

Leadership of employer engagement

May 2011

Introduction

This report seeks to bring together the findings on effective practice from visits to nine schools across the regions following recommendations from the education and employers task force.

Three National College CEIAG supra-regional associates visited a range of secondary schools from eight regions including one secondary special school. Introductions to the schools had been supplied through the education and employers task force and the schools identified had all taken part in an employer engagement week in October 2010.

The visits focused on the leadership of employer engagement, how it was done, the impact on students and how it fitted into the overall CEIAG agenda in the schools.

The National College associates involved would like to record our thanks to Dr Anthony Mann, Director of Policy and Research for the education and employers task force, and to the schools involved who made us very welcome.

Leadership of employer engagement

The key features of effective employer engagement in schools were:

- a clear vision underpinning the involvement of employers
- a named person with leadership responsibility for this area of work who is seen by employers as having the power to make things happen
- sole contact for employers with this named person to give them direct access
- time and resources for the named leadership link to secure maximum benefits from employer engagement including appropriate administrative support
- endorsement of the headteacher for the work and clear evidence of its importance, evidenced through the school development plan
- plans for the sustainability of leadership
- flexibility at senior leadership level to respond to employer requirements, eg time
- industry experience at leadership level to add to credibility with employers
- collaborative/partnership approaches to the work

How it's done

- Employers were trained by the school to deliver lessons which brought reciprocal value.
- Employer engagement was an integral part of the curriculum and not a bolt-on activity.
- Employers ran financial literacy courses and 'made this topic come alive in a way that inspired students', in the words of one respondent.
- Employer engagement with post-16 courses reflected local needs and provided opportunities for students to work off site. In one school, an employer was attached to each curriculum pathway at post-16 to work alongside a representative of higher education.
- Local employers provided real-life challenges and projects for students to work on with real outcomes.
- Employers acted as mentors.
- There was provision of placements, work experience, internships and opportunities for apprenticeships.
- Employers were involved in themed days and weeks.
- There was support for particular curriculum areas through expertise and making the learning real for students.
- Business breakfasts invited sixth-form students to have one-to-one conversations with employers.

Impact on school, business community and students

- There was provision of a rich pattern of relevant experiences that greatly improved skills.
- Students learned things that 'could not be found in books'.
- Accountability was developed through involvement in real activities in the workplace or in school.
- Wider networking opportunities were provided through contact with employers.
- Wider experience helped to develop the confidence and self-esteem of students of all abilities, particularly in the special school setting.
- The work helped to inform decisions regarding future progression routes.
- Students spoke of the positive impact their involvement had had on their overall desire to achieve.
- In the sixth-form college, the work contributed significantly to the development of what was described by SSAT as 'the most innovative sixth-form organisation in the academy movement'.
- Work opportunities increased locally through the ongoing relationship with local employers.
- There was development of effective partnership working.
- Employees developed improved communication and interpersonal skills through their engagement with the school.
- Employers influenced the development of their future workforce.
- Experience in the employer's workplace enabled the acquisition of personal qualities and key employability skills.
- There was an increased feeling of belonging for the school with the local business community and the local business community with the school.

Overall CEIAG provision

- In all the schools visited, CEIAG had a central role to play in driving the school forward. It was seen as key to raising aspiration, narrowing the gap in performance and challenging stereotypes. Employer engagement was seen as a critical part of the overall provision and brought a rich and varied experience to bear on students' learning.
- Leadership of CEIAG in all the schools was at senior level with a team approach and the endorsement and support of the headteacher.
- CEIAG was integrated into curriculum provision.
- All the schools recognised the importance of workforce development and the involvement of non-teaching staff.
- All the schools used a variety of methodologies to assess impact.

Schools visited

Caroline Chisholm School, Northampton
Castle Vale School, Birmingham
Education Village, Darlington
Harrogate Grammar School, Harrogate
Linton Village College, Cambridgeshire
Richard Rose Federation Sixth Form, Carlisle
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe
Sir Bernard Lovell School, Bristol
Sir Tom Finney Community High School, Lancashire
Worthing High School, West Sussex