

USING COMPETITION ACTIVITY IN THE VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM

**WITH LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
AND DISABILITIES (SEND)**

GUIDEBOOK

Contents

<u>What is competition activity?</u>	3
<u>The benefits of using competition within the vocational curriculum</u>	5
<u>Ways to get started with competition activity</u>	7
<u>Tips for engaging employers</u>	10

What is competition activity?

Competition activity for learners with SEND can take many forms. It's certainly not all about entering students into national competitions. For many learners (and providers), competing at national level may not be the best starting point and, for some learners, national competitions will always be pitched at too a high a level. Fortunately, there are plenty of different types of competition activities that can be used to support vocational learning and increase the chance of employment for learners with SEND working at any level.



Competition activity can range from in-class to national competitions, from competing against yourself to taking on learners from across the country. Examples include:

Personal best activities:

where competition criteria are applied to planned activities, giving learners the opportunity to experience a competitive environment without fear of failure, the goal being to improve their own 'personal best'. For example, a learner might work to reduce the time it takes them to complete a specific task, bringing them closer to industry norms.

In-class activity between learners in a group:

a good first step to competing against others. Learners might work alone or compete in a pair or small group. Competition criteria can be applied in assessing planned activities. For example, the teacher might award bronze, silver and gold awards when assessing learners' cleaning and maintenance of small animal accommodation.

Inter-group or cross-organisation competitions:

where learners from one learning group compete with those from another, or with individuals from across the learning provider. This gives them the opportunity to work outside of their comfort zone, yet still on-site and with familiar faces. For example, two different learner groups might each engage in an enterprise activity and compete to make the most profit or the provider might run an open competition to design its annual Christmas card.

Inter-organisation or regional competitions:

where learners from different settings compete with each other, either remotely or by coming together in a central venue. Other learning providers locally may already hold competitions that you could join or you could take a lead and ask others to join you. The skill area could be chosen based on local employer need with employers endorsing or sponsoring the competition. For example, learners might compete to create a short video, each submitting it to be judged, or gather together in a single setting to dress a table for a wedding.

National competitions:

where learners take part in externally organised competitions, alongside learners from across the country. Inclusive Skills Competitions, organised by WorldSkills UK¹, offers competitions, specifically designed for learners working at Entry level and level 1, in a range of skill areas, with regional heats and national finals.

1 <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/>

Competition activity pyramid

You can use this pyramid to help you choose the most appropriate type of competition for your learners at any given point. You might also decide to support learners to move from the lower-stakes competition models at the base of the curriculum to the high-stakes national competitions at the top.



The benefits of using competition within the vocational curriculum

Using competition activity in the curriculum is an effective and creative way to raise standards and help learners achieve skills excellence. Skills competitions support learners to develop and improve the skills they will need in the workplace. They can also help teachers to plan and deliver a more engaging and relevant curriculum, as well as providing a dynamic way of assessing learning.

Benefits for learners

Competitions

- add excitement, inspire and awaken ambition, increase motivation and enjoyment
- offer stretch and challenge, supporting the move from competence to excellence
- help learners to develop wider employability skills and personal and social skills
- improve learners' self-esteem and confidence
- give learners with SEND a chance to show that they can perform under pressure, at an appropriate pace and to industry standards
- can provide a direct introduction to employers, leading to offers of work experience, placement and jobs.



George Crawford student at Homefield College:

"I like taking part in competitions because they are fun and interesting. They help me come up with ideas and help me build my skills. They make me more confident and this will help me get a job."

Benefits for learning providers and teachers

Competitions

- provide teachers with an excellent method of assessment, holistically testing knowledge, skills, behaviours, and competence to carry out an occupational role
- help teachers to build a more dynamic curriculum which can lead to improved learner attendance and levels of engagement
- offer great scope for creative teaching and learning and can have a revitalising impact on teaching
- help teachers keep a strong link to industry standards and to the skills employers are looking for, leading to a curriculum that is relevant and current
- provide a great basis for building partnerships with employers which can lead to exciting opportunities for a wide range of teachers and learners.

Rob Breward, teacher at
Homefield College:



“Skills Competitions increase motivation, develop vocational or work-based skills and help promote confidence and self-esteem. Competitions can easily be embedded into a scheme of work and are an excellent assessment tool.”

Benefits for employers

Scott Mulvaney Multi-site Hotel
Manager at Premier Inn and
judge of skills competitions at
Derwen College:



Premier Inn

“As employers we are continually impressed by the standard and calibre of talent shining through as a result of these events. They are an amazing opportunity to showcase the talent that is being nurtured within the industry and I am thrilled to be part of it.”

