

# Two-Way Street

**LEADERSHIP  
EXCHANGE**



**Wirral Met College**

Leadership Exchange at  
Wirral Metropolitan College

Wirral Metropolitan  
College

## LEAD CONTACT

**Heather Aspinwall** - College Manager STEM

## EMPLOYERS

**Unilever Ltd**  
**Arvia Technology**  
**Altus Science**

Commissioned and funded by

**The  
Education  
& Training  
Foundation**

Programme delivered by



## Introduction to Two-Way Street

The nature of work is continuously and rapidly changing as employers engage with the opportunities and challenges posed by digital technology, globalisation and economic developments, resulting in transformations to existing as well as new occupations and business processes that demand new skills and capacities.

Pathways into professional and technical work for learners as well as the reskilling of the existing workforce increasingly require employer-education and training partnerships that can utilise their respective expertise - occupational, business process, curriculum and pedagogic – to plan, design and deliver innovative education and training. Nine Two-Way Street employer-provider Leadership Exchange partnerships, involving large, small and medium-sized enterprises and supported by the Education and Training Foundation explored out how these types of partnerships might work in practice.

In the nine projects leaders from both business and education and training identified ways of working together to enhance productivity, employment and training opportunities in the local, regional and ultimately national economy.

Strong and dynamic partnerships can provide the basis on which professional, technical and vocational education not only keeps pace with changes in work, but can also lead the way by acting as a seedbed for innovation at work and in education.

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## Leadership Perspectives

This project built upon an already existing and effective partnership between Unilever, Wirral Metropolitan College and the University of Liverpool through the addition of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) Arvia Technology Ltd and Altus Science engaging in identifying transferable learning activities to meet their own training needs. Meetings were held in a highly trusting atmosphere aimed at building a critical understanding of each partners' role in supporting learners in their occupational skills development. Thus the project was designed to explore whether the existing model of a learner journey could be replicated for a range of learners not only in large multi-national employer organisations but also within small- and medium-sized local employers. The success of the exchange lay in the open and trusting relationship built with the FE provider and their employer partners

## Project aims

The specific aims of this project were to:

- Increase involvement of employers in the design and delivery of vocational programmes within the college;
- Improve employers' awareness of how to make best use of college resources to support business growth;
- Create new strategically significant opportunities for learners through Higher Level Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Traineeships in chemical, sciences and technologies sectors.



## Project description

This *Leadership Exchange* built upon an already existing relationship between Wirral Metropolitan College and Unilever Ltd, a partnership which has been delivering an 'apprenticeship' programme in conjunction with the University of Liverpool for a number of years. The programme has been particularly successful in recruiting female apprentices. The *Leadership Exchange* meetings aimed to explore what the key enablers of this relationship were, with a view to developing similar schemes in different disciplines and to examine how transferable the partnership model might be to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Wirral area. The two SMEs involved were Arvia Technology and Altus Science.

Both Arvia Technology and Altus Science are 'hi-tech' chemical businesses based at Daresbury Science Park. The college is delivering Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLA) and Advanced Apprenticeships in partnership with both these companies and the *Leadership Exchange* sought to further develop this collaboration.

## Positive impacts

### For education provider

- Development of a more formalised and systematic model of employer partnership, which is transferable to a range of other employers;
- Embedding of processes to facilitate the co-design and delivery of elements of college programmes with employer partners;
- Development of an effective communication mechanism between the provider and employer through the involvement of senior managers.

### For employers

- Development of a robust partnership model that can be used to reach out to employers and apprentices within the local area;
- Establishment of a Science Industry Employer/provider network, with a shared plan in place to meet both Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and occupational sector priorities;
- Opportunities to provide input on programme design and delivery and to contribute to discussions on resources that the college should purchase to support learners and employers.

### For learners

- The establishment of clear pathways and opportunities to progress into apprenticeships/traineeships in chemical and related sciences and technologies.

## Key learning points

- An outward facing Employer Services department within the college, to act as a one-stop shop for employers and the “employer voice” within the college was of great value in developing partnerships;
- The involvement of senior leaders from both employers and education providers underlined the status and importance of the partnerships;
- Communication is key to the relationship with employers: it must be frequent and open to facilitate joint problem-solving and development;
- Joint initiatives between provider and employer, such as the promotion of careers for women in the STEM industries, has tangible benefits for learners.

## Recommendations for developing employer partnerships

- Ensure that learners are aware of how the partnership works so they can be part of it;
- Involve new employers in partnerships wherever possible to take forward ideas and initiatives;
- Involvement of other agencies such as the LEP can play an important role in the development of effective provider/ employer partnerships;
- Make use of current and past apprentices to help strengthen partnership arrangements: current apprentices can provide valuable feedback and past apprentices can act as advocates for potential recruits.

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## Feedback

*'This Leadership Exchange helped all partners to prioritise communication and bring a better understanding of challenges faced and achievements won by employers and providers of VET as we work together to develop our local STEM talent pool'*

**(Heather Aspinwall, College Manager STEM, Wirral Met College)**

## Links and contact details

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### Employer contacts

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