

Why do you need SEND alumni to support careers work?

The purpose of this information

This information is provided to help you to persuade others in your organisation (e.g. Governors, Senior Leaders), that it is worth prioritising the development of a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Alumni in your organisation.

What is a SEND Alumni?

Alumni are volunteers from your network of past pupils and students. They are shining examples and role models who can inspire others to imagine a future in a type of industry or a more specific career. SEND Alumni refer to those past pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities. Their experiences can inspire positive aspirations and attitudes among pupils and wider groups of stakeholders. Relevant audiences and beneficiaries could be current pupils (including those with and without SENDs), teachers, business partners and employers. In this way, SEND Alumni can form a community of volunteers who will support your CEIAG work across a broad spectrum of activities.

Why is a strong SEND Alumni culture important for West Yorkshire?

The SEND Careers Hub for the Leeds City Region is one of two national hubs, established by The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) and led by Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (the LEP). It serves the areas of Calderdale, Leeds, Wakefield and York and consists of 29 schools and colleges. Training and resources have been developed for schools and colleges in the region to support them in building a thriving SEND Alumni culture because this is an impactful way to support CEIAG. This reflects the hub's commitment to supporting positive destinations for young people with SENDs and enhancing employer engagement.

So why do you need a strong SEND Alumni culture?

All young people need support with their careers, but due to the relatively low numbers of **people with disabilities in work** it can be helpful to give particular attention to how to support young people with SEND. Key to this is raising aspirations and awareness among young people through presenting them with role models whose careers counter common assumptions about what disabled people can do and achieve. A strong SEND Alumni network can do so much to build positive and affirming attitudes about disability and employment.

The importance of learning from others

We learn so much about potential careers from people around us, including our families, parents, friends and the employers we have come into contact with. Young people in particular learn about their futures from role models who have direct experience of the world of work, who have been there and who have 'got the t-shirt'. Careers theorist **Bill Law** identifies 5 key learnings and influences from other people;

1. Information about the world of work
2. Examples to follow
3. Feedback about how we are doing
4. Learn about expectations from the world of work
5. Receive support towards our goals.

The importance of a SEND Alumni network

For young people with SEND, alumni that include volunteers with learning difficulties or disabilities, can provide more scope for relatable role models for all.

Wider research has highlighted many of the direct benefits which alumni with such role models can bring such as:

- Boosting motivation and confidence
- Helping students see what people who come from the same school or region have achieved
- Giving students direct and up-to-date information about the world of work
- Supporting young people in developing their employability
- Providing specific, individualised mentoring.
- Allowing students to understand that they can achieve their goals.