Getting involved in competitions for learners with SEND

- is a great way to build partnerships with learning providers and can give employers the opportunity to influence the curriculum so that learners gain the skills that employers are looking for
- provides employers with a potential source of ready-trained and motivated staff
- can build employers' understanding of different disabilities, leading to better support for existing staff and improved customer service for disabled customers
- is an excellent way to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and commitment to the community, and often leads to positive coverage in the local media.

Ways to get started with competition activity

Learners with SEND often have low levels of confidence and self-esteem, so you may need to build confidence and appetite for competition slowly. This is usually best-achieved through 'home-grown' competition rather than launching straight into national competitions such as Inclusive Skills¹.

The following suggestions are offered to help you introduce your own competition activity in your setting. You don't have to work your way through each of the suggested stages; you can start at any point, depending on your prior experience and the confidence and competence levels of your learners. However, if all of this is new to you and your learners, we recommend starting at stage 1 and extending what you do over time.

1. Promote competition as a positive learning experience to your learners

Learners with SEND may be nervous about engaging in competitions. They may be afraid of failing or have had negative experiences of competition in the past. Talk to your learners about the concept of competition and help them to see that it can be a fun and effective way of improving skills. You could visit a competition or watch a film clip together. Ask learners how they think being in a competition affects performance and how it might help them gain the skills they need for work.

2. Introduce 'low-stakes' competition activity into the curriculum

You could begin by identifying a small aspect of your existing vocational curriculum to turn into a competition. You need to choose something where you can apply measurable objectives or where agreed criteria can be applied, such as being on time for work and appropriately dressed. You can involve your learners in setting the criteria, as a way of developing their understanding of what occupational competence, industry standards or excellence looks like. You could choose a personal best activity where learners aim to improve their performance over several weeks or a best-in-class activity, where you recognise a single winner or set of winners from the group.

3. Include a competition as the summative assessment for a period of vocational learning

When you are designing your scheme of work, make one or more assessment tasks into a competition. You will need to ensure that the basic task is achievable for all, so that all students have a positive experience, while at the same time including assessment criteria that allow you to recognise which students have excelled or which student has demonstrated the best overall achievement. A marking scheme that recognises the achievements of all but results in different level awards (e.g. gold, silver, bronze) may be most appropriate for this type of activity.



¹ You can find out more about Inclusive Skills at <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/>

4. Design and run your own in-house competition with employer support

It is helpful to break down this activity into four stages:

a) Design and plan

- Identify a focus for your competition and the skill area it will address (this might be linked directly to a specific unit within a qualification)
- Identify an employer who could support you with the competition and make contact with them, explaining what sort of involvement you are looking for. You could use the **invitation letter template** to help you do this.
- Work with the employer to design the competition brief. While it should be authentic, the task could be small in scope, focusing on a specific aspect of a job role. For ideas that you could adapt for your own setting, look at the sample competition briefs supplied within this pack. You could use the **competition brief template** to help you present the brief in a way that is clear to all involved.
- Agree the assessment criteria and use these to create a mark scheme. You could present this using the **marking scheme template**.
- Check that your scheme of learning includes opportunities for learners to develop and practise relevant vocational skills and wider skills, such as working under pressure and to time, teamwork, functional skills, use of body language.
- Identify a date and a venue for the competition and the resources you will need
- Identify staff who will need to be involved and brief them on their role
- Decide who you want to invite as judges (e.g. employers, senior managers) and observers or supporters (e.g. parents/carers, a wider range of employers, staff or other students) and send out invitations
- Make sure that judges understand the marking criteria and how they are to be applied on the day.

Working with an employer to identify a particular task can also be a great opportunity to introduce them to the notion of job carving and how this can help people with disabilities to contribute to the effectiveness of their organisation. For example, someone working in a café may be able to serve at tables but struggle with the till; staffing could be re-organised without impacting business effectiveness.

b) Preparing students

- Provide your learners with plenty of opportunities to practise and develop skills relevant to the competition, explaining how what they are learning will help them to do well. You can use the development plan template to help you personalise their learning.
- Make sure your learners understand what the competition will entail, including how long it will last and what sort of support will be available to them, allowing them to ask questions, so that they feel comfortable with the arrangements and positive about taking part
- Introduce learners to the concept of working under competition conditions, such as working under pressure and to time, and build in supported opportunities for them to practise working in this way
- Track learners' progress as they prepare for the competition, encouraging them to see what they have learned and how they could improve further. You could use the **self-assessment templates** to do this.

