

Schools and businesses come together

Urban&Civic have pledged to work in partnership with local schools and colleges to help young people in Huntingdonshire find employment as part of the new Enterprise Campus. An event held at Alconbury Weald brought pupils from four Cambridgeshire schools closer to the world of work and business.



Working in partnership with Huntingdonshire Secondary Education Partnership (HSEP) U&C organised a day-long session in May 2012 which enabled students from Abbey College, Sawtry, St Peters and St Ivo schools to meet local employers and start to explore career options.

The businesses who volunteered their time to come to the event represented a cross section from the world of work and included a local company with expertise in Direct Marketing, a leading manufacturer of equipment for monitoring time and attendance, Access Control and Visitor Monitoring – as well as a firm of architects, local government officers, and the specialist and design teams linked to the development of Alconbury Weald.

All levels were represented – from school leavers who had just joined the company through to Managing Directors.

The day began with a presentation from Rebecca Britton, Community Liaison Officer for U&C who introduced the Alconbury Weald project and set out the benefits it will bring to local young people as the development takes shape. Then came the opportunity for the students to interact on a one to one basis or in small group sessions with the employers. For many this was the first time they had been able to ask questions about the world of work directly to employers – with no strings attached. The questions they asked revealed a lot about the issues which are important to young people when thinking about their future employment. According to Gill Hanby, Project Co-ordinator with HSEP, who worked with the young people on the day:

‘Bringing young people out of the classroom and into a real workplace was a real benefit and whilst they were anxious at first they soon overcame their fears and participated in some worthwhile conversations. It was particularly interesting to see them

‘It was also interesting to hear the questions young people really wanted to ask about the workplace such as are people friendly, how many hours do you have to work if you want to be successful and how does this affect time with the family?’

engage with employers who were able to talk to them not just about the qualifications needed to get a job but the importance of attitude, communication skills and presentation. It was also interesting to hear the questions young people really wanted to ask about the workplace such as are people friendly, how many hours do you have to work if you want to be successful and how does this affect time with the family? And would having a tattoo stop me getting a job?’



Schools and businesses come together



‘Talking to the employers has made me more confident about working in a new place’.

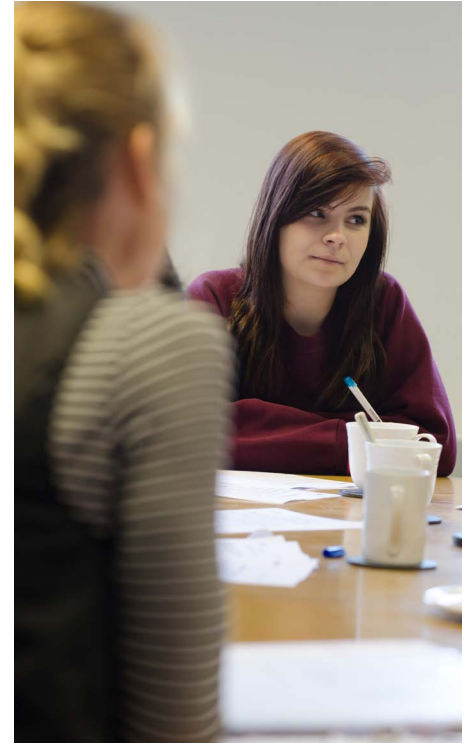
David from St Ivo School

The contributions from the companies represented was also revealing – unlike X Factor, success doesn’t happen overnight as Stuart Searle, MD of First Mailing, a successful Huntingdon-based direct mailing company, explained to the pupils:

‘I left school not knowing what I wanted to do. I had a short spell at college but then I was lucky enough to join a company who could see my potential and provided me with a training programme similar to an apprenticeship. The money at first was rubbish! I undertook an HND over three years in my spare time and with a lot of hard work and determination I learned how a company operates. After a few other jobs I decided to start my own business. However, running your own business doesn’t mean you are suddenly rich, you need to work hard to make your business a success, it’s not an overnight success. It’s taken 20 years but now I’m a successful businessman, and employ many people

across four companies throughout the UK. If you put in the effort you will get the reward.’

Paul James, Principal Engineer for Peter Brett Associates, Civil Engineers working on infrastructure at Alconbury Weald, was one the employers who took part in the event. As he explained to the young people: ‘From the age of about 12 I knew I wanted to build roads and bridges. Although I didn’t set out to be an “Engineer” I knew I liked building things and figuring out how they worked. Of course what I didn’t know then was that I would be working on interesting projects like helping to resurface one of the best known racing circuits in the world, at Brands Hatch, and having an opportunity to work in Abu Dhabi.’



‘I learnt that it is better to work at something you enjoy than just for the money’.

Beth from St Ivo School

The event also provided U&C with an opportunity to engage with the young people to get their feedback on how they would like to see Alconbury Weald develop and what might encourage them to apply to work at Alconbury Enterprise Campus. Their responses demonstrated some of the issues which they consider important when joining the world of work, including: places to sit and socialise at lunchtime – inside and out, free transport and good and safe access for bikes. Many found the heritage of the site fascinating too, although they disliked ‘not letting Sir speed down the runway!’

The sessions at Alconbury Weald were part of a wider five-day programme that HSEP have developed with Huntingdonshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, local schools and businesses to help prepare young people for employment. Kim Cooke, HSEP Partnership Co-ordinator said: ‘These days have been designed to support young people in thinking about their career options, and in experiencing a work place and meeting a range of business people and professionals. Schools already work with a number of local businesses, but this was an opportunity for the young people to meet a range of different people and explore career options!’