

ARR 5: The influence of Work Based Learning within a Post 19 provision on the employability opportunities for SLD learners.

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Background/Context

Provision for young people with special needs after they leave school is a huge concern for many parents/carers. As Pam a parent / participant explained: 'We are alarmed at the lack of Post -19 provision within Lancashire for SLD learners' (Pam). Although technically adults, many young people with learning disabilities are far from ready to join the world of work. This action research project explores if a post-19 intervention that includes WBL sessions delivered within a Special Educational Needs (SEN) School (Tor View Specialist Learning Community) can help extend opportunities into employment for learners with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) or more Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) with additional needs. In addition to learners improving skills relevant for the workplace, this WBL initiative also improves the school's relationship with the community and offers opportunities for professional development beneficial to local employers.

Target Student Group

Within this pilot Post-19 intervention the learners selected had special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which are categories as SLD or MLD with additional needs, which cannot currently be met in a local FE college. The Welsh Assembly defines young people with SLD as having:

... significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. They may also have associated difficulties in mobility and co-ordination, communication and perception and the acquisition of self-help skills. Pupils with SLD will need support in all areas of the curriculum. They are likely to require teaching of self-help, independence and social skills (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp7-8).

Work Based Learning (WBL)

The cross curricular focus of work-based learning means it can help learners improve academically. WBL helps learners to recognise the relevance and real world application of their learning in the classroom. Work in school enables learners to acquire various work skills related to their career choice, which they then use within the work place.

Research Questions

1. What does Work Based Learning (WBL) look like?
2. What is the influence of WBL for SLD learners their family and wider community?
3. Can WBL experience help create future employment opportunities?

Research process

The following stages were undertaken to gather and analyse data for this action research project. The data was collected between November 2015 and May 2016, with a sample size of three learners (referred to throughout as Sam, Sally and Sue), three parents/carers (referred to as Paula, Pam and Pat) and four employers (referred to as Eve, Edna, Edith and Emily) involves the following phases:

EXISTING RESEARCH

Looking at the existing literature, Emerson and Hatton (2008) found that 38% of all people with SLD were in some form of education or training, this leaves 62% who are not in employment. Identifying the reasons for why some learners may struggle to gain employment and explore the effectiveness of a school based intervention therefore seemed an appropriate line of enquiry.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT DATA

To provide a local policy context, data from Lancashire's Young Peoples Service and Transitions team was reviewed to identify what percentage of current post-19 learners in Lancashire had gained employment. This data provided a baseline from which to develop. For example, from the data gained, it was clear that the percentage of young people with special educational needs in employment in Lancashire was low.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The third stage involved asking parents and carers to complete questionnaires regarding current post-19 provision in Lancashire and their views about the impact of the pilot post-19 initiative. The intention was to gather their views and find out the importance of the WBL opportunity for their son or daughter as well as for the family

INTERVIEWING EMPLOYERS

Employers from related work placements were interviewed in their own setting to gather views on employing young people with SEN. A standard set of questions was used for all employers:

- What employability skills do you look for?
- What concerns do you have about working with a young person with an SEN?
- Would you see yourself employing a young person with an SEN in the future? Why?
- Have you had experience of working with young people with an SEN before?
- Has working with a young person with an SEN changed your perception?
- Do you see this pilot project continuing? Growing? How?

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis involved:

- Reading and reviewing transcripts from interviews;
- Capturing emerging codes using a mind map;
- Confirming emerging codes by tallying the frequency of parents/carers/employer comments relating to the theme.

Themes and main findings

Once data had been analysed, core themes were identified. The following core themes then provided a structure for the presentation of the pilot study findings. The themes identified:



What does Work based learning look like?

WHERE DOES TRAINING HAPPEN?

Work based learning can be undertaken in a variety of locations. Typically initial training and theory work is delivered in a training facility such as a school/college. During these sessions learners are taught key skills in various work related areas, training is tailored to learners needs and focuses on their specific vocational pathway. Using the skills taught, learners consolidate their learning in an appropriate workplacement. *“Work based learning expressively merges theory with practise, knowledge with experience.”* (Raelin, 2008 p.2)



WHEN?

