

## **Knowsley Employability Skills Project**

### **Summary**

Knowsley Council's Employability Skills Project will broker more effective relationships between schools and employers in order to better link young people with employment and develop work related skills. All of Knowsley's secondary schools are keen to engage with the project, and all of the businesses approached have offered various levels of support. A number of programmes have been co-designed as part of the project, including capacity building initiatives for teachers and business-led workshops and development opportunities for students. To continue to drive this agenda forward, a commitment from Government to allow schools to devote more time and resource to employability as part of the curriculum would be hugely beneficial.

### **Introduction**

Knowsley's Employability Skills Project aligns with the CCIN Policy Commission's deal with businesses specifically in relation to brokering relationships between schools and employers as it is helping to develop mechanisms that link young people with employment and develop work related skills. Over time, this collaboration will ensure that schools and colleges supply more applicants to meet business needs.

Knowsley's Employability Skills Project aims to support schools to establish and embed sustainable activities with employers that will enhance current employability skills. Whilst many of Knowsley's secondary schools already have links with local employers, it has been recognised that more could be done to facilitate widespread involvement with employers on a more systematic and sustainable basis. The project is being undertaken in collaboration with schools' existing business and employer partners to avoid duplication and maximise impact.

### **Background**

Employability is a term referring to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individuals, employability depends on the skills and abilities they possess and the way they present themselves to employers. Being able to demonstrate literacy, numeracy, communication and self-presentation skills to employers is crucial, and is therefore the focus of a project to enhance the current approach to improving the employability of Knowsley pupils.

Knowsley's project has been developed against a background of significant change in the provision of skills and career advice since 2012, when schools were made responsible for careers information and guidance. In 2013, an Ofsted report highlighted gaps in careers services in schools identified three quarters of the 60 schools inspected failed to provide an adequate careers service. Lack of skilled staff, adequate connection with employers and tendencies to promote academic pathways were all highlighted as areas of concern.

### **Commitment**

All of Knowsley's secondary schools have been keen to engage with the project and welcomed the idea of developing meaningful, sustainable links with employers. All agree

that the extra support, links, activities and opportunities which will be developed and made available through the project will be beneficial for pupils, schools and employers moving forward. Not all schools, however have been able to free up resources to enable activities to take place or to capitalise on proposed activities to embed and sustain them for future year's pupils.

All of the businesses approached have offered their support towards the project (including QVC, Structec, Getrag and Glen Dimplex) with varying degrees of involvement. This number of organisations is also continuing to grow.

## **Approach**

At the outset schools, academies and a number of employers were contacted to better understand the current local landscape in relation to current levels of engagement and activity. Through this activity, the provider and project steering group were able to gain an insight into the current approach to improving employability across schools, which differ in terms of approaches to engagement, capacity and current delivery.

Lots of activity has been underway to respond to the gaps identified and to build on areas which were working well in a collaborative way. This has included visits and workshops with some of Knowsley's biggest employers to look at what they can offer pupils through careers in engineering and manufacturing. Students were also invited to a pre-apprenticeship evening to gain information and guidance about the apprentice process.

A capacity building programme has also taken place with teachers in schools and further links have been made with a raft of organisations and companies (including JLR, Clarke Energy, QVC, Structec, Getrag and Glen Dimplex) all of whom have offered their full support towards the project with varying degrees. For example for some this will be through offering employability skills such as CV or interview tips to more industry specific workshops and talks. Some businesses have also offered up for their apprentices to go into schools and talk to pupils and share their experiences, day to day practice and the pathway they took to get where they are now. Several businesses have also offered site tours, training visits, curriculum linked problem solving projects, mentor programmes and use of their real life assessment centres.

As the project continues, the provider will continue to develop and co-design, with local school and employer input, the series of programmes and activities to be delivered in schools. This partnership approach will be key to the success of the project. In addition, the issues of wider sustainability and improvement will also be addressed and evaluated as part of the project.

## **Government support**

Whilst funding is only available for this project on a 12 month basis, the aim is that the links with employers and the relationships that have been built, as well as the skills and knowledge that have been gained will continue to go on to be sustainable in the longer term and be further developed and continued in the future.

However, to continue to drive this agenda going forward, a commitment from Government to allow schools to devote more time and resource to employability as part of the

curriculum would be hugely beneficial in helping to further embed and sustain this approach on a longer term basis.