



SWRAC
Specialist Independent College

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025

WELCOME

Welcome to our Spring newsletter.

I love spring—it's a season full of optimism and new beginnings and we have just a few things to share!

A Fond Farewell to Lorna

Our amazing Careers Lead, Lorna, retired in March. She joined us in 2020, bringing a wealth of experience in careers advice and guidance. Even back in 2014, when she worked at Bournemouth Council, she saw potential in what we were building at SWRAC. She invited us to work with young people she was supporting, which sparked a new chapter for us (and a few grey hairs along the way!).

Lorna has since led our careers initiatives, supported our new careers staff, and helped many students. We are incredibly grateful for her dedication. Thank you, Lorna!

SEND Funding Crisis—Have Your Say

You may have heard about the funding issues affecting SEND services at the national level. Many local authorities are struggling to meet demand due to insufficient government funding, which has worsened since COVID-19.

The government has finally acknowledged the crisis and launched an inquiry to find solutions. This is your chance to share your experiences and help shape the future of SEND in the UK. Click here to contribute: <https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3517/>

A Note on Ofsted's New Report System You may have seen the headlines about Ofsted's new report card system. The tragic death of a headteacher prompted a review, aimed at making inspections less stressful and more collaborative. However, the new system still carries the same pressures as before.

While Ofsted has reframed the discussion around one-word judgments, the new multi-category system remains just as high-stakes. The real question is whether inspectors will truly adopt a more open, flexible approach. Time will tell!

Share Your Feedback

Whether you are a parent, student, or staff member, we'd love to hear from you! Our annual surveys will be going out soon. Your feedback helps us understand how we're doing and what we can improve.

Exciting News: New Centre Opening

We're expanding! Our new centre in the Halton Council area, located in Widnes, will serve students from Eastern Merseyside, St. Helens, and Cheshire. Find out more in the update from Bev Kennedy. That's all from me for now. Thanks for reading, and I appreciate you staying until the end!

Adrian Gunner

ADRIAN GUNNER
MANAGING DIRECTOR

CAREERS SUPPORT & SIGNPOSTING



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Over the past year, our CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance) team have been leading our careers initiatives, working to expand opportunities and provide meaningful guidance to our learners.

The biggest challenge with a lot of our learners is that they often don't know what they want to do and feel under pressure to just say 'something'. And you can't be what you can't see, so a huge focus has been on broadening their horizons.

A major step forward with this has been the introduction of the Job Explorer Database (JED), which helps students explore different careers in an engaging and accessible way. Since September, students have been using JED weekly to research careers, qualifications, and skills, building their own career portfolios.

A highlight this term has been our 'Job of the Day' feature, which introduces different professions through trivia, history, and discussions. Tutors use this to spark curiosity and open conversations about career possibilities.

You can read more exciting news about the great strides we've been making in career and work experience development later in this newsletter, but in the meantime, you may find our new [Careers, Information, Advice & Guidance](#) page on the website very useful!

It contains tonnes of additional resources for our learners to utilise while at SWRAC, but also after they move on!

<https://swrac.co.uk/training-organisation-teaching-mentoring/careers-information-advice-guidance/>

VISIT THE CAREERS PORTAL HERE



BOSCOMBE UPDATE

Kerry Pedder

What a busy few months we have had here at Boscombe, filled with a lot of engaging and impactful community projects.

For Black History Month, we visited local community organisation, It's All About Culture (IAAC), where the learners experienced interactive music sessions with bongo drums, tried some delicious Caribbean dishes and listened to cultural talks.



We of course enjoyed quite a few Christmas parties, welcoming back learners who had left in November to join us for the festivities.

Our Thursday Evening Youth Club launched before Christmas too and has been thriving. Held between 5pm and 7pm, it's open to all students and focusses on weekly themes such as games nights and other social activities.

We don't always stay on site either, with visits to the driving range and Bournemouth Christmas lights already under our belt and plenty more trips planned. It's been fantastic in helping the young people settle in better and build confidence.



Workplace visits continue to be a priority, and we are keen to connect with businesses willing to offer talks or work experience opportunities.

Our rooftop garden project is also underway, with learners hoping to transform the space into a vibrant floral area. This hands-on experience is helping to build skills and confidence in a practical way.

We are about to embark on more travel training. This is often something that can cause a lot of anxiety, and we will be working on empowering independence!

WE ARE HUMANS PROJECT

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, our Routes to Education and Employment group got together to plan a project to help support the local community.

As a group, we decided to help the homeless, and asked for donations from the staff at SWRAC who provided clothing to be handed out to those in need.