For SLD learners, WBL is better when it is delivered on a weekly basis, as this provides consistently. For this group of learner it is important that the curriculum is:

carefully broken down into small-steps with plenty of repetition, reinforcement and encouragement (Hale and Gillet, N.D).

In the Pilot Post-19 WBL initiative, SLD learners accessed work based learning for two half days. This encompassed both theory and practical application. Parents and carers explained that *‘employability skills taught need to be embedded’* (Pat) This may increase the likelihood of skills taught becoming *‘second nature’* (Pat) to the learner.

WHAT SHOULD THE WBL CURRICULUM CONTAIN?

According to employers, a high quality work-based learning curriculum should include the following features:

- Clear roles and responsibilities for all staff involved including work place employers;
- Appropriate long-term planning that specifies learning goals tailored to each learner;
- Assessments to identify learners’ skills, interests and support needs whilst on placement;
- Reinforcement of skills during training and work placement with cross-curricular links;
- Opportunities for a range of work-based learning experiences, such as hospitality and retail.

WHY IS WBL IMPORTANT FOR SLD LEARNERS?

- When parents and carers were asked why they thought work-based learning was important to their child, there was a strong reference to being an *'accepted member of society'* (Pam). They were concerned that the wider community tend to see young people with a disability who are unable to gain employment are also unable to contribute to society.
- The pilot post-19 WBL experience was intended to help change negative views of both parents/carers and society by enhancing learners opportunities to gain employment in the future.

What influence could this make on the young person, their family and the community?

There were three main influences: the young person, family, and the wider community.



THE YOUNG PERSON:

According to feedback from the young people, their parents/carers and employers, the WBL experience appears to have been successful. It enabled each young person to establish a clearer connection between education and work whilst exploring various vocational pathways of their choice.

Work-based learning experiences provided the young people with opportunities to develop key skills such as -communication, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism. All of which will support the young person in future employment.



Research by the Department for Education suggest that:

some young people with EHC plans may need longer in education or training in order to achieve their outcomes and make an effective transition into adulthood.' (Department for Education, 2014)

Anecdotally, the Post-19 WBL initiative seems to be providing the extended period of time and increased level of support. It has enabled the young people to continue to learn in an appropriate education setting where new skills are learnt and adopted in the workplace.

Sue was very positive about her experience, she explained: *'I love working at the pub, I got 3 fivers on Sunday!'*

Observations of Sally's body language provided evidence of improvements in her communication and the big grin on her face suggested that both young people were happy in their work placement. When talking to them, it appeared that they felt they had:

- ownership of their 'job';
- felt safe;
- were excited at the fact that they were getting paid, so much so, that they asked to work for longer periods.

This positive experience of training and work opportunities has encouraged and influenced the young people to develop further not only in terms of future employability but also personally and socially.



Figure 1: Wordle based on key words from questionnaires of parents/carers.

THE FAMILY:

Providing young people with an opportunity for WBL not only influences them but also their families. Through their Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), young people with SEN now have increased access to education to the age of 25, which not only supports the young person but also their family.

'The focus on this age group also brings a changing dynamic within the family.'

(Thom, G and Agur, M. 2014)

Families have expressed concerns regarding the *'lack of post 19 provisions in Lancashire for SLD learners'* (Pam). They were unwilling to send their children to residential education settings and felt very strongly that they should be *'educated whilst having the comfort and security of living at home'* (Pat). The Post-19 provision provides a secure and appropriate education in their locality, therefore having a more positive influence.



A learner accessing the local bank

From current findings it has become evident that the Post-19 provision has had a positive influence at home. Providing the young people with a bespoke curriculum based on WBL, key skills and independence skills, this has enhanced their opportunities to access the community in a fuller sense. *'Without this she would struggle to be an active member of society and would probably not get a job'* (Pam).

