

Napier graduations mark a milestone for groundbreaking programme

Graduations at Edinburgh Napier University are always important, but the students who completed the Enable Breaking Barriers programme are to be congratulated a little more than most.

The charity Enable devised a programme in 2018 which enables young people with a learning disability to attend university and be fully supported to thrive there. The organisation is aware that only 8.6% of school leavers with a learning disability go on to university. (The figure for all school leavers is 45.1%.) Students undertake work experience and gain their qualification from a well-known academic institution.

Seven students completed the programme and a work placement at EY the multinational professional services company. All seven graduated with a certificate of Applied Business Skills.

Malcolm Duck, 25, from Aberlady, said Breaking Barriers had been hugely helpful.

He said: "I've always faced a lot of challenges throughout my life with ADHD. I was at university but had undiagnosed ADHD so I couldn't structure myself to get work done properly and dropped out. In my second year, I ended up having a mental breakdown and was completely overwhelmed. The diagnosis

connected all the dots for me.

“What Breaking Barriers offered me was such a good lifeline to bring my headspace back to what it needed to be and it galvanised me more to think about things like forward planning that I was struggling with before.

“I’m really glad I came and really enjoyed it. It was great to be part of Edinburgh Napier University’s graduation ceremony. The real benefit of Enable was having a structure and a person to collaborate with. It’s a big difference-maker. Enable has helped me to take the first step.”

Fellow student Enoch Oyelakin, 18, from Juniper Green, thanked Enable Scotland for the opportunity. He said: “It’s a good programme because it’s providing me with the skills that are required for a work placement. I am very happy and excited to graduate.”

Enoch’s mother, Funmi Oyelakin, also spoke about the benefits of the programme for her and her son. She said: “My son’s participation has been a truly inclusive journey for us. Before the programme, he was very shy and he couldn’t get into any programme and he felt rejected but now his confidence is up. He took the lectures at the university and was supported all the way and we are very grateful.

“He felt very isolated but he feels he can now go ahead and be part of the workforce. He is more outgoing and has been able to see what happens in workplaces. It has demystified the world of work.”

Ross Dobie, 19, from Queensferry, said the programme had been welcoming and friendly. He said: “I’m autistic and in school it would mostly cause problems with me being a bit anxious, especially for things like exams, and what I was learning would be a bit of a struggle sometimes. Studying was never something that would work as well for me; it was harder to take it in and stick.

“I’ve usually had a lot of struggles with figuring out what I want to do, and what do I need to start that, and what’s it like in higher education and the workplace. The main thing I learned from Breaking Barriers was more about the workplace and what to expect from a business or office. It was a friendly introduction instead of me applying for a job and going in completely blind. It was a less stressful environment for me to learn.”



Students Kai, Clair, Malcolm, Emily, Ross and Enoch at the Usher Hall PHOTO Mike Wilkinson



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