We then got in contact with the charity, We Are Humans, who helped us set up a stall in Bournemouth Town Centre to distribute the donations.

The stall provided food, refreshments, warm clothes and essentials to those in need, and it was so rewarding to see the positive impact it had on the people who received the help, as well as the great sense of achievement it gave our learners.



“

We were very appreciative of the students and staff who attended from SWRAC and helped engage with some of the local homeless population.

We hope the experience was enriching for your students as much as it was helpful to us? Thank you for organising and making this possible. Any opportunity to raise awareness of the Homelessness Plight in the local community is always welcome.

Should any of your staff or students wish to follow up on this 'Engagement Day' and become more involved in volunteering on a regular basis, we would be more than happy to welcome them.

ANDY TALBOT, CEO, WE ARE HUMANS

“

This experience of giving out to the homeless has helped me realise and push me on to wanting to help people in my future. It was a rewarding experience and it reminded me how important it is to help others out.

GERRARD, LEARNER



DORCHESTER UPDATE

Tracy Perren

Over at Dorchester, there's been a buzz of activity, both on and offsite, since the last newsletter.

Visits to our wonderful rural location have included students from Wyvern Academy in Weymouth, who come every Friday to feed and work with the animals and enjoy drinks and snack in the lodge.

THRIVE students from Merley House also visited to work with the animals and get to know the rest of the learners here, which was great.

PC Albert Pepper came in to do a talk on online bullying and how to use the internet safely and we also hosted a mental health workshop on building health friendships and relationships.

External visits have been plentiful too! From the panto at Weymouth Pavilion to goat walking, and then lots of workplace visits.

Prepare for Work and Supported Internship students did a site visit to Dorset County Hospital where national construction firm, Tilbury Douglas, are working on building a new emergency and critical care department. We're hopeful this will lead to some amazing work experience opportunities.

Our Routes to Education and Employment learners visited 1610 Leisure Centre in Dorchester as part their healthy lifestyles unit.

They were given a tour around and asked questions about all the facilities, student discounts and sessions for learners with anxiety.

We have also been working with the Prince of Wales school on a weekly basis. With no caretaker on site, students have been digging out flower beds and looking after the chickens. The Head Master is very happy with our continued support!

Looking ahead, we're planning visits to Bride Valley Farm, Purbeck Ice Cream and Olives Et Al, who supply British Airways, which is exciting. I am sure there will be lots of sampling going on at the latter two businesses, and it's good to know that both sweet and savoury are covered!

While there, we will be exploring employment opportunities and hands-on learning experiences.

And last but not least, we can't forget to mention our amazing fundraising efforts.

Staff held a Charity Bingo Night in November, which raised £180 for Sanctuary and The Veterans' Hub and we raised a record £200+ at the Dorchester Christmas Cracker!

LIVERPOOL UPDATE

Bev Kennedy

There's just no stopping us here in Liverpool, with even more growth planned in the coming months.

Following the opening of our Southport Centre, which has grown significantly in both staff and student numbers already, we are now opening a third centre!

We were approached by Halton Borough Council and have just secured a new premises in Widnes. We have 10-12 learners identified for our 'Prepare for Life' course, which is due to start in June, with many more referrals expected after that! So, watch this space.

Exciting progress has been made within our Supported Internships programme, with all students now settled within their placements. This includes Alder Hey Children's Hospital, DWP, The Very Group, The Gateway Café and local allotments and pharmacies.

We have also collaborated with Kingsley & Co, a community bookshop, to provide valuable work experience. Our learners had to go through an interview for this, so it was a great opportunity for them to experience real-world recruitment processes. Well done to our wonderful student, Hannah, for securing a position!

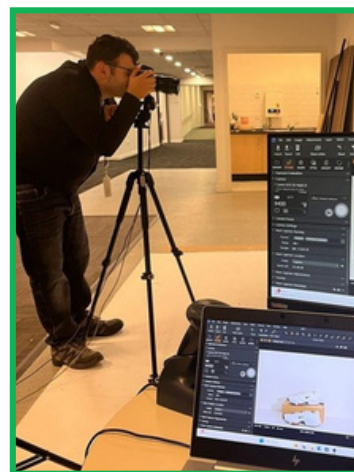
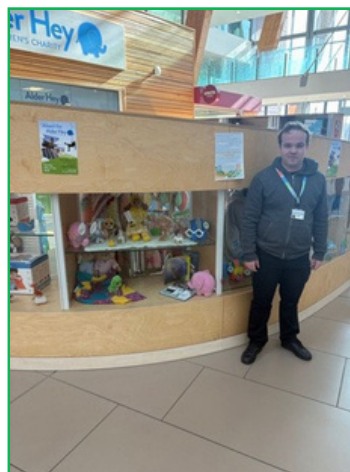
Our Southport students have been out and about on educational visits and trips. This included a day visiting the very cultural centre, The Atkinson, to see their sustainability exhibit. Students were then inspired to create a sustainability display using recycled materials! Other visits have included West Lancashire Railway, where students will hopefully take part in work experience from the Spring and even a Bowling trip at Christmas!

