

The “HOPE” Project *Highlighting Opportunity and Prospects for Employment*



A project designed to promote awareness of the different employment and training opportunities for students with special needs and/or disabilities through practical application.

Project Period – November 2010.

Final Evaluation Report – December 2010.



Hope Project

Highlighting Opportunity and Prospects for Employment

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the differing complexities of student needs, the sourcing of suitable work experience placements remains an issue for many special needs schools and colleges, therefore limiting awareness, experience and opportunity for a number of young people. For many employers elements such as accessibility, additional support and indeed the perception of special needs, also remains a barrier to engagement.

The “HOPE” Project, led by the Lincolnshire & Rutland EBP with funding provided by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Lincolnshire Transitions Service, has been designed to tackle all of these issues through a campaign of raising awareness culminating with two single day industry events for students hosted North and South of the county, specifically for students with special needs and/or disabilities.

Project Aims:

The programme has provided a range of ‘hands on’ activities for SEN students, delivered through practical workshops in a variety of contexts as an alternative or supplement to the traditional model of work experience. Students obtained a mixture of vocational awareness, enterprise activities and the opportunity to work closely with employers in a range of interactive workshops. Local employers from a wide range of industry provided a broad spectrum of experience to students, supporting personal and social development, and confidence building. The event provided a platform from which to raise student awareness of potential progression routes and work based learning opportunities for those learners for whom appropriate.

This event has been funded as a one-off event allowing schools and colleges to assess the value of such activities and to disseminate this best practice within their own organisations going forward.

Added Value:

To increase awareness of the project and its aims, the HOPE Project was promoted at an SEN Conference delivered by the Lincolnshire & Rutland EBP in partnership with the Lincolnshire Transitions Service on the 10th November 2010.

With keynote speakers from Ofsted, Linkage Trust, Remploy, Blackpool Council, plus students and teaching staff from the Lincoln St Christopher’s Special School, the conference provided the launch pad from which the HOPE project was officially launched. During the one day conference delegates were reminded by Ofsted of their responsibilities towards their students and the importance of raising awareness of the different progression options available to each student, each of which should be appropriately planned within the individualised transition planning process. This one day event acted as a significant catalyst from which teachers were inspired to think differently about their current offer of work experience and the long term prospects for their students, reinforcing the clear messages delivered through the HOPE project.

Project Participants:

Awareness Raising – SEN Conference – 10th November 2010

- 36 School Teaching Delegates
- 10 Students
- 17 Employer Delegates
- 8 Speakers

HOPE Project – Industry Day, North Lincolnshire – 23rd November 2010

- 29 Students
- 9 Teaching Staff
- 3 Training Providers
- 9 Event Facilitators
- 9 Employers – Workshop Facilitators

HOPE Project – Industry Day, South Lincolnshire – 25th November 2010

- 23 Students
- 10 Teaching Staff
- 9 Event Facilitators
- 9 Employers – Workshop Facilitators

Methodology:

Students and teachers were invited to attend one of two specialist industry days located North and South of the County of Lincolnshire. Each event provided the opportunity for students to individually participate in a total of 5 x 30 minute practical workshops, all of which were focussed around different industry sectors, offering practical application of tasks often related to job roles within them.

The two events provided a representation of the range of special needs, accommodating behavioural and emotional needs, through to Medium and Severe Learning Difficulties.

Industry sectors represented were:

- Animal Care¹
- Construction and associated trades
- Engineering²
- Hair & Beauty
- Hospitality & Catering
- Horticulture

Key: ¹ Offered at event on 23rd November 2010

² Offered in place of Animal Care at event on 25th November 2010

Prior to commencement, each student was asked to supply information in relation to their aspirations and choice of destination on leaving school. Information regarding the current work-related learning and practical activities provided within their school, their own participation in these, and their own source of support and advice for progression beyond school was also obtained. This information has been recorded

and analysed – information is provided in “*Section 2 – Initial Student Data*” contained within this document.

Following an initial briefing, students commenced on their programme of workshops. ALL students attended each of the 5 industry sector workshops, regardless of preference or aspiration. This was particularly important to ensure each student experienced all activities in order to formulate their own opinion of the tasks undertaken and their own abilities, as opposed to being led to a conclusion or simply informed of their options by peers.

All students were asked to complete a short multiple choice card upon completion of each sector workshop providing feedback regarding their experience. This information has been recorded and analysed – information is provided in “*Section 3 – Student Workshop Data*” contained within this document.

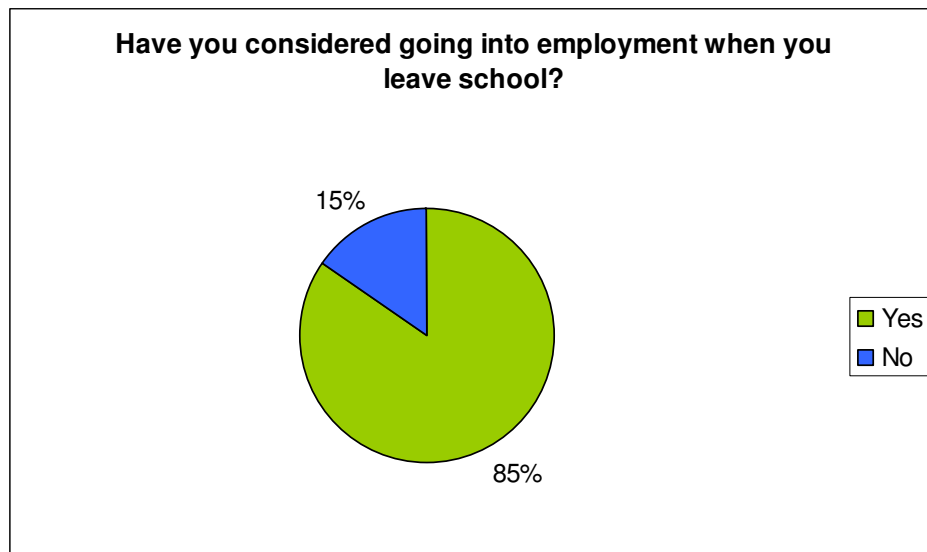
Finally, feedback and evaluations were also obtained from teachers, training provider representatives and workshop facilitators in order to provide a holistic review of the event. This information is also provided within this document.