c) Running the competition

- Check at the start that all involved know what is expected of them and that you have all the resources you need
- Ensure that you have a reliable timekeeper in place
- Try to maintain a spirit of excitement and enjoyment, so that learners have a positive experience, whether they end up as winners or not
- Find a way to celebrate the achievements of all, for example through certificates of participation alongside prizes or medals for winners
- As part of your prize-giving ceremony, acknowledge the role of all who have helped make the competition possible. Think of this element of the day as an opportunity to sow the seed for further competitions, perhaps with new employer partners.



d) Follow-up

- Use the evidence from the journey as well as the outcome of the competition activity to inform your assessment of learners' progress and achievements.
- Encourage the learners to reflect on their progress and achievements. You could use the **'Making progress: how am I doing?' template** to do this. This can lead on to discussions about next steps towards securing employment.
- Follow up with the employers who were present to capitalise on their improved understanding of the learners' abilities. Perhaps you could secure involvement in further competitions, work experience placements, supported internships or inclusive apprenticeships, opportunities for workplace visits, or support with mock interviews. It may be appropriate to talk about specific jobs for some learners.
- Consider what your own next steps might be in terms of competition activity. You can use the [competition activity pyramid](#) to get some ideas (see page 4).

Tips for engaging employers

Skills competitions designed with employers have a direct line of sight to work, making them more purposeful and giving them added credibility. Having an employer involved in designing your competition task means that you will be giving your learners the best chance of developing skills that meet industry expectations. We know that it's not always easy to engage employers, but these top tips should help you get them on board.

- **Start with your existing employer contacts.** These may be friends, existing work experience providers, contacts you have made through your local Chamber of Commerce or Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) - all are potential competition partners.
- **Make it personal.** Face-to-face conversations are the most powerful way to explain what competition activity is all about. It is individual people who will make things happen.
- **See every employer encounter as an opportunity.** Taking your car to the garage, attending a business breakfast or visiting a student on work experience can all lead to conversations about competition activity.
- **Sell the benefits.** Employers have much to gain from getting involved. To find out more, have a look at the '[Benefits of using competition activity in the vocational curriculum](#)' section above.
- **Get enthusiastic employers to enlist their contacts.** Once you have an employer on side, why not ask them to use their networks to convince other employers to get involved?
- **Be creative.** One style of competition may not fit all, so be prepared to suggest a range of approaches and negotiate with the employer to find something that works for both of you.
- **Offer plenty of support.** Employers may be enthusiastic about getting involved but have very little time to offer, so think carefully about what you want them to bring to the party and allow them to focus on that aspect, while you do the rest of the work.
- **Make the most of competition day.** You can use it to showcase learners' skills and the benefits of being an employer partner in competitions. Invite employers along to observe and/or award medals, certificates or prizes. Take photographs or video aspects of the day to share with possible future employer partners. If appropriate, invite the local press along or submit photos and details of the event to local media outlets.

You can use the **invitation template** to encourage employers to get involved.

Place your logo here

EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION

[Insert your organisation's address, logo and date plus relevant images, if you wish]

An invitation to work with us to ensure our learners with special educational needs and disabilities gain the skills your industry needs

Only 5.8% of people with a learning disability are in paid work. **It doesn't have to be this way.** People with special educational needs and disabilities have a wide range of talents and are perfectly capable of developing the skills needed for employment. We warmly invite you to work with us so that we understand your industry's needs and can ensure that we equip our learners with the skills you are looking for.

We are planning to run a [insert sector/industry] competition for our learners and would greatly appreciate your involvement. You could help by:

[delete as applicable or add your own suggestions]

- setting the competition brief
- helping us design the competition brief
- contributing to the delivery of the learning as our learners develop the skills they will need for this competition
- coming along to observe the competition
- coming to our prize-giving evening
- sponsoring our competition
- judging the competition

We hope you will see that you have much to gain from getting involved. Supporting competition activity for learners with special educational needs and disabilities can help employers:

- influence the curriculum so that learners gain the skills that your business needs
- develop your understanding of different disabilities, leading to better support for existing staff and improved customer service for disabled customers
- demonstrate corporate social responsibility and commitment to the community, which often results in positive coverage in the local media

We hope the experience will open your eyes to what our learners can achieve, giving you access to a new pool of potential recruits!

Please call or email me on [insert contact details] if you want to be part of this exciting initiative. I look forward to hearing from you so that together we can work to narrow the disability employment gap!

[Insert signature, name and job title]

Delivered in partnership with:

