



LR: Ivan Jepson from Gateshead College, Go North East's Keith Robertson, Steve McCall from Jobcentre Plus and Go North East driver Steven Glendenning

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Innovative training partnership brings critical jobs for the region's unemployed

Unemployed people in the North East are being offered a place on a unique training and skills development programme with the opportunity to secure one of over 200 new jobs thanks to a partnership between the region's biggest bus operator, Go North East, Gateshead College, and Jobcentre Plus.

Developed by the partnership and the first of its kind nationwide, the range of training included in the four-week long programme is tailored towards supporting applicants seeking one of the 250 bus driver positions advertised with Go North East every year.

Following a successful pilot between October 2016 and this July, which helped 45 local people into driving roles with Go North East, the 2017-2018 programme has launched with the aim of attracting 230 candidates.

Unlike standard application processes, participants in the programme receive intensive training prior to interview, to ensure their chances of future employment are improved for life.

Learners benefit from fundamental refresher courses in English, Maths and interpersonal skills, provided by Gateshead College and blended with critical subjects such as employability, CV writing, interview techniques, equality and diversity, and health and safety.

Tyneside Training Services, part of Gateshead College conducts practical driving assessments and tuition, with Go North East delivering a driver skills training course.

The award-winning bus company also provides depot tours and a company induction, alongside health and safety and occupational health training. The process completes with a presentation to mark the end of the programme.

Jobcentre Plus helps to recruit applicants and covers their travel expenses for the programme as part of the partnership arrangement.

To meet its ambitious recruitment target, this year Go North East is also proactively advising qualifying applicants of the opportunity to join the scheme when applying via traditional routes.

To date, almost half of those that completed the programme have been cleared for employment with Go North East to join its 1600-strong bus-driving workforce.

Stephen Glendenning, from Wrenkenton, Gateshead started the programme in February, after being made redundant from his job with an engineering firm in the oil and gas industry just days after Christmas.

Having faced redundancy three times and with a young family to support, the 36-year-old decided it was time for a career change.

Stephen, who lives with his partner Jemma and their two children said: “My work coach at Jobcentre Plus recommended the training programme to me as I was hoping to find something secure, that offered longevity.

“It was something completely different for me. I was quite worried about the customer service side at first as I didn’t have any skills - I hadn’t ever needed them, but the sessions with Gateshead College and one-to-one training from Go North East made me surprise myself. Although it was a challenge, I’ve improved my customer service, communication and problem-solving skills, which has led to an overall improvement to my confidence.”

Now a fully-fledged Go North East bus driver, Stephen is happy in his new position and feels positive about the future. He said: “Even though I didn’t see myself becoming a professional driver, I’m now proud to care for the people on my bus and find my job rewarding every day. I would definitely recommend the training programme to other job seekers; there isn’t anything else like it to help people back into work.”

Kevin Carr, Managing Director at Go North East, commented: “We’ve welcomed a range of ambitious, enthusiastic learners onto our training programme, many of whom we’ve been delighted to offer jobs to. Our partnership not only adds great value to the employment process at Go North East, it offers people in our region the opportunity to prepare themselves for a range of workplaces and employment potential and we look forward to extending this opportunity to even more local job seekers over the coming months.”

Ivan Jepson, Director of Business Development at Gateshead College, added: “The unique blend of training we are providing through our partnership means that, whether an applicant’s future lies with Go North East or another employer, they leave our programme better equipped for recruitment processes such as interviews and applications, with more confidence in their own skills and abilities.”

Steve McCall, Employer Relationship Manager for Jobcentre Plus in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear said: “We are delighted to work in partnership to assist Go North East with its large recruitment drive. With depots right across our region, this provides many people with full-time, permanent career opportunities.”

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