At our Bootle centre, we have opened a student library which will host book clubs and events, whilst also promoting reading. Thank you very much to everyone who donated books, supporting this tranquil space for our students to learn!

We have been given a plot of land at our Bootle site too, which we will be developing into a lovely outdoor space for students to take part in gardening and a 'Save the Bees' project!

A particularly lovely project, that the students all enjoyed before Christmas, was our reverse advent calendar. This was in aid of The Whitechapel Centre, a food bank which supports homelessness in Liverpool. This project was organised by our Senco, Steph, and each day items were collected by staff and students and ticked off our advent calendar list and dropped off at the centre.

Finally, we have our fingers crossed for involvement in the regeneration project of The Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle, being run by Sefton Council. It's a huge redevelopment that will involve demolition and a revamp of its event space, which hosted the legendary Tom Jones last year! So, there will hopefully be a wide range of amazing opportunities there for our learners to gain some incredible work experience while also seeing the transformation of the local area!





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THRIVE UPDATE

Rachel Rainsbury

Creativity, self awareness and reward have been key themes for THRIVE learners over the past few months.

Following on from our annual Christmas lunch, which was well-attended by over 50 people, we had the highly anticipated THRIVE's Got Talent.

Staff, parents and carers were treated to a real show from our learners, who showcased everything from magic tricks and jokes to dance routines and poems. We also managed to raise £160 for the British Heart Foundation too which we're really proud of.

The Tuck Shop has been rebranded as Tuck's Treasures, where learners can exchange green cards earned for positive behaviour and spend them in the shop or save them for bigger treats. This initiative has been a great way to encourage positive actions and reward effort.

Over at Winton, THRIVE and THRIVE+ learners have been taking part in the Colour Works Programme.

An external provider has been coming in once a fortnight since January to help students recognise their strengths and understand how they can be the best version of themselves and develop positive relationships using a Colour Wheel technique to visualise emotions.

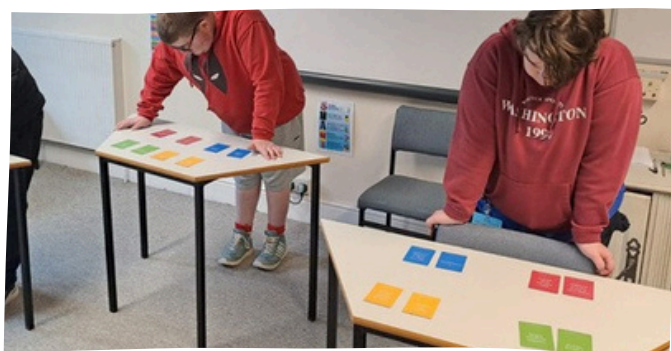
THRIVE+ have also been getting creative by designing and printing their own t-shirts with a Cricut machine. We're so proud of their individual designs and we can't wait to see them in action at upcoming events.

One of these events is a fundraising walk. The students will take a bus from Winton and then walk from Boscombe bus station to Bournemouth Pier with banners and posters, raising awareness for the veterinary charity, PDSA.

Thrive Social, at Merley House, is also raising money for The Horse Course Centre, which carries out equine-assisted interventions benefiting a huge mix of people and families. As well as having a pyjama day, we sold raffle tickets, with some amazing prizes up for grabs, including:

- 2 x professional cut and blow dry
- Swanage Railway family pass
- Farmer Palmers vouchers
- One month Gym pass
- Luxury hampers and cream teas
- Restaurant vouchers from Piazzo Lounge and Hall & Woodhouse

Thank you to everyone who supported us!



CREATIVE WITH CAREERS!

Lorna Clark

There is so much exciting stuff going on in careers and work experience development at SWRAC, and the positive impact of this is evident in the number of learners progressing into college, apprenticeships, employment and volunteer roles.

One student, James Rainey, who initially struggled to settle into education, is now thriving in his science course at college, with the hope of studying psychology at university, and that's just one example!

