

Minister visits EmployAbility scheme

Special Needs students from Nuneaton's Oak Wood School taking part in programme to boost their employability

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Children and Families Minister Edward Timpson MP has given the thumbs up to a pioneering National Grid programme that is helping three students from Nuneaton's Oak Wood School prove their worth in the workplace.

Harry Potten, Megan Moran and Mac Wright took part in a question and answer session with the Minister during his visit to National Grid's Warwick offices yesterday (Monday 12 January). The 'EmployAbility – Let's Work Together' programme offers internships to young people with special educational needs, giving them valuable skills and exposure to the working environment.

The trio joined the scheme in September at National Grid's Hinckley Operations Centre. Taking up placements in areas such as reprographics, recruitment and information technology, they have already deeply impressed managers and colleagues with their quickness to learn, enthusiasm and dedication.

Megan said: "I feel more confident. I was so delighted to be part of a team. Everyone has been very friendly and gave me support."

The Hinckley scheme follows a successful pilot programme with five young people from special schools in Warwick and Coventry. 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.

Now National Grid is calling on more businesses to take up schemes offering internships to young people with special educational needs.

Dr Emma FitzGerald, Head of National Grid's gas distribution business, where many of this year's interns are working, including the interns from Oak Wood School, 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."

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.

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.

Speaking about the visit 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."

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- 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.
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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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