2. PRE-EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE - INITIAL STUDENT DATA

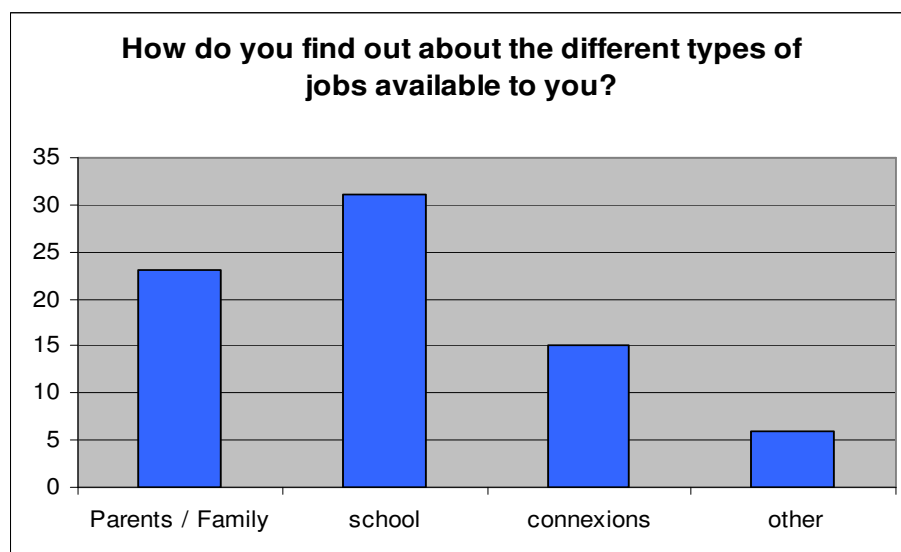
Before taking part in the HOPE project Industry days, students were asked to respond to a series of questions about their hopes and aspirations for education, training or employment after they left school.

Forty-three students completed the questionnaire. The following data is a summary of their responses:

Employability Skills



Of the thirty nine students who responded to this question, 33 stated that they have considered going into employment when they leave school.

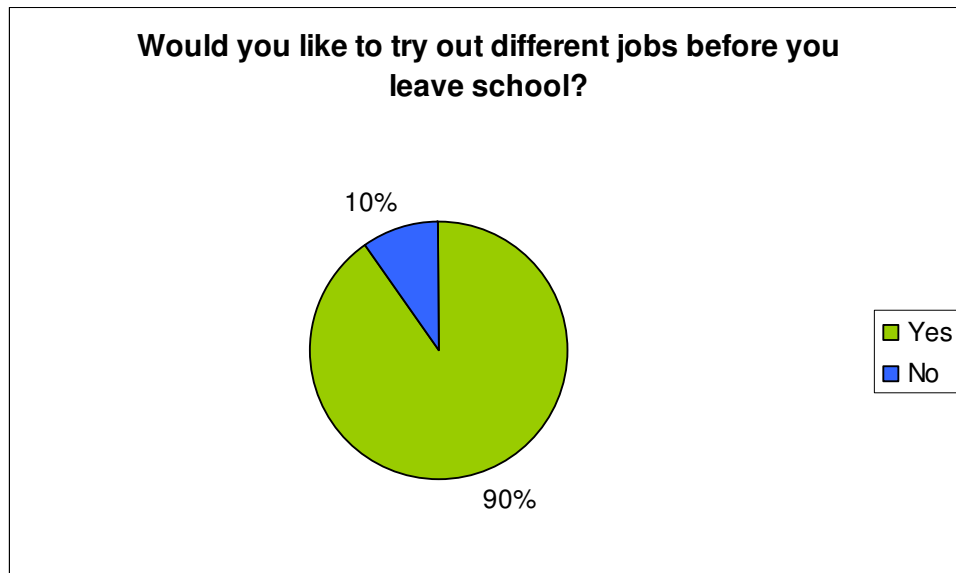


The most significant source of information regarding employment opportunities for the students was ‘School’, with 31 students (72%) indicating this. Parents / family members were indicated by 23 students (53%), and connexions advisers by 15 students (35%). Students who indicated ‘other’ listed the internet and ‘fast tomato’ (a web based careers tool hosted by Connexions) as sources of information.

