

Working in partnership with local colleges

Offering work experience in return for training

Expect Ltd worked with their local college to run a work experience programme in exchange for training for their staff. They drew up an agreement that the college would deliver an Access to Higher Education Diploma for staff, in return for Expect supporting level 2 and 3 health and social care students to do work experience.

As a result, Expect saw some great benefits. It's been a great way to find new talent, motivate and develop existing staff and helped them build long lasting links in the community.

Expect provides care services for a range of people in Merseyside, including people with learning disabilities, mental ill-health, dementia, acquired brain injuries and autistic spectrum conditions. They do this through supported living services, care homes, a day centre and domiciliary care services.

As the sector changes, Expect face challenges with their recruitment and retention, particularly with their frontline care and support staff.

To help them find new recruits, keep existing staff and boost workforce morale they set up an agreement with a local college. The college delivered an Access to Higher Education

Diploma for existing frontline staff completely free of charge, whilst Expect took on students from the college to do work experience.

Background to the agreement

In 2016 Expect developed a new company business plan. It included a 'High Potential Development Scheme' to support existing staff through an education programme, without reducing their working hours and suffering any loss of earnings. They believed that this scheme could offer staff something 'a little extra' for working in the organisation to motivate and develop them, and improve retention. It was named the 'Sue Williams Scholarship' after a trustee who had recently passed away.

When they started developing the scheme they looked into whether they could support staff to do a degree level qualification. However this wasn't financially feasible and some staff might not have the right qualifications to get onto a degree programme. So they decided to offer an Access to Higher Education Diploma through a local college.

They drew up an agreement that the college would offer the diploma to staff, in return for Expect supporting level 2 and 3 health and social care students who needed to do work experience as part of their course.



Offering work experience

Expect offered work experience to students over the age of 18 who were studying a Level 2 and 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care.

Their learning and development manager Christopher Jones, who is also a qualified adult education teacher with experience of working frontline in social care, was responsible for the programme. He delivered 'briefing sessions' with students and teachers that introduced Expect as an organisation, told them about their work experience project and explained the opportunities at Expect including any current employment opportunities.

The college then ran a selection process to find suitable students and did standard checks, including DBS checks, before referring students for the work experience.

Induction for people on work experience

When students started with Expect they did a one to one or group induction, depending on how many students had been referred. It included information about:

- the organisation, including their workplace values
- what students will be doing on the placement
- what they expect from students on the placement
- an introduction to the role of a support worker
- the importance of person-centred care
- health and safety information
- confidentiality and data protection
- safeguarding and reporting responsibilities.

At the start of work experience students completed a form to gather their personal details and emergency contacts details. They were given work placement contact details and told what to do if they're going to be late or couldn't come into work. They also signed a written confidentiality agreement and were asked to show proof of an enhanced DBS check (in addition to a DBS clear declaration covering the short period since their check was completed).

On their first day students were given a tour around the service and introduced to people who access care and support services, the staff team and relevant managers.

Monitoring progress

Throughout the work experience students were given a 'buddy' who was an experienced member of staff – they kept in touch at all times throughout the placement.

Students worked alongside frontline care and support staff across the different care settings. It aimed to give them a taste of what it's like to be a care worker, so they got involved in typical day to day tasks including:

- delivering activities and skill workshops
- record writing and documentation
- food preparation
- trips out on public transport or in the community.

Students were given the opportunity to feedback throughout the placement and had a verbal feedback meeting at the end with Expect's learning and development manager.

The manager also wrote a statement of completion for each student which included their hours worked, what they've done and achieved on placement, and observations and feedback from the placement itself – this could be used to support future job applications.

Students who had gone the 'extra mile' or shone in their placement were signposted to Expect's HR department and informed that recruitment was ongoing if they wished to complete an application form. Applicants then followed Expect's standard recruitment and interview process.



The Sue Williams Scholarship

Staff could apply for the scholarship through an application form with a written testimonial from their line manager.

The management team shortlisted applicants and invited them to a discussion with the CEO,

learning and development officer and HR officer.

The successful candidate could choose which health and social care related programme they wanted to do, and all tuition fees were then waived by the college (including exam and qualification release fees which could be charged by the accrediting university).

