

UTILISE:

Ways to utilise SEND alumni



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UTILISE: Ways to utilise SEND alumni

A SEND alumni is an alumni community that contains volunteers who have disabilities or learning difficulties.

They contribute to the formation of a diverse alumni community so that all students can find role models who they can relate to.

SEND alumni will offer advice and support to students from the school they went to. They can support all students, including those with SEND.

Your SEND alumni can be deployed in a wide range of ways, just like all alumni.

Here are nine of the most impactful ways to utilise them.

1. Invite your volunteers to contribute to the curriculum focussed on specific careers

The Gatsby Benchmarks say that CEIAG needs to be embedded into curriculum subjects. A great way to do this is to invite speakers in to subjects to talk about how their career links to a particular subject area.

2. Use them in the curriculum as an example

Careers in the curriculum does not always need to be focussed on the career options but also on the lessons students need to learn about managing their careers. Stories from young people with disabilities or learning difficulties can inspire others to think about how opportunities can be grasped, and barriers overcome.

3. Invite them to options evenings

Many schools run evenings looking at future options, either for GCSE choices, post-16 options or post-18. As well as having the opportunity to learn about these options it can be helpful to have some extra talks that sit alongside chances for informal conversations. Using SEND alumni in these talks to engage students and parents about making meaningful and aspirational life choices through telling their stories can be powerful.

4. Invite them to events with parents

Increasingly, schools and colleges are thinking through new and innovative ways to engage with parents. This can be particularly important for the parents of young people with SEND. Running parent-focussed events with SEND alumni as part of the mix can help parents to develop new perspectives on the future for their children.



5. Collaborate to develop resources

You do not always have to use alumni in face-to-face or virtual settings. There can also be value in developing resources with them that can be used flexibly throughout their career program. You could think about interviewing alumni to develop written case studies or videoing them to create recorded content for resources or your school/college website pages.

6. Use them as ambassadors in your employer engagement activities

Employers have much to gain from working with your SEND alumni. It can change attitudes. Your SEND alumni's stories and talents can counter stereotypes or assumptions. Members of your SEND alumni can give employers an opportunity to think about how they might adapt their recruitment and employment practices so that young people with SEND have opportunities.

7. Mentoring

SEND alumni can be mentors to your students, providing more structured support for an individual or group. This works best when there is a specific project underway, like an employment skills programme or a 'preparing for your next step' curriculum.

8. Connecting with their networks and inclusive places of work

SEND alumni may be working with employers who have been particularly successful at accommodating their needs. They can connect you to these employers and may be able to build a bridge to further opportunities with an employment context. For example, visits to the alumni volunteer in their workplace.

9. Social media

Your alumni can also help you by following your posts on twitter and friending your school on Facebook and other platforms. When they make posts or tweets about their career journeys, they can link to you.

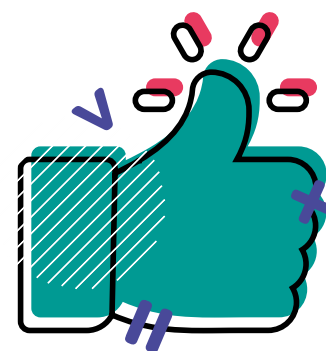
UTILISE: Best Practice in

Utilising SEND alumni

Embedding a positive alumni culture

Your alumni volunteers can have the greatest impact when they are recognised, celebrated and ever-present parts of your learning community. Your SEND alumni must be represented positively as part of your commitment to keeping the volunteering community as diverse as possible. This can be done in a range of ways including:

- Regular posts on social media about your SEND alumni
- A school/college webpage that contains success stories, quotations, photographs, images, and videos of your alumni (including those with SEND) and information about past and future events.
- Newsletters and Press Releases.
- Posters around the school that celebrate your alumni and encourage other students to register as alumni after they leave school.
- Inviting alumni to celebrations and events.
- Sending your alumni greetings during key festivals (e.g. Christmas, Diwali).



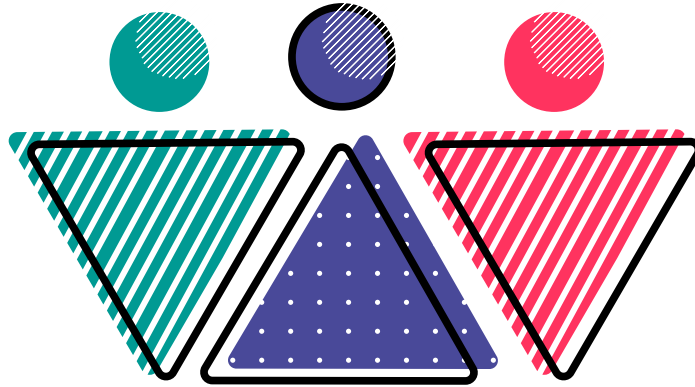
Knowing your alumni

An alumni database is a tool for effective utilisation.

It is essential to keep contact details up to date, but you can also record information about past students' careers and what kind of volunteering activities they like to do or have enjoyed doing before as alumni volunteers in your learning community.