The breadth of businesses and organisations we work with is only increasing, thanks to the hard work of Dionne Polychronopoulos. We've secured internship, work experience and site visit opportunities with many employers, including:

NHS | Barchester Healthcare | Lush | Swaffields Salon | Tricuro | Greene King | Marsham Court Hotel | Wise Guys Lounge | Christchurch Golf Club | The Parks Foundation | Dorset Reclaim | Brewhouse & Kitchen | Bournemouth Carlton Hotel

In terms of events and internal visits, we enjoyed a hugely successful Careers and Apprenticeship Show at the BIC recently. Almost 30 learners joined us, and Project Search interns helped out as stewards.

Prior to attending, we held a Careers Press Conference to prepare learners. Staff members represented different career backgrounds, and learners were given the opportunity to ask questions, helping them build confidence in exploring career pathways.

In December, our Prepare for Life and Prepare for Work students had the opportunity to be Forensic Investigators and solve a crime! Students also got to visit the campus and learned about the range of different courses they could study along with information about the Student Union, leisure activities and support available for SEND students.

YOU'RE FIRED!

To celebrate National Apprenticeship Week, we had very interesting talks from The National Trust and HIT Hospitality, and also hosted our own version of The Apprentice!

Every class took part, working in teams to design and market a protein bar or tote bag, before presenting their work in a final showcase. There were some truly incredible creations.

We also had a visit from our local MP, Tom Hayes, who came in to meet with us and learn more about the work we do. All the learners thoroughly enjoyed meeting him!

THANK YOU

Our lovely Lead CEIAG Advisor, Lorna Clark is retiring at Easter after 5 years with SWRAC and 25 years in the careers industry.

She said: "I'd like to thank the team for all their hard work and wish my successor, Dan Kerley, every success as he takes the Careers Team forwards."



EMPLOYER FEEDBACK

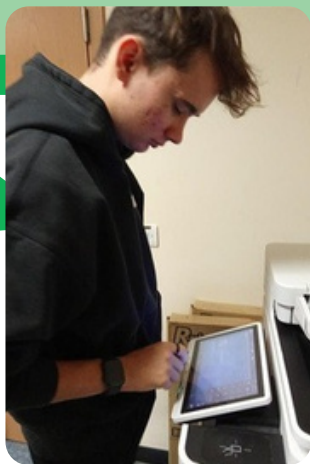


KateLord,TeamManager,BCP Council

"We have hosted two interns who have helped us complete tasks that have been pending for years, such as updating personnel files, scanning, making phone calls on services (to update directories) and transferring old excel spreadsheets into new Teams Lists for access to all. They have helped with lots of practical tasks, saving time and befitting the department, allowing staff to accomplish more work within their limited hours as team managers.

I have found interns can think differently, problem-solve, and get work done efficiently. . Interns are supported by Job Coaches who help to develop the roles and settle interns in until they become independent. The Job Coaches effectively communicate, making the process smoother for both managers and interns.

I highly recommend managers take the opportunity to host an intern. My advice is to be open, flexible, and not to worry too much about planning everything in advance, it can be done in chunks as the intern settles and develops. The job coaches encourage managers to set goals for interns, as once interns achieve their goals, their confidence builds and skills develop."



INTERN, JON



KATE



INTERN, EMILY

Ali, Gateway Cafe, Bootle

"Over the past few weeks Abhi has learned how to make coffees, has helped with baking cakes, has took part in making lunch for the onsite gardeners and also serves customers throughout the session. Abhi is always very proud of the things he does and any new skills he learns.

On Monday, Abhi made Chai Tea as a special. This went down really well with all of the gardeners and customers tasting it and coming back with constructive, but great feedback. He will make it on both Mondays & Thursdays so that it can be stored and sold throughout the rest of the week.

Yesterday Abhi completed his Level 1 food hygiene online qualification, for which he has a certificate. Abhi is extremely happy with this as it enhances his knowledge of the subject, but it is also something he can utilise when looking for further voluntary or employment opportunities.

Abhi has also featured on social media throughout his sessions. Most recently, him and his Chai Tea have been posted on Instagram, as well as times when he has baked cakes. Abhi also features on the community wall within the café and also in their published impact report."



ABHI



CONTACT INFORMATION & NOTICES

NEW

WEEKLY JOB CLUB - MONDAYS

The Boscombe site is now hosting drop in sessions every Monday from 9.30am to 3.30pm for current and ex-learners to get additional support them with job searching, CV writing, and interview preparation.



VISIT: EDUCATE AGAINST HATE

Our safeguarding leads encourage you to speak to your young people about the signs and dangers of radicalisation.

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/resources/talking-teenager-radicalisation-2/>



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