

Work Inspiration Week 2021 – Creativity in a 'virtual world'

Work Inspiration Week (WIW) event is an annual event hosted and run by National Grid graduates for students with learning disabilities from partner colleges and schools. It is part of our supported internship 'EmployAbility, Let's Work Together' programme. In view of the restrictions linked to Covid-19 the 2021 WIW was organised and run virtually by a group of 2019 intake graduates across three regional hubs – Warwick, Wokingham and Solihull.

The WIW aims to give students with special educational needs and disabilities the opportunity to learn and explore within National Grid, raise aspirations and provide the opportunity to apply for the National Grid supported internship programme.

Whereas the WIW is normally hosted and run in person, giving students a taste of life in the office and meeting people across the business face to face, the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic made organising the event very different this year.

Instead, the graduate teams set about creating an itinerary for a virtual WIW that would still be an exciting and engaging opportunity to introduce the students to what National Grid does, different areas of the business and a variety of skills-based workshops.

Across the event students took part in a variety of learning and activities organised by the graduates including, but not limited to:

- Learning about what National Grid does as an Energy Transmission Owner and Operator
- Virtual office tours of key areas of NG offices including the Mailroom, Reprographics, Kitchen and Customer teams
- Q&A Meet 'n' Greet sessions with current EmployAbility interns to learn about the programme
- Sustainability activities to design and develop their own plant beds
- Skills-based workshops to think about the importance of customer service, personal strengths and time management
- Daily team hub check ins, including fun games such as cross words and sharing jokes

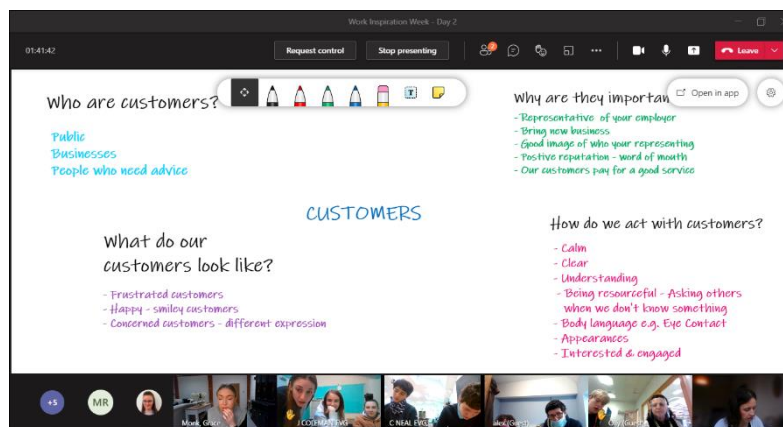


Photo: Screenshot of a 'Customer Service brainstorming activity' hosted with the Warwick Group

The event was finalised with a really rewarding plenary session, giving the students a chance to reflect on their learning and favourite aspects of the week alongside special guest attendees from across the business. This included attendance from senior leaders who shared their encouragement and thoughts with the group. Mark Pickles, Business Director MyFinance, who also leads EmployAbility, said: 'It would have been all too easy to cancel this year's WIW due to Covid-19 but our graduates have used their creativity and given a very inspirational experience to the students. Well done to all involved.'

Certainly the 2021 WIW event was an exceptionally rewarding experience for students and graduates alike. Many students taking part expressed a real interest to follow up with an application to the internship scheme and the graduates left having built confidence with organising events in difficult circumstances and delivering engaging content through non-ideal means. Graduate Kiah Cox said: "Organising and delivering this year's WIW was a great opportunity to put in practice skills learnt across the graduate program such as project management, building relationships with others and delivering presentations. Taking part and working with these inspiring young people has also raised my disability confidence. I would recommend the value of getting involved with EmployAbility programs to anyone!"

Many graduates taking part noted how the confidence and engagement of students across the event grew exponentially as attendees were able to build relationships and find trust in one another. It would be easy to have said an event like WIW couldn't take place in a virtual world, but this experience shows that focus on relationship building and fun can make anything possible even within the realities of a global pandemic.

The 2019 graduates taking part in the event included: *Jenny Wignall, Grace Monk, Lilla Torok, Martin Price, Sarah Brignall, Megan Rawbone, Ian Larsson, Vinay Joshi, Michele Jordan & Kiah Cox.*

Article written by Kiah Cox

Notes: Our EmployAbility programme started back in 2013 as a partnership with Round Oak (now Evergreen) Special Educational Needs School in Warwick. In that first year, we offered internships to five students at our nearby offices. We saw an enormous transformation in each of the shy and nervous students that first arrived, as they grew in confidence and self-belief, often for the first time in their lives. Since then, we have reached our 100th intern which is a significant milestone. We've expanded across 5 of our offices (including 2 in Cadent) and are in partnership with 11 special schools and colleges.

The supported internship model is simple. National Grid identifies a range of roles that an intern can fill. These could be office-based, or in departments such as catering, reception or facilities. The intern then spends around three months in one of these roles, supported by a job coach. These coaches are provided by one of our partner schools and funded by a government funded Access to Work grant. They provide individually tailored support to each intern, breaking down the role into manageable parts, training the intern and helping them to settle in. While at National Grid, the intern normally completes two or three placements in different areas of the business over the course of an academic year, giving them a thorough introduction to the organisation and different workplace tasks.

As well as their placements, the interns also spend a few hours every morning, with their job coaches, studying for a BTEC in work and functional skills. The qualification covers topics such as writing CVs and preparing for interviews. Armed with these new skills and workplace experience, it helps to make sure that at the end of the year, the interns are employment ready.

Why not watch this brief video to learn more about the programme: https://youtu.be/_JKPedEGzDA