

Inclusion into Employment

Derwen College

What the Judges Said

So touching to read these stories – the difference this college is making to the lives of students and their families is immense. The support being offered to get their students into employment is inspirational.

Context

Derwen College, in Oswestry, is a national specialist college for young people aged from 16 to 25 with learning difficulties and disabilities. The college focus is on employability and development of independent living and social skills. There are more than 180 people enrolled on programmes from local authorities spanning the UK, including nearly 100 residential students. Students are based at the college's main site near Oswestry, in Shropshire, and at three smaller satellite sites. Learners follow vocational pathways in Hospitality and Housekeeping, Horticulture, Retail and Creative Arts with work experience opportunities and relevant qualifications delivered by expert teaching staff.

Derwen College offers on-site work placements for students in its commercial areas which are open to the public. These include a restaurant, café, print shop, garden centre and shop. The college also runs a three-bedroom training hotel supported by hotel chain Premier Inn.

Derwen College has received three consecutive 'Outstanding' Ofsted gradings and has been shortlisted in the Times Education Supplement Awards prestigious Specialist FE Provider of the Year category for 2018 and 2019.

As testament to their hard work, Derwen College's Work Experience and Transition Team are pleased to have received the nationally respected Fair Train Work Experience Quality Standard at the highest Gold level for the third consecutive time.

Entry

"I like helping and doing work. I like working with everyone and being busy doing jobs."

Retail student, Jack

“Being employed at Premier Inn has taught me important skills: to be punctual, time keeping and to have a smart appearance and make a good first impression; how to deal with all sorts of people and visitors to the hotel. This has been a great scheme for me and I’m really glad that I had the opportunity to do it.”

Former Hospitality and Housekeeping student Mary, who now works at Premier Inn

“I do stock-taking, checking dates, keeping things tidy. I do this in the Garden Centre and now I do it at Spar. I like working in Spar every Tuesday, stacking shelves and talking to customers. When I leave Derwen I would like to work in a supermarket and earn my own money.”

Retail student, Tom

These are just some of many quotes from students at Derwen College, in Shropshire, who aspire to take their part in their community through work and supported independent living.

Adults with a learning disability are under-represented in paid employment; figures suggest that only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work (Mencap/HSCIC 2015). Derwen College is working to buck this trend through on-site vocational training and innovative collaboration and partnerships with local and national employers.

Derwen’s Work Experience and Transition Team work hard to build partnership links with businesses and organisations throughout the country. At present we work with 24 employers including national chains. To try to combat the low national employment rate, the college invests in a comprehensive and up-to-date programme of training and development of college staff and the provision of industry standard facilities and equipment.

The college has also launched an innovative ‘industry champion’ initiative, working with employers who share their expertise and support our programme areas in working to the most current industry practice and standards.

Our sustained partnership with Premier Inn exemplifies our Inclusion in Employment model.

In 2013 we began work with Premier Inn to support a student with a work experience placement in a Premier Inn hotel site. Proving a success, Premier Inn realised the incredible potential of our students and saw an opportunity to facilitate more work

experience placements. In 2014, a branded training room on-site at the college was developed to enable learners to develop industry standard skills with staff who had received industry standard training. Links were developed to work with the national hotel chain to create work experience opportunities at Premier Inn hotels as students progressed.

In 2017 the training facility at Derwen developed to 'Hotel 751', Premier Inn working alongside Novus Property Solutions, built a Premier Inn training centre complete with a reception, three bedrooms and laundry room on site.

By the end of summer term 2018, from 36 students who participated in training since the beginning of the partnership in 2013, 16 had achieved paid employment with Premier Inn. With an employment rate of 44%, this course beats the 6% national average by 38%.

As part of this successful partnership, Derwen College hosted a Disability Awareness Day for Premier Inn staff so they feel supported and confident when working with learners and staff with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The college is also working with and providing a direct service to employers as part of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (match funded by The Midlands Engine) 'Investing in our Future Workforce' project. The project at Derwen will develop a series of web and mobile applications to support students into work and equip them with life-skills for independent assisted living. Part of this project will be to work with and provide a direct service to employers supporting them to overcome the barriers and potential misconceptions in employing a person with special educational needs. The project is exploring the use of apps in supporting traditional learning, starting with the launch of a Premier Inn app providing a step-by-step guide to making up hotel room at Derwen College's Training Hotel and off-site hotels.

Simon Ewins, Managing Director, Premier Inn:

"Premier Inn couldn't be prouder to work in partnership with this life-changing educational establishment and it's a joy to see the young people learn new skills and flourish under the guidance of the college and our hard-working teams. We're absolutely committed to giving back to the communities in which we serve so we're delighted to have Derwen students in employment with us across the country. The partnership is about more than simply 'giving back' though – we get so much ourselves. We think business excellence is cemented by diversity and this partnership in particular not only enables a pipeline of employees but inspires and motivates our teams."

Don't just take our word for it ...

Mary, former Derwen College student and Premier Inn employee:

“I have been employed as a receptionist at Premier Inn, Greenwich, in south east London since November 2016.

“Through a scheme that was devised by the college in conjunction with Premier Inn, I was able to gain work experience and, with that, the confidence and skills to make the transition from being a student to paid employment..

“When I started at Premier Inn, Chester, initially I had some support with travelling the and so on, but after a few months I was able to gain enough confidence to get to work independently. Initially I started doing morning shifts and progressed to evening shifts.

“In 2016, I graduated from Derwen College and I moved back home to the Greenwich area. I was enjoying my work experience at Premier Inn located in Chester and was able to continue my work experience at Premier Inn, located in Greenwich. After a few months on work experience, they offered me paid employment.

“My work on reception involves greeting the guests when they arrive and either I enter all their details on the computer or I assist the guests in the Kiosk where they can enter their own details. I’m pretty talkative and I enjoy chatting to the visitors when they arrive.

“Being employed at Premier Inn has taught me important skills: to be punctual, time keeping and to have a smart appearance and make a good first impression; how to deal with all sorts of people and visitors to the hotel. Overall this has been a great scheme for me and I’m really glad that I had the opportunity to do it.”

Angela, Mum to former student Olivia says that Derwen College helped her to secure paid employment.

After leaving Derwen in 2014 Olivia’s journey has taken her back to her home area of Derbyshire where she is now working for The Moon Inn, Stoney Middleton. With the support of Derbyshire County Council Community Connectors Olivia has found paid employment as a kitchen porter. She also volunteers for a local café and has an annual role in her village pantomime.

Staff at The Moon describe Olivia as ‘an asset to their team and a pleasure to work with.’ They are amazed at Olivia’s work ethic and ability to focus on her job. Olivia’s mum feels that this is down to the excellent vocational training that Olivia received

during her three years at Derwen College. The fact that training is daily really establishes an understanding of what it is to work in catering.

“Liv loved her time at Derwen and it really did teach her how kitchens and cafes work and how to work in a team and get the job done. It made her employable.”