Tips for effective communication

It's really important that all forms of communication are clear and that the right methods for communicating are used for the students you'll be supporting. Use these tips to help ensure all forms of communication are well received and understood.

- Ask the school/college what communication format works best for them.

- Minimise distractions when you are communicating, so consider your environment.

- When speaking, ensure the volume of your voice is appropriate and check that everyone can hear you.

- Use clear, simple language, avoiding technical terms, jargon, acronyms and abbreviations. Where you think this is unavoidable, ensure you provide a clear explanation of the term, acronym or abbreviation.

- Provide only that information which is relevant. For example, if you are sharing information about your organisation, it's unlikely the students or teachers will need to know lots of financial information about your business.

- Share information in a logical order and be mindful of the amount of information you are aiming to share. Several smaller pieces rather than one long piece are much more helpful.

- When sharing information, use questions to check that what you've shared has been understood.

- Use positive and descriptive language, as this will help engage teaching staff as well as students.

- For written documents:

- Make it visually appealing, using colours, images and photos where possible. The school/college will advise on any visual needs for students.

- Write as you would speak in conversation.

- Keep sentences short and use simple punctuation.

- Bullet points and fact boxes are great to break up text.

- Use numbers rather than the word e.g. 3 instead of three.

- If students will be reading your information, use a font size of at least 12 and sans serif fonts such as Arial, Calibri or Verdana.

- Consider using videos recorded via smart phones or tablets to share information.

- Use open questions.

- Be mindful of your own body language, facial expressions and those of your audience. Use cues from your audience to adapt your style of communication.

- Be patient in your communication. You may need more time to ensure what you are communicating is well received and understood.

Mencap has a great resource called 'Am I Making Myself Clear?' with guidelines for accessible writing, as well as a guide on 'Communicating with people with a learning disability' which can be downloaded.

Questions to ask the school/college

The school/college will also welcome your openness in asking questions at this early stage. It may be that you're not sure what you can offer, or you have some concerns about being able to provide a meaningful work encounter or experience of the workplace. Through our research, we asked employers what questions they have found useful to ask and we also asked teaching staff what questions they wished they had been asked in the planning stage.

These are listed below, and you may want to use some of these as you start to plan your activity:

- Can you tell me about your school/college and your students?

- Are there any reasonable adjustments or special arrangements I would need to put into place to ensure we provide a safe, informative and happy experience for them?

- What extra support will the students need, and will I need to provide it or will you (the school/college) provide it? Can you give me some examples?

- What methods of communication will work best for your students?

- If I feel anxious or worried about not understanding the student, who can I speak to?

- How can we best support their career development and employability skills?

- Is there any information you can share of the work-related learning they have already done?

- What type of employer encounters/activities do they already experience?

- Can you suggest types of work encounters or experiences of the workplace we could offer and what materials/resources we may need for each?

- Is there anything specific about my organisation or the type of work we do that would be of particular interest to your students?

- How many students are we likely to be working with and what is the ratio of teaching staff to students?

- How many employees are typically needed to deliver a successful work encounter or experience of the workplace?

- Could you deliver a disability awareness session for employees?