

Case Studies: The Day-release BTEC centre

Situated opposite one of Europe's largest shopping centres, The Source is a training centre with a difference. Sheffield LEA works in partnership with the Meadowhall Shopping Centre to deliver Edexcel Retail programmes for 14-16 year olds.

The Source offers three Edexcel programmes: a Level 1&2 BTEC Award in Customer Service, a BTEC First in Retail and a GNVQ in Retail. Now in their second year, 60 students are currently registered on these programmes on day-release from their schools.

Edexcel programmes manager Sue Eastwood, who delivers the programmes with Mick Clarke, describes the difference they make to the students: "Some kids wouldn't turn up to school and didn't communicate well, but they like the fact that the BTEC programmes are about being treated like adults. They do a lot of practical work which they respond well to."

Students attend for one whole day or two half-days a week. Those who are old enough also do work experience in one of Meadowhall's stores.

Cheryl Lloyd, Assistant Manager at specialist retailer Toymaster in Meadowhall, has been delighted with her work placement student: "We were happy to take on a BTEC student one day a week as part of our team. It provides the kids with good exposure of the retail environment, and they learn the crucial skills of communication, teamwork and customer care. I'd definitely recommend it to other employers - the students' skills have really come on while they've been on the course."

The Edexcel programmes have had excellent support from local schools, which have seen student performance dramatically increase. According to Peter Feek, Deputy Head at Newfield School, "We've seen a marked improvement in all students in areas of confidence, communication, motivation and taking responsibility. We're very positive and will continue to support the programme in any way possible."

Marie Baxter, who's been studying for her BTEC Award in Customer Service, said: "I really enjoy my placement day and my day at The Source. My IT skills are much better and now I have almost 50 credits at school for my work. My parents are very proud of me".

Although the course is only in its second year, Sue Eastwood is confident about how the students will progress: "The Customer Service students will probably go into retail or an apprenticeship scheme. Most of the GNVQ students will go on to sixth-form college to study retail management or retail marketing programmes."