Working with employers around communication skills

We all know that communication skills are vital to children and young people's life outcomes.

Communication skills are frequently highlighted by employers and organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). Indeed, the CBI's own definition of 'employability skills' includes the ability to communicate effectively. However, employers and the CBI have at times raised concerns over the quality of communication skills of young people entering employment.

By taking part in the Communication Commitment, you will have acknowledged that speech, language and communication skills are not things that develop on their own but skills that need to be taught, learnt, encouraged and supported. Through the work you'll be doing across school, you'll already be embedding some of the good practice that will be helping your pupils develop these skills. This will be of great benefit for pupils not just at school but as they move on and into employment.

Working in partnership with employers to ensure that the work you're doing in school will help your pupils achieve well when they leave will be a fantastic way of bringing to life the importance of communication to your pupils. It will also let local employers in your area know your school takes communication seriously and is working to ensure your pupils have the skills they need to make a valuable contribution when they enter the world of work. Below are some ideas to help you work effectively with employers in school.

HOW DOES THIS LINK TO THE CODE?

One of the key principles of the 2014 SEND Code of Practice is that all children and young people are entitled to an education that enables them to 'make a successful transition into adulthood, whether into employment, further or higher education or training,' (section 6.1 of the Code). Thinking inclusively about how you work with employers could be part of meeting this responsibility.

Key principles

Before you get to work on getting employers into your school, here are some key principles for you to consider:

- Make sure you're clear as a staff team about the outcomes you want from your work with employers. Record these and reflect on them to improve the work in the future.
- Ensure that whatever activity you decide on to get employers involved in your school, it's accessible and appropriate for all pupils. Pupils with SEN may need additional support to engage with the activity and, importantly, might have specific questions or concerns they'd like to raise with the employer – it is important these are included and addressed.

- Talk to the employer you're working with about your school and pupils. Make sure they're aware of the work you're doing to make communication a central focus in your school, and contextualise the work you're doing to help them understand the approach and attitude you're working to support.
- Getting someone into school who doesn't work day-to-day with young people can bring a fresh and dynamic approach to engaging with pupils. This should be encouraged and will serve to make the activity more memorable and impactful. However, ask the employer to share their plans for the session with you. Make sure you're happy that it will be appropriate and engaging for all your pupils – you know them best.

Making contact

Identify some local businesses and employers in your area that you'd feel comfortable working with and who you think would be appropriate to bring into school. Some tips:

- Think about contacts you may already have – for example, you might already have partnerships with some local employers through work experience placements. How about some of the main contractors who work in your school on building maintenance and IT support for example – would they be willing to get involved?
- If you identify an employer you don't have contact with yet, you can use our template letter for inviting employers into school.
- Speak to other schools, perhaps they've done something similar locally or have worked with a national employer who they'd recommend. You can do this using the Share Your Stories function on the Commitment site.
- Put a call out in your newsletter or on your website for parents who might work somewhere that would be willing to get involved. There might be parents who run their own businesses or work to recruit staff in their place of work who would be willing to help out.

Ideas for involvement

You can get employers involved in your school in whatever way you think will work best for your staff and pupils. For some schools, this may be direct interaction with the students; for others it might be more about working with the staff team to help shape the areas of focus in lessons. Here are some specific ideas:

- Invite an employer in to do an assembly. Work with them to make the presentation engaging and accessible for your pupils.
- Invite an employer in to work in a particular lesson or group to do a more interactive session.
- You could set up a Question Time panel where the pupils get the chance to ask employers the questions they want to know about – a member of staff could chair the panel. In the run up to the event perhaps some lessons could be devoted to helping pupils prepare their questions and think about what they need to know.
- Set up a staff meeting and invite an employer in to speak to staff about how their lessons and teaching could best prepare pupils for employment. Discuss the opportunity with your staff team to find out what they'd find most useful.

- Why not see if you can organise for pupils to visit the employer in their place of work – this might really help to contextualise for pupils the importance of speaking and listening in a busy warehouse or office, for example.
- You could arrange a pupil-led initiative, for which they could do the work of contacting and planning a session with a local employer. This would really help to build their practical skill set – it might even lead to better results and higher levels of engagement than something organised by the staff team!