Students were also asked to indicate which of three activities their school offers, and which of these they have personally taken part in before attending the HOPE industry day. Their responses were as follows:

	Work Experience	Employer talks	Industry days
School offers	95%	33%	33%
Have been personally involved in.	49%	19%	9%

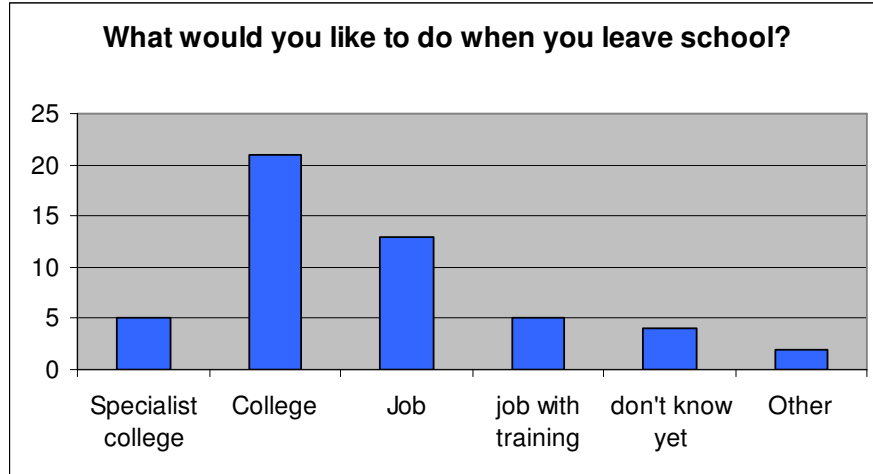
Only 49% of the students had personally taken part in a work experience placement, despite 95% indicating that work experience was offered by their school. Only 9% of students had taken part in an Industry day prior to participating in the HOPE project.



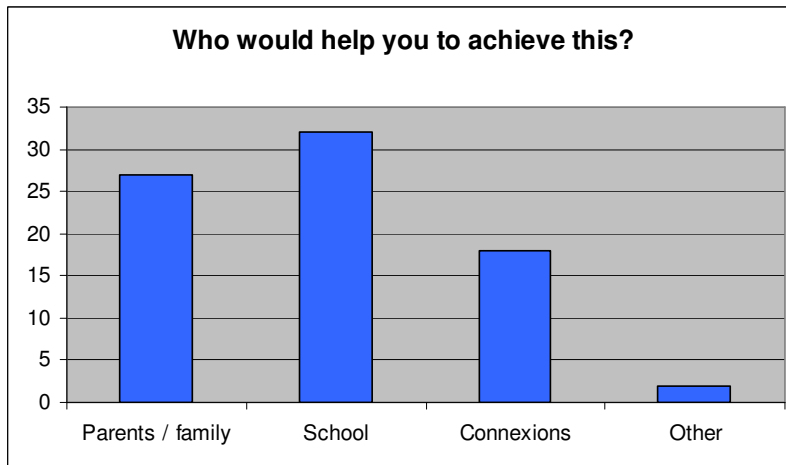
Ninety percent of students indicated that they would like to have the opportunity to try different jobs before leaving school.

Preparing to leave school

Students were asked to choose from a list of options, what they would like to do when they left school. Students could select as many options as they liked, however the majority selected only one answer. There were a total of 50 selections from the 43 students.



The two most popular options on leaving school were ‘Go to college’ with 21 responses (49%) and ‘Get a job’ with 13 responses (30%). Going to a specialist college such as Portland or Toynton Hall was not a popular choice with only 5 students (12%) selecting this option, and the same was true of the option to ‘get a job with training’. Four students indicated that they were unsure as yet what they wanted to do after school. Two students chose the ‘other’ option, with one stating that they wanted to be a footballer, and another stating that they already had a job.



When asked who would help them to achieve this aim, again with the option to select multiple answers, the highest scoring responses were again School (74%), followed by Parents / Family (63%), then Connexions Advisers (42%). The two students who stated ‘other’ did not provide any further information.

3. STUDENT WORKSHOP DATA

During the HOPE project industry days, students were offered workshops from a range of different industry sectors.

After taking part in each workshop they were asked to complete a brief evaluation. Their responses are shown below, both as total data for the combined workshops, and broken down by industry sector.

Initially students were asked to indicate whether they had enjoyed the activity, and to state what they had enjoyed most, and what they had enjoyed least about each workshop.



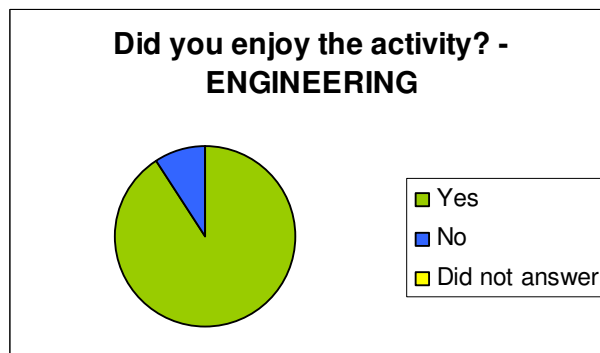
The total responses indicate that on average 92% of students enjoyed the workshops.



When asked what they enjoyed most about the ANIMAL CARE workshop the most common answer was ‘walking the dog’, indicating that the students enjoyed the hands-on element of the activity. When asked what they didn’t like about the workshop most stated ‘nothing’, however one student (who had stated that she did not enjoy the activity) stated that one of the dogs had jumped on her.



When asked what they had enjoyed most about the CONSTRUCTION workshop, which involved trying a plumbing activity, most students again mentioned the hand-on elements such as ‘using the spanner’ and ‘fixing the pipes’. Also mentioned was ‘watching a teacher get wet’. Again, a common response to the question “What didn’t you like about the workshop?” was ‘Nothing’. Also mentioned was ‘getting wet’.



For the ENGINEERING workshop, most students stated that they had enjoyed ‘rolling the tubes’ or ‘making a pyramid’ most. Again, ‘nothing’ was a common response for things they had not liked, although 2 students made a comment about not liking the behaviour of another student.



Many students commented that they had enjoyed ‘all of it’ or ‘everything’ within the HAIR & BEAUTY workshop. Hair (brushing / styling / rollers) was mentioned more frequently than nails. Students mentioned ‘hairspray’, ‘putting the cape on’ and ‘curling tongs’ as parts of the activity they didn’t like, and some students stated that they just ‘don’t like hairdressing’.