THE WIDER COMMUNITY:

The community around the young person can include multi-agencies from local care providers, service providers and employers. There can be many benefits to the community from work-based learning experiences and can *'motivate potential employees and future employers to employ job ready young people'* (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015), which then could potentially reduce costs in training during the initial stages of employment. Ensuring that all parties provide *'clear, detailed, and repeated directions to teach skills needed, will then produce successful job performance.'* (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015)

Teaching WBL and independence skills, on many occasions, can be transferable. All employers ensure their employees are aware of, for example, health and safety rules. These skills can be transferable allowing the young person to demonstrate skills learnt in various work settings. This then strengthens community partnerships.

'Establishing collaboration between schools and employers leads to a more productive local economy and, ultimately, builds thriving communities.' (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015)



Health and safety when vacuuming

Can there be employment opportunities?



Work based learning is a worldwide project, where the Federal Partners in Transition (FPT) have quoted that **'Work-based learning experiences have been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of adult employment success for students and youth with disabilities.'**

Alarminglly, from research, it has shown that 81.1% of SEN school leavers in Lancashire were not in employment at any one point during 2010/2012. This is our current cohort of post 19 learners. (See figure 2)

On a positive note, the research found that Rossendale had the highest employment rate in Lancashire at 24.3%. With our new Post 19 provision growing, there could be opportunities for this percentage to increase.

'For some young people progression to employment will be attractive and possible, but may not happen due to limited job opportunities.' (Thom and Agur: 2014)

An area to focus on is the relationship between both schools and employers. Creating the link between both may open up more job opportunities for these young people, ensuring that they have the appropriate skills to complete the job as necessary.

A recent report from the National Development Team for Inclusion noted that:

'The overwhelming majority of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are capable of sustained paid employment, with the right preparation and support.' (Ndti.org.uk, 2016)

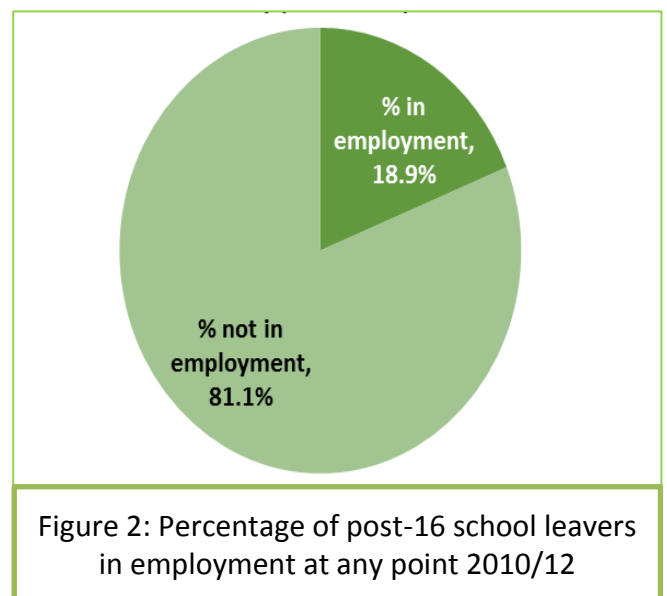


Figure 2: Percentage of post-16 school leavers in employment at any point 2010/12



Training in a commercial kitchen

This is a positive read, with both the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 strongly endorsing that these young people should participate in work. With this recent report, it is hoped that provisions, such as our post 19, will flourish within the East Lancashire locality. This could give more young people the opportunity to further their education with the possibility of gaining employment in the future.

Further Research

Based on the insights of this paper, further research would be beneficial into the views of other SEN schools. The following are some potential areas for further investigation:

- What is their view on a Post-19 provision?
- Is their current cohort of SLD leavers attending an appropriate provision for their needs?
- What is the likely hood of those young people gaining employment?

Further to this, expanding the link between employers and schools in Lancashire could open up many more opportunities and questions.

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