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NETS AND ANCHORS / CASE STUDY

# Esteem Multi-Academy Trust

*Post-16 pathways and supported internships for young people in specialist schools and AP*



Illustrative image (AI-generated), not this setting.

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# At a glance

**School group**

Esteem Multi-Academy Trust: 14 specialist schools and alternative provision academies

**Place**

Derbyshire, Derby City, Staffordshire, Worcestershire

**Phase**

Secondary and post-16, specialist and alternative provision

**Key partners**

Royal Derby Hospital, University of Derby, Transition 2 (local authority), FE colleges, EMCCA Careers Hub

**Contributor**

Sabrina Hobbs, Director of Education (previously Headteacher at St Martins School, part of Shaw Education Trust)

**Use destination data to test whether young people are truly prepared for adult life, and build pathways with employers so support doesn't stop at the school gate.**

This case study draws on Esteem Multi-Academy Trust, which is in the early stages of its strategy, and on examples from St Martins School in Derby, where the case study contributor Sabrina Hobbs previously worked. This case study is connected through the EMCCA Careers Hub with the Respect case study in the paper. All Trusts serve young people with additional needs, including SEND.

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# Anchored in place

**Understanding the school context.** Young people with SEND often receive significant investment at school, but too often support stops at school. In Derby, specialist post-16 places have shrunk, and some colleges and employers still form a judgement based on the type of school a young person has attended. Esteem's 14 schools are very different, so exam results can't be compared across them. What every school can track is where its young people go after leaving, and whether they stay there, indicating a successful outcome. That destination data gives the Trust its clearest picture of success and impact, or where there is more that needs to be done, where young people are dropping out of college or becoming NEET.

**Working in partnership.** In her previous role at St Martins School in Derby, Sabrina managed and developed a Project SEARCH internship at Royal Derby Hospital and later extended it to include the University of Derby. Two school staff, trained as job coaches, are based on site full-time alongside volunteer mentors in each department, and that is a large part of why it works. The local authority's Transition 2 service then supports young people once in work, because keeping a job can be as hard as finding one. This is a highly scaffolded approach to help young people succeed as they move into the workforce. In her current role at Esteem MAT, Sabrina is also connected to other specialist leaders in the region, including Respect and other schools through the EMCCA Careers Hub (see the Respect case study that follows).

# The net: building capacity together

Esteem has made destinations a Trust-level priority and is highly proactive in its approach. When destination data shows young people dropping out of college or becoming NEET, heads take that to the college or other supporting organisations, including the local authority, and design something better together, with the board's active backing. Destination data is not a measure the accountability system prioritises, but Esteem sees it as the truest test of whether its schools have successfully prepared young people for adult life, and chooses to invest in this work because of it. Its alternative provision heads are now exploring the concept of supported internships for young people without an education, health and care plan (EHCP) as this is a gap in the system.

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Sabrina's advice to other schools and Trusts starting out is to empower leaders to innovate and work in partnership with their LAs, supporting organisations, and larger employers.

## What is in place

Project SEARCH internships continue at St Martins School in partnership with Royal Derby Hospital and the University of Derby, with two full-time job coaches; support for young people once in work through Transition 2. At Esteem MAT, Trust- and school-level destination data are used across all 14 schools to maximise opportunities for its pupils and the communities they serve.

## The difference it is making

At St Martins School, eight or nine in every ten interns moved into paid work each year, and the rest into apprenticeships. Esteem's partnerships have widened the destinations young people can choose from. This results in low NEET figures across its various types of schools. As this strategy evolves, Esteem hopes to be able to report on the difference innovation and vocational pathway development will have on even more successful outcomes for more of our most vulnerable young people.

## Challenges and lessons learned

The system invests heavily in young people with SEND in special schools but lacks a clear route into adult life, so adult services often only step in at a point of crisis. Supported internships are mostly limited to young people with an EHCP, which leaves many in alternative provision without that pathway. Keeping a job can be as hard as finding one, which is why support after the internship matters.

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# How they are making it possible

**First step:** using destination data to see where young people were going, and where pathways weren't working.

**Roles and time:** two school staff trained as job coaches, based full-time on the internship sites, alongside volunteer mentors in each department. Heads lead the conversations with colleges and the local authority, with the board's backing.

**Funding:** Esteem's alternative provision heads are working with local authorities to access funding for supported internships for young people without an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

**Partners:** Royal Derby Hospital and the University of Derby host internships via St Martins School; the local authority's Transition 2 service supports young people once in work; and the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) Careers Hub connects St Martins, Esteem MAT, and other specialist providers with careers leaders and employers across the region.

**Starting with what you have:** look at where your young people go after they leave you, and whether it lasts. Then talk to one local employer or public body about hosting supported work experience.

# What we wish we'd known at the start

Plan for what you intend to happen after the placement from the start: maintaining a job is just as difficult as finding one.

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# In your setting

**School context:** Where do our young people go after they leave us? Is this a positive outcome?

**Working in partnership:** Which local employers, LAs and public bodies could support, fund or host supported internships, and who supports young people once they are in work? Is this a sustainable model?

**Building capacity together:** Does our board back leaders to act on destination data, even though accountability measures don't prioritise it?

*"We have a civic duty to make a difference. If we don't do it, who else will?"*

**Sabrina Hobbs, Esteem**

**Full paper and supporting sources**

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