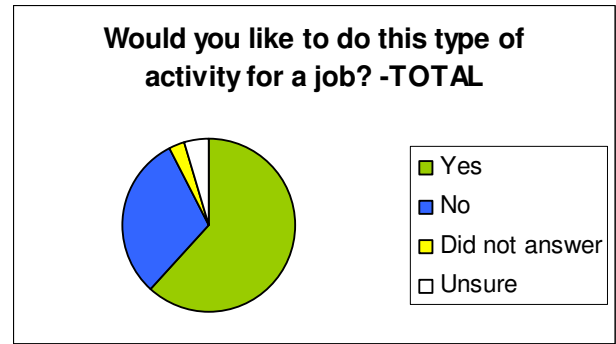
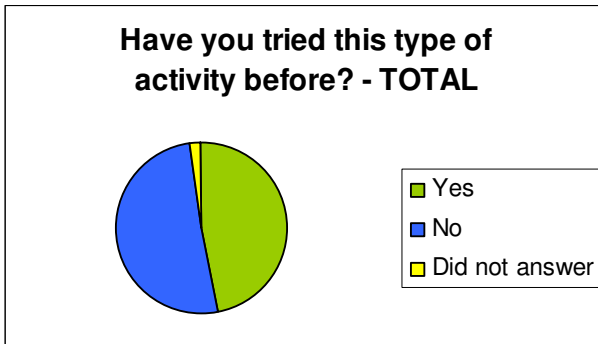


Popular elements of the workshop on HORTICULTURE were ‘using compost’, ‘planting seeds’, ‘planting bulbs’ and ‘watering’. One student commented that they had enjoyed ‘getting my hands dirty’, however another student listed ‘getting dirty’ as a dislike.



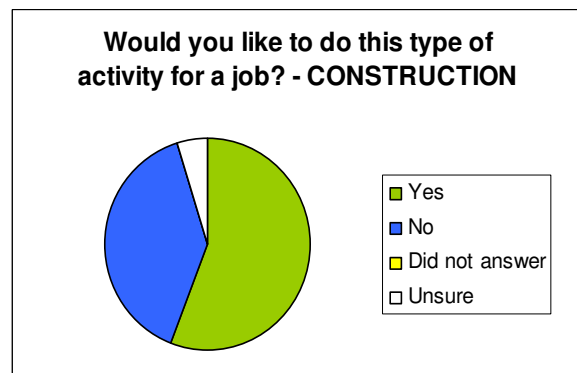
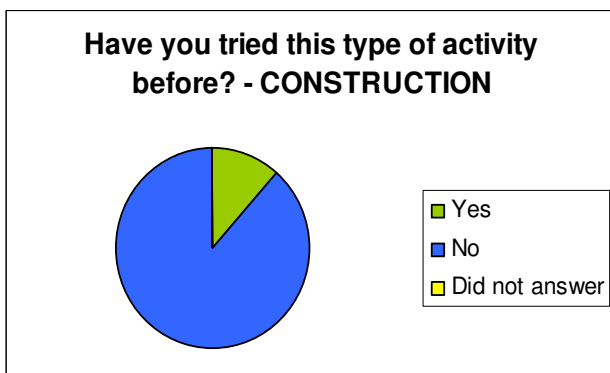
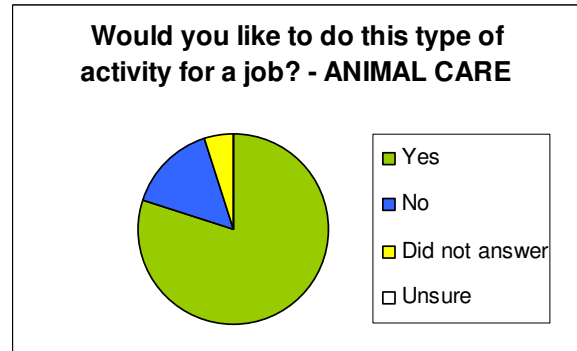
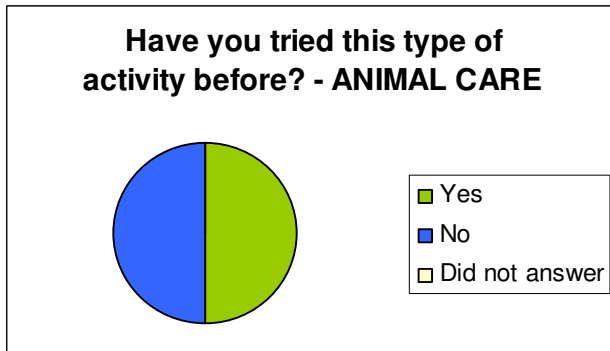
The HOSPITALITY & CATERING workshop gave students the opportunity to make soup and mince pies. Both of these were mentioned by students as being most enjoyable. Also mentioned was ‘tasting the soup’ which according to one student was ‘Yummy’. The only elements mentioned as dislikes were that it was ‘hot’, the ‘chopping’, and ‘fiddly’.

