Co-ordinating Work Experience in West Cumbria

Initial Meeting Notes: 27th November 2020

Chair: Cath Howard, BEP (Jacobs & Balfour Beatty). Summary Notes: Nicola Gorrill, ORANO.

Introduction

We have a plethora of opportunities for work experience here in West Cumbria that encompass a large range of businesses from micro-enterprises to SME's to globally recognised companies. Some of these are accessed through Cumbria WEX or directly through contacts with schools by businesses or Not for Profits. During Covid19 virtual offerings were developed by large companies such as Jacobs and Morgan Sindall, as well as local virtual support and offerings facilitated by Inspira & CfLP to name but a few.

We know from national and local research that young people have been disadvantaged this year in terms of schooling but also in access to real life work experience and other inputs. We know that young people from the most disadvantaged areas/backgrounds will struggle to gain employment, and even without COVID19, some do not gain appropriate or worthwhile work experience.

Key themes/issues raised

- Lots of great programmes going on in the area but picture is difficult to understand.
- Some schools nervous/jittery regarding "real-life" experiences.
- Blended approach (face to face/real life & virtual) is working well and there is some success with purely virtual experiences. Capacity is the issue here.
- Approved schools have students that might struggle with virtual only activities.
- Virtual programmes – has to be a balance so students don't spend too much time online - wellbeing of students.
- Access to laptops etc. may be a barrier – laptop loaning for students?
- Do we need a "work awareness" package to run alongside work experience programmes – application process can help understand background and interests but can be a barrier too?
- Important students this year (due to COVID19) do not miss out completely
- Variation required – engineering, project management are easier to run, especially online but we need to consider more vocational careers: hairdressing, joinery, plumbing etc.
- Work experience has to meet Gatsby benchmark – project element is a key part of this.
- Good practice & quality are important.
- Need to differentiate clearly between the programmes so students can see which is the best one for them – a ladder of quality opportunities
- A younger person's view is that as they didn't know what they wanted to do, work experience was helpful – can see opportunities/roles they didn't know existed. Enjoyed coming into a real life workplace as don't normally get that opportunity in school.
- Need to get buy in from MD's of organisations to make this work.
- Requires a strategic overall role. West Cumbria Works doesn't exist anymore and didn't ever achieve the overview required. Not all schools are linked in to opportunities.

Questions raised:

What evidence do we have that we are not reaching the most disadvantaged students with meaningful work experience placements?

When is the best time to run these programmes? Half-term v term time.

Questions that require consideration

1. What does a successful work experience placement look like?
   a. When should it be held?
   b. What are the outcomes?
   c. Matching aspirations
   d. Virtual/Blended/Real-life

2. How do we reach we reach the most disadvantaged students?
   a. Do disadvantaged students receive the same information?
   b. Is this dependant on schools?
   c. Do they have access to IT software & hardware – see below

3. What are the issues with capability/capacity to carry out these programmes, especially virtual and blended programmes?
   a. Issues regarding hardware
   b. Issues regarding wi-fi connectivity
   c. Information students have prior to experience

Stakeholders

Co-ordinators / Providers	Placement Providers / Businesses	Schools

Students	Interested Parties
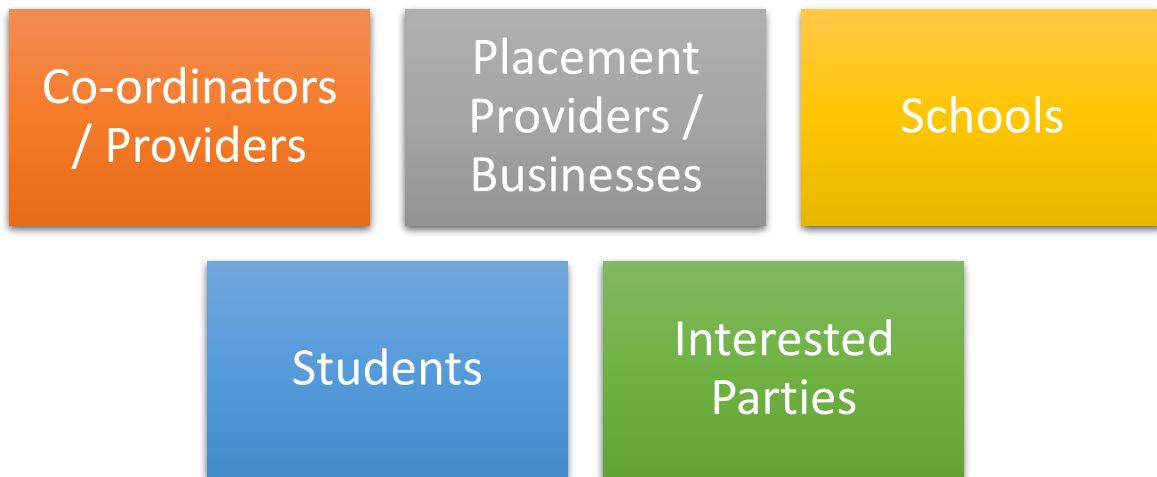
Way Forward/Next Steps:

Everyone agreed that co-ordination is needed and key so all schools/pupils have sight of what is available and can access the best possible experience.

Where this might sit as a central co-ordinated hub and how will it be resourced requires further conversation.

Following on from the above statement are further actions:

1. We have existing structures in place so how do we maximise and build on these.
2. Need to consider key questions above & understand what is good practice
3. How do we engage more with businesses on work experience – what's in it for them?
4. What does the "pre-work experience" look like – matching students to placements, understanding their interests etc? What can we build on that is already I place?
5. How we keep others informed, e.g. BECBC SV group; Nuclear Communities Network, NDA and how can they contribute? Ideally this group will become part of, or a sub group of one of those listed to ensure duplication of effort is minimised.