

Support into Employment

Oldham College

What the Judges Said

The judges were impressed by what has been achieved, with all staff involved working extremely hard to establish links with a very large number of employers. This has enabled students to choose from a wide range of pathways. Being able to follow a route that matches their interests and ambitions may well be one of the reasons for early signs of excellent outcomes.

Context

Oldham College is a technical and professional college in the heart of the town centre. This is a borough with more challenges than many other regional and national areas in terms of deprivation (56 per cent borough-wide) and education and skills levels (only 56 per cent at Level 2 or above).

These levels of deprivation are ranked among the highest in the country. The linkages between deprivation, social mobility and educational attainment in Oldham are currently the focus of a Department for Education 'Opportunity Area' initiative. They include the prevalence of low skills, low prior achievement and the interconnection between these and other complex issues, such as mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, workless-ness and similar challenges.

The disproportionate levels of deprivation associated with Oldham College learners is accompanied by related issues including a full range of safeguarding and support concerns, forced marriage, domestic violence, crime, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health and self-harm, lack of confidence, language, social isolation and poverty.

Oldham College works alongside employers to offer an extensive range of qualifications and work experience across a variety of sectors. We have a vibrant SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) community and work hard to achieve the highest possible levels of positive student experience and successful outcomes.

The Supported Internship programme has revolutionised our discrete SEND pathway into work. Strong and consistent work outcomes have acted as a catalyst

for both students and staff to raise the aspirations of young people and to change the goalposts in terms of what is achievable.

Entry

How do you go above and beyond the expectations.

Oldham College Skills & Employability Faculty has tailored all aspects of its Supported Internship programme to address the real issues students will be facing in the workplace.

This has included strengthening students' ability to use specific assistive technologies, travel training, workplace communication and dealing with problems. This in turn has improved the work preparatory courses and created a streamlined, targeted and meaningful pathway from Oldham College courses onto the Supported Internship, and then into work.

Unlike many other Supported Internship provisions we do not operate a one employer model whereby all the students access the same workplace. We are passionate about widening participation and social inclusion so, instead, we take the aspirations and skill set of the student prior to enrolment and begin to make individual connections with large and small businesses within the community so that our students get a real and sustainable experience of work. We are very proud and passionate about this and believe it promotes full inclusion within the community.

Our hardworking Employment Officers and Job Coaches go above and beyond to develop secure employer relations. They work closely with employers to create employer targets and support the students learning both within the workplace and the classroom. All the employers we have engaged with demonstrate that they want to work with our students again.

We also have a highly-skilled and passionate curriculum team who believe in creating and delivering a bespoke learning experience for our students. As such, our 27 students this year are all following a differentiated timetable whilst completing their placement commitments, and working towards a City and Guilds qualification. Individualised targets add to the differentiated nature of the programme.

The work doesn't end then either. Our staff continue to work closely with students, families and employers for six months after the course has ended in order to offer support and maximise achievement.

How is your work is innovative?

We believe that our approach to delivering this programme is unique.

To acknowledge the difference of ability of our students, we have created a streamed approach to the Supported Internship that is now able to accommodate the needs and aspirations of a wide range of students. This ranges from learners that are working at EL2/3 to those that have a L3 qualification. This has led to tailored pathways being developed requiring a different staff skills set, varied class-based input, differentiated employer connections and individualised progression routes.

Strong employer collaboration is at the heart of the rigour of this programme and staff work extensively with employers to design a bespoke 'on the job' learning experience for each student that will prepare them for the specific demands of that industry.

Our Supported Internship students get a genuinely meaningful work experience and we are currently engaged with 33 employers to provide work experience for up to 15 hours a week per Intern. Our employers include Clean Plate Kitchen, Savers, Remedian IT Solutions, The Crossley Centre, Oldham Council, SR Sports, Heathbank Services, and Royal Mail, to name just a few.

Students report feeling confident that they can go on to achieve a higher level of independence than they previously thought possible, and family members also inform us that they feel confident and reassured about the student's future prospects.

How is this work sustained over at least two years?

At the heart of this provision – and the reason for its unprecedented success – is the belief that students, family and employers should be fully and actively involved in the co-design of the programme.

We have continued to build on this belief and on our commitment to social inclusion since 2017 by working with students, families and employers, before, during and after their time at Oldham College.

This has led to excellent achievements, recruitment that has doubled for the last two years and students that report increased confidence in their ability to secure work.

From 2018 our progression into employment has been 100 per cent and that is again our prediction for this year.

Students now aim, with excitement, to attend the Supported Internship and, upon completion, secure work which previous Interns openly state has changed their life and prospects.