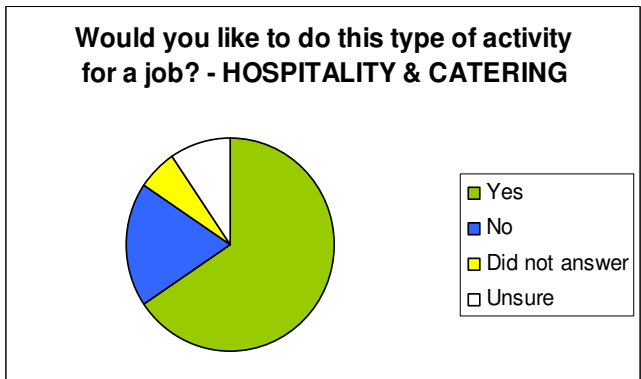
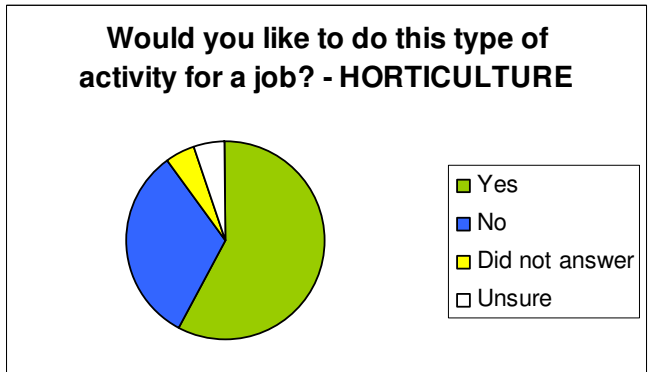
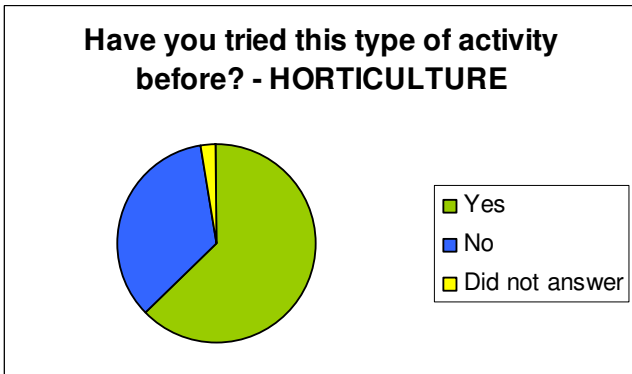
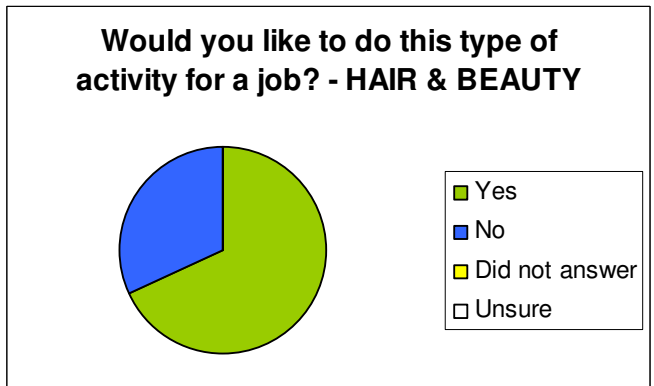
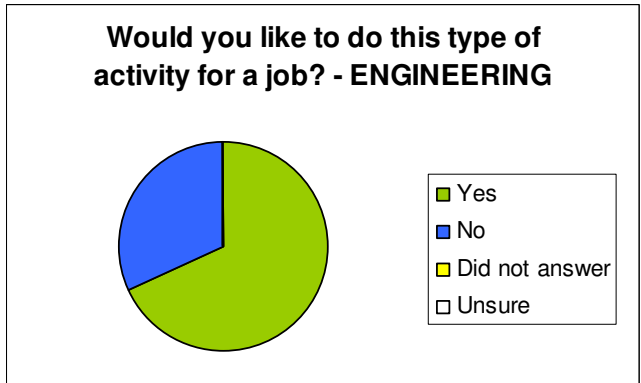
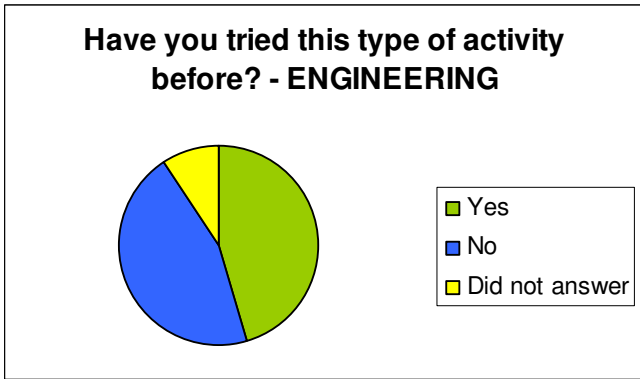
Students were then asked whether they had tried the activity before, and whether they would now consider the type of activity for a job. Their responses are summarised in the following charts, again broken down by industry sector. Although there were only ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ options on the form, some students actually wrote responses such as ‘Not sure’ or ‘maybe’ onto their forms in response to the question about doing the activity as a job. These responses have been counted and included as a separate category.



From the total responses 47% indicated that the students had tried similar activities before, however this varied widely between the different industry sectors, with the majority of participants (81%) having tried similar activities to those within the HOSPITALITY & CATERING workshop (cookery), but only 12% having tried similar activities to those offered in the CONSTRUCTION workshop.

This is a clear indicator of the types of stereotypical roles traditionally offered to students with special needs or disabilities, either through work experience or as in-school activities.





4. TEACHER RESPONSES

Teachers who attended the HOPE project industry days with their students were also given the opportunity to complete an evaluation questionnaire. Their responses are summarised below.

All staff stated that it had been ‘Very’ useful for their school to take part in the activity.

When asked how much they felt the students had benefited from the activity 75% stated ‘Greatly’ and 25% ‘Quite a lot’.

When asked to rate the workshops 75% responded ‘Excellent’ and 25% responded ‘Good’.