This can help you utilise alumni volunteers in ways that suit their strengths and preferences. These may include:

- Speaking at parents' evenings where students are making subject or qualifications choices either in person, virtually or in a video. This can also include opportunities for meeting with students and their parents/carers.
- Presentations at assemblies and careers fairs (live or recorded) to parents, students, or employers.
- Live webinars and virtual events.
- Supporting CEIAG through the wider curriculum (e.g. careers or skills-development in science or the arts).
- Helping students in small groups or individually with mock interviews and applications.
- Hosting visits to their workplace.
- Telling their stories for the website
- Tweeting about their jobs and occupations with links to the school (hashtag, alumni webpages).
- Being mentors to individual students or groups of students



Involving leaders, parents, other staff, and governors

Alumni volunteers are most effective when the whole school community knows who they are and why they matter so much.

This can be done in a range of ways including:

- Planning the events or activities that your alumni are going to be involved in with other colleagues.
- Arranging opportunities for colleagues to meet alumni volunteers before the event (phone-call, online meeting, school visit). This helps to build a relationship between the alumni and other colleagues in school.
- Encouraging colleagues to ask you about the alumni volunteers on the database who might be a particular fit for an event/skills session/learning activity. For example, if the teachers are delivering to the ASDAN Personal and Social Development qualification, you may have a SEND volunteer who can bring richness to the learning and inspire students to plan their next steps beyond school.
- Reporting to school leaders and governors on the activity and impact of your SEND alumni against the goals you had set.
- Finding ways to get parents/carers connected with your SEND alumni community

Knowing your goals

If you are going to utilise alumni well, you need to know what you want to achieve with them. Use an action plan with clear goals and objectives to plan for utilisation.

Meeting the needs of your alumni

No matter how you utilise your SEND alumni volunteers, it is important to give them the best experience you can.

There are a range of ways to do this:

- Making their experience as stress free as possible through helping with practical details like parking, signing in, finding the right person to greet them, and asking for their feedback.
- When you invite alumni in you need to provide a clear brief on who they will be working with, what they will be doing and what the goal of the work is.
- Use briefing methods that suit the needs of individual alumni volunteers. Some volunteers may need pre-meetings or phone-calls before the event. Some volunteers may have access needs that need planning for. Some volunteers may want a written briefing as an aide-memoire . It is important to ask your alumni what their needs are so you can match the communication to them.
- Follow up on any events quickly with thank you postcards.

UTILISE: Best Practice

Case Studies

Futurefirst.org.uk and have written a range of case studies about impactful practice for managing alumni.

These are available at: <https://futurefirst.org.uk/our-stories/>

When all the case studies are put together, some important messages about best practice emerge.

We have considered how these messages are relevant to SEND alumni

Key messages

Alumni practices are most impactful when there is a strong alumni culture embedded in the school.

Mentoring is impactful

- Match the student to the right mentor. Students relate to mentors they can identify with. We cannot assume that a mentor who has the same type of learning difficulty or disability is the right match for a student. Students gain a lot from an approachable mentor who they can ask questions.
- They like to hear about mentors' experiences at work.
- They like the hints and tips that mentors share.
- Students gain from working with mentors on specific projects (e.g. mock interviews, team interview tasks) and from having them as an audience for their work.

Alumni make events come to life

- Where alumni are involved in careers related events, like mock interviews or lectures, they create a buzz which pupils enjoy.
- Mock interviews are effective for young people when alumni give the right balance of support and challenge.
- Young people gain from the opportunity to ask questions of alumni and interact with them more informally.
- The time spent on planning how to involve alumni for best effect is worth it.
- It is important to include attention to managing setbacks and challenges in the stories that alumni share. Students prefer it when people do not make it seem too 'rosy.'
- Getting the best from SEND alumni will depend on creating a positive alumni culture, meaning that everyone involved in an event knows its purpose and importance and treats alumni accordingly.

Alumni from the local community can build networks and aspirations

- If a school is in a catchment area where unemployment is more common, it is even more important to include community alumni who have stayed in the area and have successes to share.
- Meeting people who are in successful jobs not usually associated with an area really impacts positively on broadening perceptions of what is possible.
- Starting with the youngest children is important. It is never too soon to prepare for the future. This idea is embedded in England's policy for SEND
- Keeping strong relationships with alumni in the local community helps students feel like they matter and their community matters.
- Students are engaged by alumni who talk about their challenges and imperfections and how they 'made good' after school.



Virtual events broaden horizons

- Where alumni have moved away or abroad, they can engage in alumni events virtually by platforms like MS Teams or Zoom.
- Using this approach in subject lessons can work, for example in using an alumni volunteer to share their insights into labour markets in other countries (geography) or experiences of working on drama projects (arts).

Simple, short projects work

- Creative, simple projects can have a big impact on helping students imagine their future.
- SEND alumni volunteers can 'send a selfie' to a member of the school staff that could then be shared. The selfie could be of themselves outside their college or university building. It could be of them in their place of work or in a volunteering/community project they are engaged in.
- An assembly could include a planned 'Alumni Zoom' where a group of alumni (that includes people with learning difficulties or disabilities) join in a live event with an interactive Q and A. Students have a hashtag or weblink to use when considering questions they would like to ask before or during the event.