

Employer engagement to benefit learners and businesses: East London Advanced Technology Training

URN: 51646

Region: London

Remit: Further education and skills

Provider background

[East London Advanced Technology Training](#) (ELATT) provides courses in information and communication technology, primarily to help unemployed and disadvantaged people in East London gain employment. ELATT's learning centre is in Hackney, approximately two miles from the City of London. Training is also offered in several community and partner venues in East and Central London. Deprivation levels in the areas around ELATT's main training venues are among the highest in England. ELATT works with a wide range of employers to provide work experience placements and enhance vocational learning.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how ELATT develops relationships with businesses that are trying to fulfil their corporate social responsibility. Together they create bespoke programmes that benefit both learners and the businesses.

The programmes range from one-off events, such as supporting a conversation club for learners who speak English as an additional language, through to extended work experience placements and mentoring.

Learners benefit greatly through applying and extending the skills and knowledge they gain in the classroom into the workplace.

The good practice in detail

At ELATT's [inspection](#) in January 2015, inspectors noted the 'great success in providing learners with development opportunities with large companies in the nearby City of London, neatly tapping into those companies' attempts to fulfil their

corporate social responsibilities'. This results in briefings, employment seminars, work experience, apprenticeships and other routes into employment for ELATT's learners. Companies welcome the high quality of ELATT's learners, but also feel they are benefiting by extending their own employees' understanding of the diversity and challenges in nearby areas of deprivation.

ELATT adopts an approach that reflects the needs of employers and learners by:

- allowing time to develop relationships with employers, so that work experience and vocational learning are planned thoroughly
- working with businesses that share similar organisational values and aspirations
- creating a culture of employer engagement and ownership
- adapting to different types of employer and developing opportunities that fit with their business model
- ensuring that learners have the capacity to meet the demands of extended work experience placements
- providing on-going monitoring and support for learners and employers.

Developing relationships with employers

ELATT invests much time, over a year in some cases, in nurturing relationships with like-minded businesses through joining local employer networks. Projects often start small but grow and develop over time as the partnership gains a greater understanding of what each can contribute. Employers that are new to the education sector can take time to establish where they fit in and what they can offer. This investment of time by ELATT's managers and staff pays dividends, as the number of learners undertaking extended work experience has increased impressively over the last year.

However, the business needs of employers take priority and so determine the pace of the programme

development. ELATT's chief executive officer (CEO), Anthony Harmer, says: 'Patience is the key and there are no quick fixes! The time we invest at the beginning builds solid foundations which lead to great opportunities for our learners and the companies we work with.'

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Businesses with shared values

Opus 2 International is a company that specialises in providing software for litigation and transcription services. Opus 2 staff met ELATT while developing their corporate social responsibility programme through a local brokerage initiative, 'City Action', which matches companies to local community organisations.

Opus 2 was 'hooked' by the enthusiasm of ELATT's staff and found it shared ELATT's core values and beliefs. This led to Opus 2 delivering some stand-alone interview practice sessions for learners. The company has since developed two substantial work experience placements for learners.

Camara is an international charity and social enterprise that refurbishes computers and supplies them to schools in, among other places, Africa. An ELATT student discovered the charity during a class on gaining work experience through volunteering, leading to a relationship being established with the charity where ELATT's learners put their practical skills to good use in helping with computer refurbishment. Since the relationship started, six learners from ELATT have taken substantial work experience placements at Camara and the two organisations now have a formal referral and evaluation process in place.

Creating a culture of employer engagement

ELATT ensures that staff have time available to make, develop and maintain vocational learning opportunities with employers. The CEO has freed up teachers' time for this. The co-ordinator of vocational projects spends up to two days each week on this area of work.

Responsibility for employer engagement is not given to one or two individuals and seen solely as their concern. All staff share the work. Trustees who have 'contacts, seniority and networks' are encouraged to use these to broaden employer engagement. For example:

- one trustee has used his professional contacts to set up a relationship between ELATT and leading tech organisations Xerox, Cognizant and Informed Solutions
- another has recently established a partnership with the University of Westminster.