Teachers were also asked if they felt the event had provided the students with an awareness of different industry sectors. 75% responded ‘Quite a lot’, and 25% responded ‘Greatly’.

When asked “Do you feel that this event has assisted those students who may aspire to go into employment?” one school’s response was ‘Hardly’, however, the inference from further comment was that this applied only to students who were able to access ‘traditional’ work experience. Of the remaining responses 50% stated ‘Quite a lot’ and 50% ‘Greatly’.

When asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the opportunities that their students have to undertake ‘traditional’ work experience, responses ranged from 3 (sufficient) to 5 (excellent). One teacher also commented “I feel there is good provision of work experience and information available from the school”.

The only suggestion for activities which should be offered to support students to gain employability skills was “Standard life skills approach”.

100% of respondents rated the administration / organisation of the event as ‘Excellent’.

The venue was rated as ‘Good’ by 25% and ‘Excellent’ by 75% of respondents.

All staff stated that they would like to be involved in similar activities in the future.

There was a comment from one of the schools that Year 10 SLD and MLD learners would benefit most from this type of event. Another school commented that they felt “the event was pitched at a very good level for our year 10s”

Further comments, and suggestions for future improvements, were:

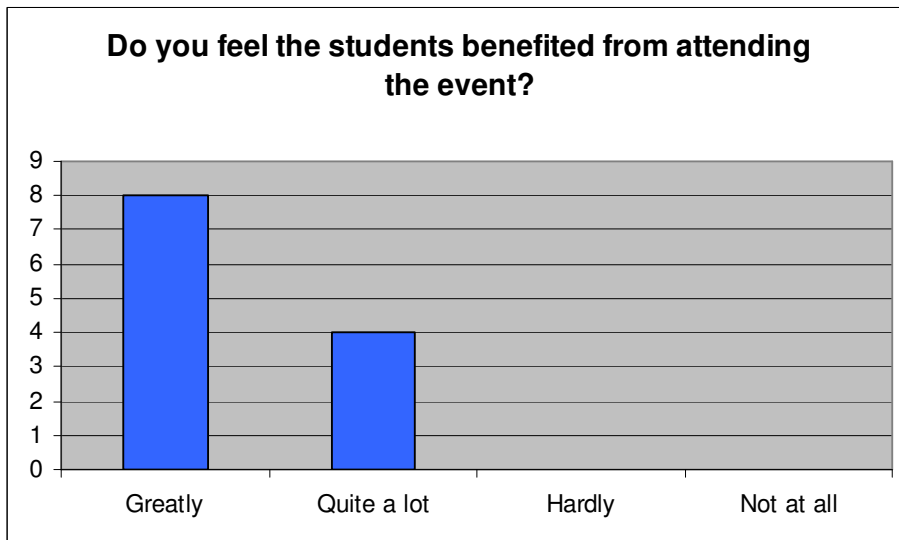
- “The event went very well as it focussed purely upon Special Needs students. Other events have often tried to merge the two student groups together which does not work as it alienates our students with special needs, reinforcing the stigma attached to their individual conditions which only adds additional barriers for them.” (Verbal comment from a school).
- “All of us, staff and students, enjoyed the day. We felt the day went very well and have no suggestions for improvements. Thank you.”
- “Modify the evaluation forms. Some of our pupils' literacy skills are quite poor. Use of symbols might be better.”
- “I felt the day was a really enjoyable experience for both the students and the staff. The sessions were pitched at a pace they were comfortable with and the mixture of activities kept the day fresh.”
- “The only very minor thing I would perhaps change is the length of the lunch break, some of the students became a little restless before the afternoon activities.”

5. WORKSHOP FACILITATORS EVALUATION

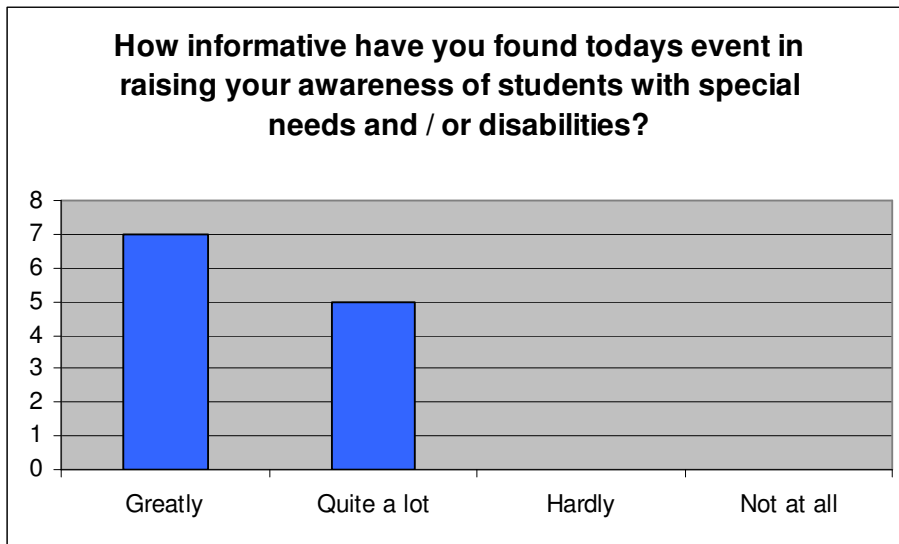
Representatives from the different industry sectors who facilitated the workshops were also given the opportunity to provide feedback on the event through an evaluation questionnaire. Twelve individuals returned their completed evaluations. The information below is a summary of their responses.



