

Project Explore

An exciting project brought to life by **Liverpool City Region Careers Hub** and Juice Immersive, created a safe and engaging space to introduce young people with SEND to make the first steps in experiences of the workplace.

Evolution of Project Explore

The Liverpool City Region (LCR) currently supports 134 educational institutions, of which nearly forty are special schools and pupil referral units. The Liverpool City Region Careers Hub, managed by Growth Platform, supports schools and colleges in developing effective careers plans for students with the mission to help every young person to find their best next step.

Established by the national body for careers education in England, The Careers & Enterprise Company, **Careers Hubs** are tasked with delivering modern careers education to ensure students are given relevant careers advice and to enable businesses to raise awareness of the skills and attitudes that they require from their future workforce.

Providing meaningful experiences of the workplace can be particularly challenging when working with young people with SEND, but essential to create pathways to the world of work. Sometimes, no matter what interventions and gentle transitions that are implemented, it can be difficult to get these young people to even think about work experience because their fears and anxieties can be too overwhelming to take that first step.

Claire Caddick, Operational Hub Lead, began looking for an innovative way to help these young people explore the world of work in a safe and predictable environment whilst being realistic and tangible. She says: 'I was fairly aware of emerging research and articles around the positive impact of immersive technology for autistic young people and started to wonder if I could create a bespoke resource? One which would prepare young people for experiences of the workplace, and supported internships, but also allow them to learn about different job sectors and opportunities in our local area.'

The pilot project was born. The employer partner was **Regenda Homes**, a **Cornerstone Employer** for the LCR Careers Hub, Regenda Homes have provided placements for Supported Internships for schools, which have led to employment, and are a shining example as an inclusive employer. The project was brought to life by **Juice Immersive**, award winning augmented, mixed and virtual reality creative agency.

On tour

Project Explore is currently on tour around Liverpool City Region Schools and has been vital in the blended approach to work exposure as a response to the Covid Epidemic. Currently only 5.1% of young people with learning disabilities are in employment.

Many schools are struggling to get employers to open their doors for work experience. Virtual reality provides a perfect solution for both Employers and Students who have anxieties over hosting work experience and taking part in experiences of the workplace.



The virtual experience

Working with students with SEND, scenarios were envisioned that young people may encounter during experiences of the workplace. This includes addressing the first day common questions like: How will I get to work? Where will I eat my dinner? What tasks could they ask me to do?

As many students may have not had experience of travelling independently, it was decided to start at a bus stop. There are interactive elements built into the scenario where the student has to make a choice or complete a task such as ringing the bell to get off the bus or sorting out leaflets for the marketing department. Both hand controllers are used, as well as eye gaze options for students who struggle with manual dexterity.



During the Scenario George is the Host and takes you on a tour of Regenda where you meet people, find out about different jobs and are show places like the staff room. You even get offered a cup a tea which the students love! At the end of the scenario George explains his journey from being in a special school to being a valued employee at Regenda.

"When Juice Immersive were approached to work on this project, we couldn't have been more excited. The opportunity to use immersive XR technology for good was something that galvanised the whole team.

The use of VR to empower and transport people is something we've long believed in. So to leverage that technology for the benefit of SEN students across LCR, allowing them to safely experience work placements in real world organisations was a dream brief for us."

Owen Cotterell Creative Director, Juice Immersive



The future of Project Explore

Taking the journey further, pre-production has started for the second scenario featuring Knowsley Safari Park. Viewers will experience their first day of experiencing typical job roles at the park and the skills needed for these roles. Students will be able to get up close and personal with the meerkats, as well as explore the range of background roles such as hospitality and retail. 'Given the current challenges of organising work experience placements, it has added a different dimension to our career's week. Our pupils commented on how good it was and loved using the headsets. It is a very realistic and immersive experience!!' said Claire Pattison, Careers Leader Bankview School.

The sky's the limit with this project! Employers are needed to help fund and feature in the project. It is a way to showcase your organisation, roles and sector to the future work force and inspire them to come and work for you.