

Unique graduation ceremony at Edinburgh Napier

Edinburgh Napier University hosted a unique graduation ceremony this week for a group of students who successfully completed ENABLE's Breaking Barriers programme.

The initiative, established by ENABLE in 2018, empowers young people who have a learning disability to enjoy university life whilst being fully supported to thrive. Students can undertake work experience opportunities with a leading global employer and gain a university qualification from a world-class academic institution.

Over the course of several months, a group of students have completed a learning programme at Edinburgh Napier University and a work placement with the course's corporate partner, multinational professional services provider – EY.

There is a widespread lack of opportunities for young people with learning disabilities to enter the workforce. Recent data shows that while 45% of all Scotland's school leavers go to university, only 8.6% of school leavers who have a learning disability go on to higher education.

The Breaking Barriers business class of 2022 came together this week for joyful celebrations with friends and family in the River Suite at Edinburgh Napier University. All of the students were successful in achieving their Accreditation in Applied Business Skills.

One of the students Gemma told us what the Breaking Barriers experience has meant to her: "I'm so happy to have successfully completed the Breaking Barriers programme, it was such a valuable experience that has benefited me a lot and I now feel ready to take my next step into further education or employment.

"I used to find school and college quite overwhelming but thanks to the support Breaking Barriers offers, I've really enjoyed the university environment and the chance to meet lots of new people. It was lovely to all come together on Wednesday to celebrate our achievement with our family and friends."

ENABLE CEO and co-founder of the Breaking Barriers programme, Theresa Shearer, said: "Since 2018, the Breaking Barriers programme has made it possible for students who have a learning disability to access the life-shaping experience of university that is a rite of passage for so many, yet it is currently available to so few disabled young people.

"Breaking Barriers demonstrates how the public, private and third sectors can work collaboratively to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in education and the workplace. Thanks to our partners at Edinburgh Napier University and EY, I am delighted to see those opportunities extended to even more young people across Scotland, and I congratulate what I am sure will be the first group of many from the programme at Napier."

Philip Milne, EY Sponsor Partner in Scotland for Breaking Barriers, said: "It was our pleasure to welcome the Breaking Barriers students to our team for six weeks. As part of their work placement, the students rotated across all of our core service lines, showed curiosity by asking pertinent questions, and importantly grew in confidence every week.

"At the graduation event we heard the success stories of students who had been encouraged by their experience, to

explore further education and employment – a true example of how breaking barriers down can make a difference.”

ENABLE runs the Breaking Barriers programme through its ENABLE Works division that sets out to break down barriers to employment for people living with a learning disability.

Currently the specialist employability service is embedded within 28 local authorities across Scotland and supports 5,500 people each year. The development programmes are all about getting people of all ages ready for work – and supporting their individual needs every step of the way.

Professor Nazira Karodia, Vice Principal of Learning and Teaching at Edinburgh Napier University said: “We have been delighted to welcome our ENABLE students to our Craiglockhart campus, where our vision is to be the Business School for empowerment, enterprise, and employability for all.

“Our ethos as a university is to be the home for difference makers. Not everyone has an opportunity to change the world, but everyone can make a positive difference to the world around them: working with fantastic partners like ENABLE and EY is truly helping to break down barriers faced by young people with learning difficulties.”

The Breaking Barriers programme, which originated in the West of Scotland, has entered its fifth year and works with corporate partners including STV, Scottish Power and EY, with courses at both Edinburgh Napier University and the University of Strathclyde.

The University of Strathclyde recently expanded the programme offering to include a science cohort, giving young people with learning disabilities the chance to focus on STEM subjects both in a classroom and work placement setting for the first time. This launched in September 2022 and will run for twelve weeks.



Adam



Aunonto and Aadam



Dr Malcolm McGregor, Edinburgh Napier University



Gemma



Gemma



Gemma with her family and her graduation certificate



Group shot



L-R Jack, Adam, Gemma, Micheal, Cameron, Adam, Aunonto with their certificates



Laura McDade, ENABLE Works



Madeline King, ENABLE Work



Michael



Philip Milne of EY



Philip Milne of EY



Prof Paul Barron, Edinburgh Napier University