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### **Siemens puts young people on pathway to employment and independence**

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities have begun the journey to employment with Siemens in Hull.

The global engineering company has worked with the Pathway Plus project to develop a pioneering programme aimed at enabling young people with special needs to gain independence and confidence by entering the world of work.

The unique, long-term programme aims to support a group of young people from work placement through to supported internship with the ultimate aim of securing full-time employment with Siemens and its service suppliers at the Alexandra Dock site.

Typically young people with special needs face the prospect of a lifetime of unemployment and reliance on carers and the welfare state. The new programme aims to break that cycle, by enabling progression from school to fulfilling employment.

The initiative began with the young people visiting Siemens' Hull Blade Factory for the first time to meet the mentors and workplace champions who are supporting them to succeed.

The seven participants, aged between 16 and 19, are now spending one day a week at the factory on work placement in reception, office, catering, cleaning and security roles, either directly with Siemens or with supplier businesses. Over the next few months they will move around the various roles to establish those that are most suitable for them.

It is hoped that, from September, the participants can progress to supported internships with the prospect of full employment from September 2018.

Carolyn Woolway, Siemens' Head of Human Resources in Hull, said: "It's early days for the programme, but we have been so encouraged by how well the students have adjusted to their work placements. That has been a huge credit to them."

“These young people may have learning difficulties, but they also have skills and talents which are sometimes hidden. This programme is about unlocking their potential, so they have the opportunity to fulfill their lifetime ambitions.

“We understand they will require a great deal of support. That is why we have worked with the University of Hull to bring in volunteers studying towards careers in the fields of social care and special needs education. They will mentor the young people on a one-to-one basis during the early stages of the programme.

“We have also put in place a network of employee champions who appreciate the issues and challenges they face and are trained with the techniques to support them.

“We believe this programme will be good not just for the young people themselves, but for all our employees. We are already seeing how it is fostering a community in the workplace who are so protective and supportive of these young people. We envisage this will encourage our people to be more understanding, caring and tolerant.”

The project is part of Siemens’ drive to develop a diverse and inclusive workforce for its wind power manufacturing, assembly and logistics operations in Hull, which will employ 1,000 people when fully operational later this year.

The company has worked with Pathway Plus Manager John Chell, who is also the Assistant Headteacher of Ganton Special School in Hull, to develop the programme, which is a major element of the wider Pathway Plus project, based at the city’s Endeavour Learning and Skills Centre.

As well as the work placements at Siemens, Pathway Plus participants undergo a structured programme to develop skills and capability for independent living, including adapting to the world of work.

Mr Chell said: “The whole Pathway Plus project came from a desire to address the frustration of seeing former students return to their special schools for events in their 20s, 30s and 40s, having regressed since leaving school. They don’t progress because they haven’t had the stimulation and challenge that work provides and that means they become more and more dependent.

“Through Pathway Plus we are intervening to break the cycle, using employment opportunities alongside teaching life and independent living skills, to create a future of increased independence and active, empowered lives.

“The vision for Pathway Plus is to give these young people a stepping stone, with a safety net, into the rest of their lives. We want to enable them to develop as any other

young adult would and key to that is employment, with all the benefits it brings of having regular independent income, daily social interaction with colleagues and being valued as part of the team.

“Why can’t these young people be independent, economically active and contributing fully to society, especially when the special schools recognise they have the capability to make that contribution, with the right support?”

The programme is thought to be one of only two structured initiatives in the UK which involve major private sector employers supporting young people with special needs to gain employment. The other has enabled young people with special needs and disabilities to be employed by National Grid at its base in Hinckley, Leicestershire, and Siemens executives have visited the company to learn from that award-winning scheme.

Mr Chell added: “What is so special and impressive about the programme is the significant, long-term commitment of Siemens and their suppliers to support the young people to succeed. They have bought into this in a huge way.

“This is an opportunity not just for the young people themselves but for the city as a whole, to develop a programme of significant scale. We hope we can build on this and work with other companies to increase the scope and positive impact.”

Pathway Plus involves Hull’s four special schools – Ganton, which is the lead school for the project; Frederick Holmes; Northcott; and Tweendykes – and is part of Hull’s first multi-agency strategy to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

One of the priorities of the strategy, developed by Hull City Council and partner organisations, is to improve the transition to adulthood for young people with special needs, with an emphasis on promoting employment.

Councillor Phil Webster, Hull City Council’s Portfolio Holder for Learning, Skills and Safeguarding, said: “Pathway Plus is a really great programme that the Council’s Hull Training and Adult Education team have been working on with partners over the past couple of years to bring to fruition.

“To see one of the city’s newest employers supporting young people with special educational needs and disabilities by giving them the opportunity of moving to full-time employment is really heartening. I hope other local employers look at similar ways they can support special schools and young people with special educational needs and disabilities with training and employment opportunities.”

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## About Pathway Plus

Pathway Plus is a new option in Hull for school leavers with Education, Health and Care Plans. We can offer a unique two-year programme to provide the support needed to help young people with special educational needs and disabilities to become work-ready. The following are key points of the programme:

- We work with colleges, employers and training providers to give learners the chance to try out a type of work or course before enrolling onto work programmes.
- Learners are also supported to gain experience across a range of genuine work environments.
- During the supported internship programme, learners are immersed in a full-time work programme which is both supportive (tailored to meet the individual learner's needs) as well as progressive and challenging.
- Throughout the entire programme we work with various organisations and services to give young people any level of individual support they need. We deliver a holistic programme, supporting social and individual needs (including life skills, confidence, social skills and social care/health referrals) to develop each individual's core skills (such as functional, enterprise and employment skills).