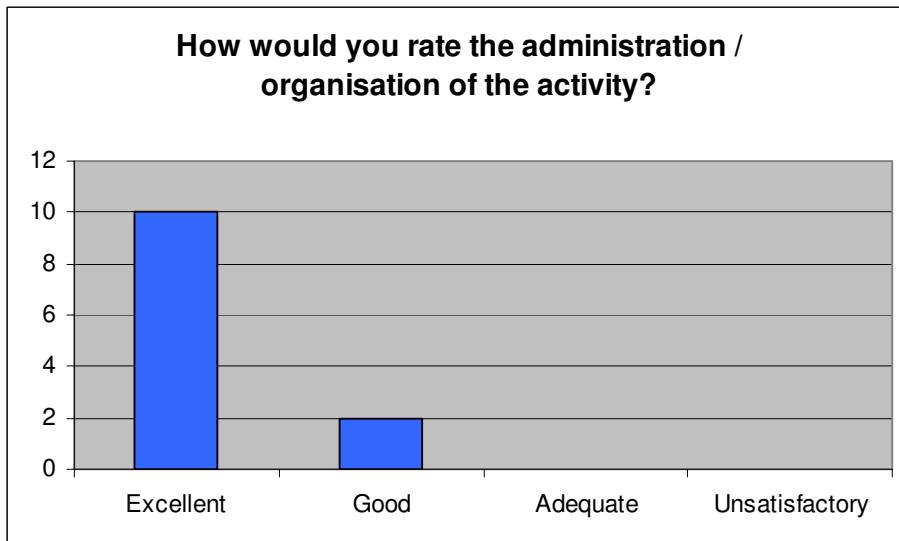
All respondents stated that the event had been useful to some extent, with 67% considering the event to be ‘Very’ useful to themselves and their organisation.



Again, all respondents felt that the students had benefited from the experience, with 67% indicating that they felt the students had benefited ‘Greatly’.



All respondents stated that they had found the event informative, with 58% finding that it had raised their awareness of students with special needs ‘Greatly’, and 42% that it had raised their awareness ‘Quite a lot’.



All workshop facilitators were happy with the administration and organisation of the event, with 83% considering this to be ‘Excellent’.

When asked “Would you be prepared to be involved in a similar event in the future?” 100% of respondents said that ‘Yes’ they would.

Workshop facilitators were also invited to provide further comments and suggestions for ways in which future events may be improved. Their responses included:

- “Nothing to be improved on. Well organised and enjoyable day.”
- “Yet again very good.”
- “Invite the press to cover the event for local papers.”
- “Everything was in good order and well organised.”
- “I think the organisers are doing a great job and nothing needs to change, Well done.”
- “A great day. Thanks for the invite.”

6. WORK-BASED LEARNING PROVIDER FEEDBACK

A total of 7 Work-Based Learning (WBL) Organisations were contacted and invited to attend one of the two events. The purpose of this was to raise awareness amongst WBL staff of young people with special needs, and to challenge their own perception of the limitations of this client group in relation to employment.

Of the 7 providers contacted, only 3 organisations accepted the invitation to attend. Senior level feedback from one of the organisations declining the invitation to attend was “Special Needs is not high on our agenda” – outlining the low level priority given to the client group by this particular provider.

The two events provided a WBL delegates with a representation of students, ranging from behavioural and emotional needs, through to Medium and Severe Learning Difficulties.

Each of the three WBL delegates attending confirmed this was their first interaction with students with special needs and/or disabilities. It was confirmed that perception was often the main barrier to engagement with this client group, with many being unaware of the range of special needs or disabilities that would place these young people into this category.

Whilst it was agreed by each of the WBL delegates that employment would not be a possible outcome for all of the students attending the events, it was clear that a number of students would be capable of progressing into work. For the remaining students, the experience obtained through the event was hugely beneficial to support their own knowledge and understanding, social awareness, soft skills development and aspirations for adult life.

Through group discussion with the training provider delegates, it became apparent that the current focus upon successful outcomes and the restraints placed upon providers in relation to minimum levels of performance etc provide their own barriers to engagement.

When faced with these in addition to the barriers within society, the result is often a lack of participation.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon the commencement of this project, it was the combined opinion of both the Lincolnshire & Rutland EBP and the Lincolnshire Transitions Service that the aspirations of many students with special needs and/or disabilities were set by their peers – i.e. teachers, tutors or parents/guardians.

The purpose of the project has been three fold:

- a) to raise the awareness of our young people of the opportunities available to them through practical experience and applied learning;
- b) to raise awareness of influential peers of the activities that could be offered independently by their own establishments to provide a more comprehensive work-related learning offer suitable for all students as opposed to the more able;
- c) to raise employer awareness of special needs and disabilities, removing barriers often preventing their engagement of both supporting student development and their consideration for employment.

Preparing for transition

Following consultation with influential peers supporting students with special needs and/or disabilities, it is evident that the main factor in a successful transition is the consistency of the student mentor and level of support provided. Combined with the need for stability in day to day life, it is clear that transitional pathways need to be planned from an early stage, allowing any potential changes in direction resulting from increased awareness of experience to be introduced with minimal stress to the young person.

Events such as the HOPE Project provide a perfect opportunity at an early stage for students to experience the various industry sectors and to raise awareness of the opportunities that may be available to them. Delivery of such activities around Year 9 in school will provide students with the knowledge and experience required to influence their person centred transition plans. Participation within such an event will also provide key peers and tutors responsible for assisting students with their transitional planning with a greater knowledge of the young persons skills, interests and broader aspirations.

The outcome of such an event can then be used to signpost the more able students to more focussed work experience placements, adding value and progression opportunity to their individual transition plan.

