

Minister Praises scheme to help pupils with special educational needs gain employment

Special Educational Needs Pupils from across the Midlands taking part in programme to boost their employability

12 Jan 2015

- **Last year's interns either got full time jobs or went on to further education.**
- **Children's Minister, Edward Timpson MP, praises the scheme**

Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson, has today (Monday 12 January 2015) praised a National Grid scheme to help young people with learning disabilities get into work.

EmployAbility – Lets Work Together" gives young people with a range of special educational needs a year's internship with National Grid, gaining valuable work skills and exposure to the working environment.

Visiting the scheme today (Monday 12 January 2015) Edward Timpson said: "National Grid's initiative fits in with what we are trying to achieve through our SEND reforms – to help children with additional needs to achieve their best by putting their needs at the centre of the system.

"It's absolutely vital young people with SEND are supported in the transition to the workplace when they finish education. Too many talented young people have been left in limbo in the past. That's why I want to see more supported internships and work placements like this to offer a first step onto the career ladder."

This is a message supported by the FTSE 100 Utility company who are using the Minister's visit to encourage more businesses to take up schemes offering internships to young people with special educational needs.

"EmployAbility, Let's Work Together" was piloted last year and gave 5 young people from special schools in Warwick and Coventry a year in the workplace. Four are now working for the company in roles such as sustainability, customer liaison, IT and project support (with the fifth person going back into mainstream further education). The programme has been expanded to offer placements to a further 12 students in Warwickshire and Leicestershire with a view to raising this eventually to 20 across the company.

Taurai Horton (18), one of last year's interns who now has a permanent role in the company, said: "People never thought I could make it in life. Being bullied for being autistic made me hate my condition and myself. This condition has affected me greatly and has always given me disadvantages.

"Being in 'EmployAbility, Let's Work together' made me realise that anything is possible and that I can do things I never thought I could do. It's been an amazing experience and I'm so thankful I got the chance.

"If there were more companies using models like this then people like me would be so much better off. EmployAbility has shown me that it doesn't matter if you have autism or disabilities you still can do it. Now, I can dare to have ambition."

Department for Education statistics state that students with learning disabilities have only a seven-per-cent likelihood of finding paid employment. The cost to the community of supporting someone who doesn't get into employment through their life is £1 million per person.

Added to this are the costs and social impacts you can't quantify - the individual who wants to contribute but doesn't get a chance. National Grid's EmployAbility programme is about doing just that - giving a chance to people who don't always get one.

Dr Emma FitzGerald, Head of National Grid's gas distribution business, where many of this year's interns are working said: "So many companies will be inadvertently screening out young people with additional needs just by the way they run their recruitment processes. It's not deliberate but it's a barrier and one that can easily be addressed.

"The results we've seen from EmployAbility have been amazing. Students are quick to fit in to their job roles, their self-belief grows, as do their aspirations. Their National Grid internship is an important part of their CV and demonstrates that they can bring value to a business environment.

"What we've found is that not only do we have competent, engaged, committed young people working with us, but also our existing staff gain greater disability confidence and a real sense of pride that they're working for a company that offers these kinds of opportunities. It's encouraged them push the boundaries of what's possible in their own careers and development. It's absolutely been a mutually beneficial scheme."

The programme has a simple but effective model minimising the impact on both the business and the student. National Grid identifies roles that an intern can fill while the special schools we partner with provide Job Coaches. The Coaches go into the business, learn the role, break it into component parts, train the intern and help them settle in. As the intern's confidence grows, the Coach backs away. Each intern spends about three months in the role and will do three internships over their final academic year.

It's this model that National Grid will be sharing with Edward Timpson MP, hoping to show how any company or SME could introduce a similar scheme into their business.

Emma FitzGerald added: "We're keen to see EmployAbility expand and grow within National Grid but we also want to encourage other businesses to offer similar opportunities to young people with disabilities."

Contact for media information only

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Notes for editors

EmployAbility involves current and former pupils from the following schools: Oak Wood Secondary School in Nuneaton, Warwickshire College Group of schools, Hereward College in Coventry, Round Oak School in Warwick, Dorothy Goodman School in Hinckley, Leicestershire

Taurai Horton (a former intern) and one of the National Grid EmployAbility team are available to do interviews. Contact Rebecca Watson on the numbers above for more details

For an interview with Edward Timpson MP please contact the Department for Education press office on 0207 340 8332 – Ext: 308332

To speak to the schools about their involvement in EmployAbility or the importance of employment experience to young people with disabilities, please contact the schools directly.

Notes to Editors:

National Grid is pivotal to the energy systems in the UK and the north eastern United States. We aim to serve customers well and efficiently, supporting the

communities in which we operate and making possible the energy systems of the future.

National Grid in the UK:

- We own and operate the electricity transmission network in England and Wales, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. We also operate, but do not own, the Scottish networks. Our networks comprise approximately 7,200 kilometres (4,474 miles) of overhead line, 1,500 kilometres (932 miles) of underground cable and 342 substations.
- We own and operate the gas National Transmission System in Great Britain, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. Our network comprises approximately 7,660 kilometres (4,760 miles) of high-pressure pipe and 618 above-ground installations.
- As Great Britain's System Operator (SO) we make sure gas and electricity is transported safely and efficiently from where it is produced to where it is consumed. From April 2019, Electricity System Operator (ESO) is a new standalone business within National Grid, legally separate from all other parts of the National Grid Group. This will provide the right environment to deliver a balanced and impartial ESO that can realise real benefits for consumers as we transition to a more decentralised, decarbonised electricity system.

- Other UK activities mainly relate to businesses operating in competitive markets outside of our core regulated businesses; including interconnectors, gas metering activities and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) importation terminal – all of which are now part of National Grid Ventures. National Grid Property is responsible for the management, clean-up and disposal of surplus sites in the UK. Most of these are former gas works.

Find out more about the energy challenge and how National Grid is helping find solutions to some of the challenges we face at <https://www.nationalgrid.com/group/news>

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