This whole-organisational approach leads to greater ownership of employer engagement throughout the organisation.

The commitment of the CEO and senior staff releases resources and enables others to plan the details and deliver the work. He sums up the benefits of partnerships with local businesses: 'Our City InSight programme with local business is a major factor in helping us meet our fundamental organisational aim: to produce students with the skills and attitudes that the London economy needs. Our corporate partners make a huge contribution in supporting our students to gain vital work

experience and develop the self-confidence they need to raise their ambitions and realise their potential.'

Adapting to different types of employer and opportunities

ELATT adopts a flexible approach that exploits well different opportunities that different employers provide. ELATT's work experience programme with Opus 2 is designed so that the employer selects the learner.

- Opus 2 shortlists candidates from the CVs provided by ELATT and interviews learners, as it would any prospective employee.
- This in itself is a good experience for learners, who get to practice their interview and presentation skills.
- It ensures that organisations can control who they work with and gives the businesses ownership of the programme.
- Such was the success of the initial four-week work experience placement, it has subsequently been extended to three months with plans for Opus 2 to support more of ELATT's learners in the future.

ELATT had a different approach when working with Crowdskills, a company that helps connect new freelance tech professionals with businesses. As part of its corporate social responsibility, it works to help disadvantaged young people. Due to their shared values, Crowdskills has a long-standing relationship with ELATT and as part of the [Teach Too programme](#) Crowdskills supported ELATT to redesign the curriculum so that it better focused on the specific areas of expertise that freelancers web designers need. As a result eight learners have been employed on a freelance basis.

Ensuring that learners can meet the demands of extended work experience placements

Placing learners with employers is about more than them just having the right

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technical knowledge and skills to carry out the role, although this is important for a successful placement.

Staff at ELATT have a very good understanding of the needs and personal circumstances of individual learners. This enables them to put in place 'stepping stones' to work experience

outside of ELATT such as in-house mentoring and coaching.

Where learners have personal barriers that may affect their ability to successfully complete a placement, staff put in place additional support to help them do so. For example, staff secure charitable funding that they use to support learners' childcare and travel costs. This ensures that learners are very well placed to successfully complete their placement. Last year, all learners who undertook work experience completed it successfully. The benefits to learners are summed up well by one who said, 'This have given me confidence to find my vocation.'

On-going monitoring and support for learners and employers

ELATT maintains on-going monitoring of placements and support for learners during their extended work experience. Staff are strong advocates for learners when needed and help build their confidence; as one said, 'I've learned that I'm good enough to improve my life.'

Staff work hard to forge good relationships with advisers at JobcentrePlus and support learners well when appointments need to be arranged outside of a learner's 'working day'.

The amount of time employers need to support placements varies. The investment of time in setting up extended work experience placements pays off, as once they are established they are based on firm foundations and support typically decreases. This is a key factor in increasing the number of placements available and maintaining the capacity to develop further placements with other companies.

The benefits of good employer engagement

For ELATT, the benefits are:

- a wider, more holistic learning experience is offered to learners
- teachers and managers increase their industry expertise and knowledge
- organisational knowledge of up-to-date industry needs, standards and expectations is improved.

For employers, the benefits are:

- access to talented and skilled individuals who are potential employees and freelance professionals
- help in developing and fulfilling their corporate social responsibility agenda
- broadening staff understanding of their local communities – as one said, 'It's so rewarding to know that I've helped'
- developing and extending the skills of existing staff through taking on extra responsibilities, for example supervisory or coaching roles
- adding capacity to the workforce with skilled and enthusiastic learners.

For learners, the benefits are:

- the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents to employers
- rapid development of workplace behaviours and attitudes
- increased competitiveness in the job market – a greater number of ELATT’s learners who undertake work experience placements progress to a job as their next step, compared to those who do not
- consolidating and extending their technical knowledge and skills
- developing beyond the technical requirements of the job role and gaining a broader skill-set, such as customer service skills and the ability to work in a team
- quick improvements in spoken English and communication skills for those learners who speak English as an additional language.

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children’s services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

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