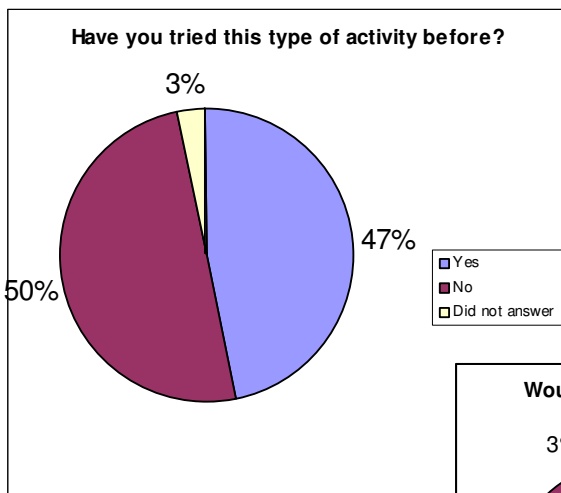
Raising student awareness

When reviewing student responses within Section 2 – Initial Student Data against responses acquired following the workshop activity (Section 3 - Student Workshop Data), the power of practical experience is clear in relation to its impact on student aspirations.

Interestingly enough, the majority of students were supported by their teachers/tutors with their responses within section 2, where as the responses following each workshop were obtained independently from students with a small proportion assisted by impartial event facilitators.

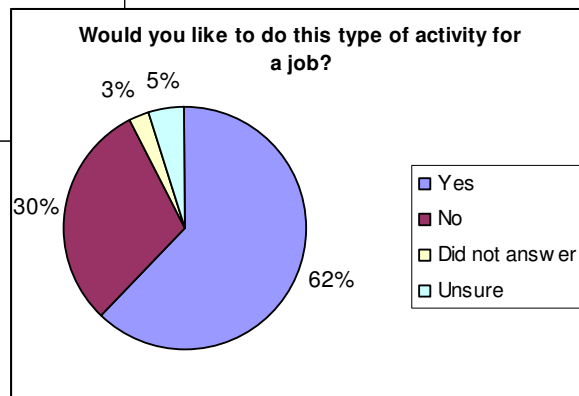
With less than 50% of participating students having experienced the types of tasks undertaken within the employer led workshops prior to the event, the shift in interest towards employment was clearly a result of the increased awareness and practical experience enjoyed by the students during the project.

The volume of students expressing an interest in employment prior to the industry day activities equated to only 30%.



The majority of students initially had stated their preference was to attend a specialist or traditional college (total of 61%) compared to only 30% interested in going into work.

Following the workshop activities and exposure to potential employment related tasks, this percentage rose to 62%, clearly signifying the impact of the project.



Comments from students during the two days reinforced the requirement of practical experience days, allowing them to “try different things” before having to make decisions regarding their future destination or career choices.

One student in particular prior to the event had always insisted he wanted to be a Fire-Fighter. Whilst this career choice would be unlikely due to his own medical condition, it became apparent through discussion that the young man had a limited view of potential career choices.

The HOPE project industry day provided the opportunity for the student in question to experience all 5 industry sector workshops. Following the construction workshop, the employer facilitating the activity remarked that the student had excelled at the plumbing activity. The student also stated he had enjoyed the activity and felt he would definitely like to consider plumbing as an employment option.

Project Sustainability

As a result of the project, a total of 5 special schools have committed to reviewing their internal planning and offer of work experience to their students and the opportunities for incorporating an Industry Taster Day into their curriculum.

The EBP have committed to hosting a Special Needs Focus Group in partnership with the Lincolnshire Transitions Service where schools can come together to action the following:

- a) The sharing of best practice
- b) Combining resources and funding to obtain best monetary value for events such as Industry Days
- c) Support partnership working for employability and vocational development

A total of 13 schools from both mainstream and special schools have confirmed their wish to be involved in the Special Needs Focus Group. With the recent Government white paper, “Special Educational Needs and Disability Review – A statement is not enough” published in September 2010 and the very clear message surrounding identification of special needs, there is a greater requirement for mainstream education and special schools to work more closely together to support each other.

It is hoped that the participation of both SENCO’s from mainstream in addition to the specialist tutors from our SEN schools will provide the additional support to assist staff with the challenges faced in addition to the future transition of students moving between the two.

It is through this group that the long term sustainability and additional benefits gained from the project will be reviewed and supported.

Final Conclusions

Having reviewed the outcomes against the original project aims, the project has met its original criteria, and exceeded expectations in some areas.

The feedback and statistics from students, staff, employers and WBL delegates has shown overwhelming benefits from the project in terms of raising awareness for student progression and the removal of barriers from influential groups involved in the transitional progression of students with special needs.

In the same way that the activities have impacted upon our students, the project has proven that the benefits of such activities become clearly visible to teachers and employers when they are personally involved in such activities and can physically experience the event and its impact for themselves.

It is this principle that has been fundamental to the HOPE projects success – “learning through doing” for all involved.

For further information relating to this project, please contact:

Claire Flavell
Work-related Learning Manager
Lincolnshire & Rutland Education Business Partnership

EBP
Education Business
Partnership

Lincolnshire & Rutland

The EBP would like to express its thanks to the following:

Alexiane Home from Home Boarding Kennels
Beckfield Nurseries
Build A Future
Gates MacBain
Hair Razor
Hall Farm Nursery
Image International
Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Lincolnshire Transitions Service
Lincolnshire Welfare to Work Service
Rumbles
Sue Clements
The Healthy Hub

For further information regarding any element of this document,
please contact:

Claire Flavell
Work-related Learning Manager
Lincolnshire & Rutland EBP

Tel: (01522) 574305
Email: claire.flavell@eblo.org.uk

