

Case Study: Example of Good Practice or Innovation

Created for BASE (British Association for Supported Employment)

Please describe the practice or innovation.

Tom is a year 14 pupil at the Castle School Post-16, with moderate learning difficulties. He has lots of confidence and energy, and a lively personality, but can lose focus if he becomes distracted.

Tom was very keen to find work in a retail setting, so we set up some work experience for him in the dairy section at Sainsbury's Superstore in Newbury. This was a regular part of his school timetable, taking place once a week for six weeks. Tom quickly excelled in this placement; he completed tasks independently and took evident pride in his work, forming a great relationship with the dairy supervisor. After a few weeks he was offered the opportunity to move to an extended work placement, lasting several months. Through the placement we saw Tom develop new maturity and focus that were not always evident at school.

By the end of his placement Tom was very confident in his role and we felt he had developed the skills and understanding necessary to gain paid work in this area. Tom himself felt that this was an area he definitely wanted to pursue for future employment. We all agreed that he would do well in a smaller store, with more flexibility within the role and so we approached our local Tesco Metro, with whom we already had a good working relationship. The store were recruiting for new staff at that point and agreed that Tom could start a new work placement with them, with a view to gaining paid employment if everything went well.

Tom started his work placement at Tesco Metro in mid-October 2019. He immediately made a great impression, worked really hard and impressed the regular members of the team. At the end of November we received an email from the store manager, saying she wanted to offer Tom a permanent part-time job in stock replenishment. We supported Tom through the recruitment process, as the regular Tesco procedures still had to be followed, and he started paid work at the store in early 2020. His hours were arranged to fit around school commitments.

Tom has continued his paid work in the store even while the Castle School has been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He has had to adapt very quickly to the changes, procedures and challenges facing the retail industry at this time. Due to the current conditions, Tom has needed to progress in his role at a faster rate than might normally have been the case; working independently, dealing with difficult customers and learning to work on the checkouts. Tom has taken everything in his stride and has become a key member of the Tesco team.

What challenges were overcome and how?

Although Tom did well in his initial placement in Sainsbury's, he felt that this role was not right for him in the long-term. We discussed this with Tom at length to identify what he really wanted. He wanted to learn more and be involved in more aspects of the retail process, and the size of Sainsbury's did not allow this, as staff are assigned to specific areas. Through our previous work with the smaller Tesco Metro, we knew that the teams there had to be more flexible and work all over the store, which Tom thought he would prefer.

Due to a change in staffing it took us some time to re-engage with the Store Management Team to discuss Tom in detail. The new Store Manager had attended our World of Work celebration event at school, so she knew about our programme and the long-term goals we have for our students, and we knew that she was interested in getting involved. Through several visits to the store to talk to the manager face-to-face, we were able to set up the work placement that led to the paid position.

The Tesco Metro store runs at a fast pace, with a tight team. Tom had to adapt quickly to a new environment and needed some help to transfer his skills to the new position. We supported him in store as much as necessary and took photographs of the different aisles to assist Tom in finding his way around, enabling him to find products and assist customers.

The biggest challenge in securing Tom's paid position was getting through the Tesco online recruitment system. We needed to complete this, even though the manager had already decided that she wished to offer him a job, as this is standard Tesco practice. The system is complex, and requires a very specific set of responses. It is likely that Tom would not have got through if he had been applying as an unknown candidate, even with support. In order to complete the application, we worked closely with the store manager to guide Tom through the recruitment process over a series of in-store sessions, in order to achieve a successful outcome.

What learning would you want to pass on from this practice/innovation?

There are three main points we would pass on from this process:

- Put the right person in the right position: Through getting to know Tom really well, enabling him to develop his skills through work experience, and understanding his aspirations, we were able to identify the right job and environment for him, in a store where they were actively recruiting. Once we got him into the store, the progression to paid employment was very fast, and benefitted both Tom and the Tesco Metro store.
- Be persistent (without being a nuisance): We knew the store manager of Tesco Metro was open to working with us, but due to her work commitments and busy schedule we had to make regular appointments to discuss the recruitment process. Regular contact with the Store Manager was vital in this process, and having an understanding and awareness of other priorities allowed us to work together within a timeframe that worked for all parties.
- The most important learning from this practice was the importance of work experience or a work trial to achieve paid employment: If Tom had submitted an application to Tesco as an unknown candidate, he would not have passed the recruitment process. His success was based on the fact that he had already proved himself. Therefore the store manager knew she wanted to employ him and pushed his application through.

Tom: "Going to work gives me independence and the routine that I need. I love that every day is different as it is a small store. I have learnt a lot in the last few months. My colleagues have been supportive through all the Covid-19 challenges as things quickly change from day to day."

