range of learning opportunities to develop employability and independence.



Educational, vocational, residential and therapeutic staff all play a strong part in enabling learners to achieve their personal, social and vocational goals. All have a strong focus on the primary goals of achieving sustainable employment with appropriate care and support in place. The collaboration begins before learners start at Foxes with a thorough [residential initial assessment](#) and with opportunities for learners, parents and carers to discuss the options available. Learning programmes are reviewed regularly and adapted as learners make progress and acquire new skills.

## A clear line of sight to work

By basing their programmes around a commercial hotel, Foxes Academy is preparing learners for the world of work from the moment they start their course.

At the earliest opportunity, learners get involved in real activities, including preparing meals for other learners or [undertaking housekeeping duties](#). Initially, learners may require high levels of support or supervision. This is planned and regularly reviewed to ensure learners progress as quickly as their understanding and abilities allow.



- Learners experience different areas of work, receiving regular careers advice and guidance, before they choose which area within hospitality and catering to specialise in.
- The range and variety of experiences given to learners enables them to cope with situations as they arise. For example, if a guest is not happy with their meal or a plate is dropped, learners have to respond appropriately.
- Learning from mistakes enables learners to develop strategies and contingencies when dealing with unforeseen situations, prompting them to problem-solve and use their initiative where appropriate.
- Any learning points are reviewed later as the business has to continue and there are very few opportunities to stop the situation, go back and do it again.
- Qualifications in food hygiene are delivered in the workplace, using occupational specialists.
- Very close working relationships with employers has led to an extensive work placement scheme that matches the needs of the learners and the employers.



## Learning in different settings

All learners develop their essential vocational skills while working at the hotel. They interact



with residential guests, customers using the restaurant and delegates attending conferences and seminars. By providing conference facilities, Foxes hotel brings a wider range of customers into contact with learners. Organisations including the local tourist board members and the Chamber of Commerce now use the hotel resulting in potential work-experience providers experiencing the high standards and quality of service achieved by the learners and subsequently offering work placements.

Although the hotel provides a good range of work settings including, reception, food preparation, waiting and housekeeping, all learners benefit from work experience outside of the hotel. Each placement is realistic and linked to the learners' individual goals, usually reflecting the likely locations learners will progress to on leaving Foxes. Several employers commented that Foxes' learners were some of the best interviewees, being well-prepared and able to

use appropriate vocational language.

This attention to detail in preparing learners for placements results in highly successful experiences for learners.

- The match between the needs and ambitions of the learner and the experience employers can offer is particularly effective.
- Employers receive excellent advice, guidance and support before and during work-experience. The majority of employers are small and local, although other national employers play a role in supporting learners' understanding of wider work opportunities. This helps them to them understand the similarities and differences between large and small organisations. Partnership work between Foxes, employers and other learning providers is genuinely collaborative, with feedback and observations from employers influencing the learning and training provided in the hotel.



## Dual professional

All vocational tutors have strong experience and expertise in hospitality and catering and they are also qualified further education teachers. They keep up-to-date with current good practice through links with the industry, including visits to and placement with organisations considered leaders in hospitality and catering. During college holidays, staff continue to run the hotel.

- Literacy, numeracy and ICT tutors meet regularly with vocational tutors to support them in high-quality delivery of embedded literacy and numeracy.
- The work-experience manager attends regional and national events to keep up-to-date with occupational standards.
- Vocational team tutors attend national events, such as the 'FoodShow', as well as other training events to enhance their skills.



As well as investing in maintaining the occupational knowledge and skills of staff, Foxes ensures relevant staff are qualified to give good, relevant information, advice and guidance enabling learners to make informed decisions about their future.

## A commitment to a two-way street

During college holidays, many learners find work experience close to their homes. As learners prepare to leave college, more formal links are established with potential employers. The well-managed transition ensures that the vast majority of learners progress into appropriate, sustainable work. Other providers benefit

from the expertise developed by Foxes and are able to offer other practical placements as well.

Employers comment on how their understanding of disability and the potential of disabled people as employees is significantly increased as a result of the joint working with learners and staff. Other hotels now ask Foxes' staff to visit and recommend how they can become more inclusive for guests and employees. An annual dinner and awards evening celebrates the contribution made by employers who support the work of Foxes. New and potential work-experience employers are encouraged to attend and discuss with established employers the benefits of offering work placements.

## Provider background



**Foxes Academy** is a residential training hotel and college for young adults with learning disabilities. It is situated on the seafront of the beautiful holiday town of Minehead, Somerset. They offer a variety of courses lasting up to three years. The Academy has consistently supported young people with learning disabilities to achieve sustainable employment in the hospitality and catering industry. The ethos behind the college is an unrelenting passion to support, guide

and ensure that every young person who trains with them achieves their potential.

## Background

*It's about work...* the summary report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) highlighted characteristics and features of outstanding vocational teaching, learning and assessment. These are in line with the criteria for judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Ofsted's *Common Inspection Framework for FE and skills 2012*, but also focus on the additional, distinctive processes of design and delivery which characterise excellent vocational provision.

The case studies in this set were compiled in response to the CAVTL report which highlighted the importance of ensuring a 'clear line of sight to work' on vocational programmes.

**The Education Training Foundation** has been asked to take forward the recommendations from the Commission's report.

## Other examples in this set

Barking and Dagenham (employability): [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140003](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140003)

Barking and Dagenham (motorsport): [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140004](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140004)

Bridgwater College: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140005](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140005)

Exeter College: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130259](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130259)

Hull College: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130258](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130258)

Leeds City College: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140007](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140007)

People and Business Development Ltd: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140009](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140009)

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140008](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140008)

Wendy Shorter Interiors: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140010](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140010)

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice)