



## Sheffield Futures

### About the organisation

[Sheffield Futures](#) is an established youth charity providing a range of services for young people in Sheffield and Sheffield City Region including careers advice services, youth clubs, Sheffield Young Advisors, Sheffield Youth Cabinet and UK Youth Parliament, Community Youth Teams, Duke of Edinburgh and Talent Match. Much of the charity's work is with disadvantaged communities within the city region.

What Employers Wants (WEW) fits well with the overall aims of Sheffield Futures and with their role in the Talent Match programme, a targeted project for young people aged 18-24, who have been not in education, employment or training (NEET) for 12 months or more. The programme helps young people overcome barriers to employment through one-to-one work with a coach and work experience opportunities with local employers.

In discussions with young people on Talent Match and other programmes, the attitude of employers frequently came up as a perceived barrier to employment. It was hoped that as well as helping young people to understand employers' expectations, taking part in the What Employers Want project would help employers to better understand young peoples' needs and would break down some of those barriers.

### Delivering the project

Five young people, identified by their Talent Match coaches as best able to contribute and benefit from participation, were recruited to the project. The group included a transgender young person, a care-leaver, a young parent, a homeless young person and two young people with 'invisible' health conditions.

Sheffield Futures already have good connections with local employers – approximately 60 employer champions, mainly voluntary sector and SMEs, are signed up to their Talent Match programme. The charity also has links with the Employers Forum in Sheffield providing contacts to 'big name' employers. Although it proved a challenge, seven employers, ranging from small community based organisations to a large popcorn factory, were engaged in the project, one employer from each Sheffield City Region.

Sheffield Futures wanted the young people to be at the heart of the project and to make decisions about how the project developed. Having brought the young people together to deliver the initial training programme, provided as part of the Project in a Box materials, they worked with the young people over several weeks to find out which industries or sectors the young people were interested in; to support them to develop their own questions for employers and to discuss different research methods for capturing responses. In the final meeting, the young people developed a presentation bringing together all the key points and quotes from the interviews they had done. The information from this has been condensed for use in different resources by Sheffield Futures. The participants were keen for example, to produce a booklet for young people across the city region, about what employers are looking for when they recruit a young person.

To support the young people at the start of the research, the first interview was undertaken as a group, with an employer already known to them.

*“I think that gave them the boost of confidence where they’d met the employer, they knew they were nice, they knew the questions they needed to ask so they were then comfortable enough when they were going out on their own to take more control.”* Project lead

For the remaining interviews, the young people arranged to go out to the employers in pairs, taking it in turns or deciding amongst themselves who wanted to ask the interview questions, if for example one of them had experience in the specific employment area or they wanted to ask specific questions to that employer. If needed, a member of the Talent Match team went with them, particularly as some young people, who require additional support to participate, can find travel across the city region, quite difficult. In all instances, the young people led the interview, and asked all the questions, and staff acted as note-takers only.

Some of the young people struggled with writing notes at the same time as interviewing, so the project team designed a consent form to request permission from employers to record the interview. These recordings proved especially helpful as the young people frequently identified things, when they listened afterwards, that they had not noted down or had missed during the interview.

## Challenges

The main challenge in delivering the project was recruitment. Sheffield Futures worked with five young people from the Talent Match programme, half the number planned.

This may have been due in part to some of the Talent Match coaches making decisions, on behalf of the young people they were working with, that they were not ready to engage in this type of project. Some young people may not have been

aware that project staff were prepared to come out to venues around the region and were deterred from involvement by the prospect of making the journey to Sheffield.

Many of the young people with whom Sheffield Futures engage require extra support to make the most of their lives, for example young people with mental health needs, young parents and young people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of harmful behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse or offending. Maintaining engagement on a project, particularly over a longer period, with young people facing these kinds of issues can be challenging. Although supported by the project team, two of the young people were only partially involved, at various stages of the project. The involvement of the young parent, for example was restricted due to childcare issues.

Sheffield Futures have found, with previous projects, that when young people come together from across the region they learn a lot from each other. With any project, bringing young people together at the same time can be problematic. To try to overcome this, the organisation funds taxis where public transport is limited, provides transport expenses, and offers lunch to encourage attendance.

### **Benefits – for young people, organisations and employers**

Project staff noted that the young people grew in confidence from their experience of interviewing employers. This was demonstrated, not only in the way they behaved during the interviews but in their reflections on the process and their conversations with the project team and other young people in the group.

Participants also benefitted from a greater awareness of the range of skills and characteristics employers are looking for.

*“...They now could say, ‘This is what I need to say to an employer.’ They have got more of an idea of what would be asked of them and they realised it wasn’t always as scary as it was made out.”* Project lead

Through their research, young people also developed skills in note-taking, C.V writing and working to deadlines.

Participation in the project gave employers the opportunity to engage directly with young people and to tell them what they were looking for in employees.

*“...it actually gives the employers an opportunity to say, “Well actually, in our business we recruit these types of people, and if you’re interested, then here’s some of the skills or some of the areas that you might want to develop.”*  
Project lead

Talent Match staff have used learning from the interviews to inform mentors’ one-to-one work with young people, for example on C.V. development.

The project team also plan to produce and disseminate information about the project findings, to benefit young people across the Talent Match partnership.

### **Success factors**

Allowing young people to take the lead was key to the success of the WEW project. Participants were more actively involved and enthusiastic because of their “ownership” of the project.

*“It got them more motivated about it, they came up with more ideas and they started talking amongst themselves more...”* Project lead

Planning in time at the outset to enable participants to bond as a team, and to develop their confidence, also made a difference to how young people engaged with the project

### **Project resources**

The Project in a Box toolkit proved a useful resource to start conversations with the young people taking part and to get going on the project. Participants found resources such as the sample interview questions particularly helpful, rather than starting from scratch with a blank piece of paper.