

OIEP Explosive Learning Solutions Case Study

Explosive Learning Solutions (ELS) is a private company based at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Didcot, Oxfordshire. Their principal focus is the analysis, design and delivery of learning, including consultancy support and the assessment of apprenticeships. One of the established areas of the business, drawing on over 20 years of experience, involves supporting businesses in working with government and accessing public sector opportunities. This includes working with SMEs and charities in central government and local authority supply chains, helping them understand procurement expectations and demonstrate social value.

In this case study, we demonstrate how ELS's work aligns with OIEP's six principles for inclusive employment*. The content highlights practical actions that employers can consider. While this piece does not intend to promote ELS's services, inclusive employment requires collaboration across all stakeholders in a local economy, and strengthening these networks across Oxfordshire's SMEs is a priority for OIEP.

1. Person-centred, place-based adaptation of policies

When supporting SMEs and charities to engage with public sector procurement, ELS begins with a needs assessment that identifies the organisation's current workforce strengths, existing learning practices and local labour conditions. Where public contracts require accessible apprenticeships, skills delivery or workforce inclusion, ELS helps shape solutions that reflect the employer's situation and community context.

Example: A small engineering firm was supported to design a first apprenticeship role that could be flexibly delivered to widen access for candidates with care responsibilities. This demonstrates how business-focused adaptation can lead to community-focused inclusion, strengthening employment pathways for local people.

2. Invested commitment from all stakeholders

ELS demonstrates internal commitment through its own apprenticeship pathways and ongoing staff development programmes. Many team members have progressed into new roles through structured learning opportunities.

They are also active in community engagement, which involves:

- Careers outreach in local schools
- Volunteer time supporting third-sector employability partners
- Hosting local work experience placements

These actions help build confidence and awareness among people exploring routes into employment.

3. Lived-experience leadership to review and adapt action

ELS's leadership includes people with military and public service backgrounds. This informs how inclusive design is embedded into learning and consultancy, particularly when supporting clients whose workforces include service leavers or individuals who are transitioning careers.

Example: ELS have adapted their onboarding to pay particular focus on the needs of the veteran and military community.

4. Stability for spaces and organisations that are lived experience-led

ELS helps organisations, including veteran-led and mission-driven SMEs, build sustainable capability to secure longer-term contracts. Developing strong apprenticeship frameworks and workforce strategies supports business resilience, helping inclusive employers to remain active and contribute to the local economy.

5. Acknowledgement of diversity within diversity

ELS recognises that inclusion challenges vary widely. They design flexible, non-standardised solutions and create unaccredited development where formal pathways are not suitable. They also:

- Benchmark their internal and client-facing practice against OIEP's inclusive employment principles
- Actively gather staff voice to refine policies and support mechanisms

Example: Staff feedback led to improvements in wellbeing provision, supporting those with caring responsibilities or fluctuating health needs.

6. Awareness around trauma

ELS understands that individualised past experiences, for example, military service or other life challenges, may influence workplace needs. They collaborate with trusted external experts when required and build reasonable adjustments into learning and consultancy delivery. Their focus is on enabling employers to adopt inclusive and supportive practices as part of delivering social value.

Internal Inclusive Practice

ELS' internal approach reinforces their commitment to inclusion and involves:

- Apprenticeships supporting progression into specialist roles.
- Clear continuing professional development pathways.
- Line managers trained in accessible communication and inclusive leadership.
- A culture that encourages speaking up and shaping workplace improvements.

These practices demonstrate that inclusive workplaces require continuous listening and adaptation.

Overall, this case study demonstrates the importance of equipping local organisations with the knowledge and confidence to participate in public procurement. In so doing, employment opportunities that are fair, accessible and rooted in local strengths are unlocked and made accessible to the local community.

*The six principles, published in September 2025, were identified during the Creating Opportunities through Local Innovation Fellowships (COLIF) project.