To support the staff through the course, Expect spoke to their manager and arranged an additional 15 days (115.5 hours) of paid study leave so they could cope with the additional academic workload. This was agreed at particularly busy times of the year and was agreed with their line manager to ensure continuity of care and smooth service provision. It also helped to develop the staff's own skills and encourage them to manage their own time more effectively and take extra paid study leave at key times, such as when coursework or exams were due.



Key achievements

The agreement ran between 2016 and 2017 in which time 23 students passed the work experience scheme and received written statements of completion as part of this agreement.

The scheme led to a new workforce supply stream direct from the college and a number of new level 2 and 3 health and social care qualified workers applied for roles with Expect. This was possibly due to their familiarity with Expect and the management team, and the fact that Expect had talked to students about the opportunities to develop and progress in the organisation. They could also see first-hand that Expect would invest in their development and there were real opportunities to progress.

In return, frontline care staff received completely free tuition to do an Access to Higher Education Diploma accredited by the University of Central Lancashire.

Adam Sutton was one member of staff who benefited from the agreement. He said:

“At first I was sceptical of the logistics of maintaining full time work whilst also attending college. However, with support from management and the training manager, Chris, I was reassured that the company would enable me to work my hours around the college course hours. The training manager even acquired study hours for me which I could offset from my weekly working hours – this provided me with more time to complete my work which I was grateful for.

I was delighted to learn that I had been awarded the scholarship, as I knew this was an opportunity for me to further myself. The college course was an Access to University Diploma in Health and Social Care – it's recognised by universities and would give me the opportunity to go to University in the future.

I successfully completed the course after a year and decided to look into University options. My prospects have been greatly enhanced from this opportunity. Without this course I would never have considered attending University and therefore never have had the opportunity to have a 'professional' career in mental health.

I am very grateful for those who provided me with this opportunity.”



The benefits

Expect had some great benefits from offering work experience, particularly as part of the agreement with their local college.

They told us:



We would encourage other organisations to think about setting up mutually beneficial schemes such as ours, especially where 'out of the box' thinking may be required.



Expect has found work experience to be a great way to find new talent. Their community presence increased and they developed strong links with the local college that still exist today.



These new recruitment streams are full of fully qualified staff that have already been observed by your organisations service users, workforce and management during their placement. They know you and you know them.



Work experience also offers existing staff the opportunity to develop themselves and can really motivate them. Expect said: **“Your frontline staff can visibly see and take advantage of the additional development opportunities and this will encourage the wider workforce to work hard to succeed in their role and career.”**

They highlighted the importance that adult social care employers can play in careers education – for example they can offer experience, teaching, skills, mentoring and professionalism.

“Further and Higher Education colleges are academic institutions, not frontline care providers, they really need what social care providers have – i.e. the opportunity and experience that comes with frontline professional practice. In short - care providers have what academia needs!”

The scholarship was also a great opportunity to develop existing staff. In 2016-2017 Adam completed with an advanced level qualification in health and social care, which was accredited by the University of Central Lancashire. He has now progressed to Liverpool John Moore University to study mental health nursing with RMN status. Seeing the organisation invest in staff development also motivated other staff.



These schemes could also help boost your workforce morale and raise the bar in terms of staff productivity and service quality.



“This is because your organisations frontline staff can visibly see and take advantage of the additional, highly valued development opportunities created - this will encourage the wider workforce to work hard to succeed in their role and career.”

If you’re thinking about doing something similar they suggest that both organisations have a designated coordinator to organise and monitor the agreement. This can be a lot of work but if it’s managed well, the results can be considerable for social care employers – they can assist the organisation with ongoing challenges such as recruitment and retention.

Skills for Care recommends

Offering meaningful work experience guide

This step by step guide helps adult social care employers deliver and get the most out of work experience.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/meaningfulworkexp

Pre-employment support

We have guidance and tools to help adult social care employers get involved in pre-employment support programmes.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/preemployment

Finding and keeping the right workers

Our online toolkit has practical tips and resources to help you attract, take on and keep the right people for your organisation.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/finderskeepers