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Developing employability skills in a realistic environment: Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce

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Brief description

A working workshop undertaking real tasks for local businesses helps learners to develop good employability skills. Work is completed to commercial time and quality standards and provides learners with the confidence and skills to progress to a work-placement or job with a local employer.

Overview – the provider's message

'The workshops were designed initially to prepare learners for work by providing them with experience of doing simple tasks. It evolved into a more structured project to develop learners' work ethic in a sheltered environment before going out into the workplace. Some young people have massive barriers and difficult social needs or problems and require more support to prepare them for the commercial pressures of work. The sheltered workshop allows them to develop true work ethics and understand what working for an employer is really about without experiencing harsh lessons in the world of employment. Learners are able to develop over time in a sheltered environment and learn about what employers need from them. The aim is to develop the necessary work skills for them to progress into an apprenticeship.'



Sarah Temperton

Sarah Temperton, Head of Training, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce

The good practice in detail

Some learners are not ready to face the world of work due to learning difficulties, difficult social needs or low esteem and confidence. Training providers sometimes try to prepare them for work through supportive in-house provision or work experience with a supportive employer. Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce (DNCC) has developed a realistic working workshop where learners carry out real work tasks for local businesses.

Creating the right environment

DNCC provides real practical work tasks for which companies will pay, providing the work is done to a good standard. Packing, sorting, administration work and printing are some examples of simple labour-intensive work that companies often outsource. Some work is carried out in a classroom environment initially, particularly work such as administration or packaging. The work skills are formally recognised and accredited to demonstrate to learners what they can and have achieved. This helps to build their confidence and provide future employers with evidence of their competencies. Good links with local employers are carefully built up to provide the work tasks and to provide routes for future work experience or employment.

The work can often be repetitive and DNCC sells the benefits of the underlying work skills to the learners and what they will gain through performing the tasks to a consistently high standard. 'Let them see and understand the importance of working to deadlines, working as part of a team and maintaining high-quality work', says Sarah. 'They need to understand that there are important work ethic skills to be learnt, not just the practical tasks of printing or packing or whatever. The work skills that they learn and practice then need to be applied in the real world, either through work experience in their preferred occupation or a job when they are ready.'

Learners' experiences

Learners experience a wide range of work activities to help them to develop employability skills. The workshops simulate workplace requirements as closely as possible. Learners have



Learners at work

to 'clock in' and out to learn the importance of good timekeeping. The work has to be completed to tight timescales and to high-quality standards. Learners' attitudes and skills are carefully monitored and regularly reviewed to provide evidence for a recognised qualification in employability. As learners gain experience, they are given additional responsibilities, such as becoming the workshop supervisor or quality controller within the sheltered workshop environment. This helps to increase their knowledge and confidence.

Outcomes for learners

Learners gain a better understanding about work and are instilled with a strong ethos of discipline, accountability and responsibility. The protected work environment allows them to develop and practice real work skills in a protected but busy work environment. Issues such as timekeeping, working as part of a team, maintaining high-quality work and working for long periods on sometimes repetitive tasks are addressed without the pressures of production and profit at this stage. Learners' confidence and experience gradually improve and, when they feel confident enough, a work-placement opportunity or even a job with a local employer is found.



Learners at work

Learners also develop and improve their personal skills. The work improves their self-confidence and working as part of a team and, by giving them responsibilities, helps to improve their self worth. They start to feel more capable and useful and show that they can work effectively as part of a team. Their chances of remaining in work and completing an apprenticeship in their preferred vocation are greatly enhanced as a result of their time in sheltered workshops with DNCC.

Provider background



The Reception

Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce (DNCC) is a company limited by guarantee based in Chesterfield. It represents approximately 3,000 member organisations across the two counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The training department has a main site in Chesterfield and centres in Glossop, Bolsover, Shirebrook, Ripley, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottingham and Swadlincote. DNCC is funded by the Skills Funding Agency for apprenticeships in dental nursing, engineering, construction, information and communication technology, and business administration

and law. It is funded by the Young People's Funding Agency for programmes in preparation for life and work. In addition, DNCC provides Train to Gain programmes on behalf of the Derbyshire Network.

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