



Where Autism
Professionals Connect

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Transitioning from school to employment

[New Bridge School](#) in Oldham was formed 10 years ago when three special schools were merged into one organisation. As a generic special school we support all levels of learners aged between 11 and 19 on two purpose built sites. Well over 50% of our learners have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) identified as either a primary or secondary need.

New Bridge became a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) in 2014, and part of the [New Bridge Group](#). We set up our post 19 provision, New Bridge Horizons, as a direct response to the [SEN and disability green paper](#) (later the [2014 Children and Families Act](#)).

Young people attend Horizons with the support of individual budgets or Continuing Health Care funding. We offer safe and stimulating adult courses that include supported work placements and volunteering, community engagement, living skills and leisure opportunities.

17 -19 Internship model

In 2009 New Bridge introduced Bridging the Gap (BtG), a supported internship model that has been featured in Ofsted best practice publications and DfE guidance. BtG is New Bridge's critically acclaimed employment strategy for young people with additional needs aged between 17 and 19.

The principles are based on the highly successful 'Project Search' model founded in Cincinnati, USA. Our BtG project immerses young people in the world of work by basing them with an employer for a full year where they gain an understanding of employment, and learn the concepts involved in a variety of jobs. The clear intention is for the individual to develop transferable skills to enable them to move into the world of work.

We opened our first BtG project at the Royal Oldham Hospital in 2010 and have subsequently developed further 'pods' at Manchester Metropolitan University and within Oldham Council. The impact can only be described as remarkable, with the organisation moving significantly more young adults into employment than the current national average.

19 to 25 project

We have recently developed a new initiative, Future Finders, based at New Bridge Horizons. Future Finders, with the support of the Manchester College, works with small and medium size businesses to further increase opportunities for young adults aged 19 to 25 who are interested in accessing supported employment, paid employment or volunteering opportunities. Many of these young people have been on BtG and have not yet been able to secure paid employment.

Future Finders matches young people to roles that offer a meaningful and fulfilling long-term future. We provide extended specialised support to both employers and young people, to ensure a smooth transition into work that offers mutual benefits and rewards.

Some of the young people are also interested in partnering with local businessmen and women to learn more about setting up their own business. Self-employment opportunities include t-shirt design, computer programming or catering. We work with a number of industry mentors who can support our young people to become the next Alan Sugar!

Moving into employment

Aspiration to the world of work is reinforced from the day all the children and young people join the New Bridge Group.

There are many informal messages such as campaign work by our New Bridge Champions (young people who have succeeded in the workplace), and best practice promoted on our internal TV channel, our websites and within our local media. More formal messages are embedded within our curriculum.

Curriculum

Our curriculum is constantly evolving to meet the needs of an ever changing population. It offers many unique elements but of particular interest are the 14-19 pathways in:

- Performing Arts (Lumenus touring theatre company)
- Horticulture (Hortus full gardening service)
- ICT (Digit4ll)
- Sports (Activ8).

Expectations are high and aspiration is encouraged.

Assessment

In common with many other schools we are presently evaluating our assessment models. What has become increasingly apparent is the fact that there appears to be a disconnect between our assessment of the 'traditional' curriculum, and our ability to assess the skills employers require.

New Bridge feels that our present assessment system continues to serve a purpose in relation to measuring progress and achievement for individuals and the school as a whole. However, it is arguably limited in giving stakeholders and the young people themselves the information they require to assess if they are ready to access employment pathways or, more importantly, where they need to improve their skills. We need a 'golden thread' that assesses a variety of skills in all areas of our curriculum.

This challenge has led us to develop the New Bridge Dashboard which assesses a more holistic set of skills. These include:

- being a good team worker,
- committed
- reliable
- organised
- honest
- an independent thinker
- flexible
- determined
- and ensuring good attendance and punctuality

We are in the process of developing an assessment tool which includes sets of developmental descriptors. Our year planner now includes 'assessment weeks' where our stakeholders and young people agree progress relating to each of these indicators, celebrate their successes and also put together individual targets to improve their deficit areas.

Placements

From Key Stage 4 onwards the young people who have the required competencies are offered internal, supported work placements. As a large organisation we are fortunate in being able to offer a variety of placements in areas including administration, catering, sports development, car valeting, premises work etc.

For our Future Finders (aged 19-25) these placements can be enhanced with local small and medium size employers. Placements can take place weekly and are extremely flexible; they may be half a day a week for a year, or 5 days a week for 10 weeks.

Part-time placements can also be suitable for young adults who have a particular interest in developing skills within an industry but are not yet ready to enter full-time paid employment.

Key staff involved in the process are:

- Our curriculum and pastoral teams.
- Named senior staff who work with all our placement and work providers.
- Job coaches, travel trainers and careers advisors who support all placements.

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The future

Since opening, the number of children and young people attending organisations within the New Bridge Group has risen by over 120%. We now support over 450 children and young people aged between 4 and 25.

The New Bridge Group continues to evolve; we now are one of the largest employers in Oldham with over 280 staff and we are proud of our reputation for supporting, developing and training every individual.

Throughout the last decade, and central to all our developments, has been our mission statement “Learning together, Learning for all, Learning for life”. Our children and young people deserve the best we can offer them – we will continue to strive for that excellence.

Further reading

[Bridging the Gap: a student guide](#)

[Kirklees Local TV and Bridging the Gap](#)

[Newbridge Group on Twitter](#)

[Newbridge School](#)

[Ofsted \(2012\) Raising aspirations for disabled students post-16](#)

[University to offer placements for youngsters with learning difficulties](#)