

## ESS Partners With Bedford College to Deliver 'First Steps' Supported Internship

1 year ago



**ESS**, part of Compass Group UK & Ireland, has partnered with Bedford College, part of The Bedford College Group, to deliver the 'First Steps' supported internship at its MOD Chicksands site. The programme is providing students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) an opportunity to gain valuable work experience in a variety of roles.

ESS joined the Central Bedfordshire Council SEND Employment Forum to identify opportunities for providing an access to work initiative and established the link with Bedford College. The organisations worked together to develop a bespoke course for students aged 18-24 who have completed their formal college education but are experiencing barriers to employment.

12 students are now undertaking a year-long internship which sees them completing a series of placements in ESS' catering, retail and cleaning departments. The participants rotate across the three areas and gain experience in a variety of roles and tasks, giving them the chance to see what they are interested in.

They spend one afternoon a week on classroom-based activities, including CV writing and interview techniques, and have access to the Compass e-learning portal which enables them to explore a range of subjects.

The college has placed two job coaches and a tutor on site to support the programme. Prior to delivering the initiative, the ESS team received training from the college on the potential challenges experienced by the interns, and two members of the company's management team completed a five-day course on Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI).

On joining, the interns took part in a two-week induction covering the ESS business, health and safety, customer experience, a treasure hunt to familiarise them with the site and the issuing of uniforms. They also undertook travel training to prepare them for getting the bus to and from site. Parents or guardians were invited to introductory sessions to learn more about what their children would be doing throughout the year.

'First Steps' has proven to be a great success at Chicksands, with three individuals already being offered permanent positions with ESS.

Student Declan, who works in the retail store on site, has expressed his pride at speaking to customers and helping other students to learn their jobs. He has reported learning a variety of tasks and skills, including processing deliveries and using the till.

Louise Smith, Head of Foundation at The Bedford College Group, commented:

*"We are delighted to be working in collaboration with ESS to provide excellent opportunities for our students. It is a priority for us to be able to support students to further develop their skills and knowledge through real life work experience with the aim of supporting them to gain paid outcomes. We hope that this is just the start of a long partnership with ESS."*

Michael Southerden, ESS General Manager at MOD Chicksands, commented:

*"The First Steps interns have quickly become a valuable part of the ESS team here at Chicksands. They've fully embraced the programme and are really getting to grips with the various tasks delivered by our catering, retail and cleaning colleagues. I'm so pleased to be a part of the programme and I couldn't be prouder of the interns and my team for their positive, proactive approach to it."*

Bob Gray, Managing Director – ESS Defence, Marine & Aerospace, added:

*"Compass Group UK & Ireland's 'Mission to a Million' commits to enhancing the opportunities for one million people from both within and outside the organisation by 2030. Programmes such as First Steps delivered in partnership with Bedford College really brings this pledge to life and I'm delighted at the progress the students have made during their time with us."*