

Curriculum redesign project: Framework for College report.

BACKGROUND

Derby College is a large Further Education College with four main campuses, located in and around Derby and Derbyshire, including: The Joseph Wright Centre, The Roundhouse, Ilkeston and Broomfield Hall. Each year we have over 30,000 learners, 6,000 of which are aged between 16 and 18 years of age, who are studying on courses of all levels ranging from pre-16 provision for school learners, to higher education courses and work-based qualifications.

The college offers provision in all 15 subject sector areas and the majority of learner enrolments, 2,704, are on an advanced level course. Currently we have 971 learners on level 1 full time qualifications or below with the biggest cohorts in Construction, Motor Vehicle and Hair and Beauty with smaller numbers evenly spread across all the other sector areas.

The proposed area for our action research for the curriculum redesign project was centred on the design of our foundation E3 and level 1 provision. The **problem** we were trying to solve was the relevance of the content, delivery and teaching methods of the foundation and level 1 curriculum, in order to achieve sustained success for young people.

The college has been involved in many projects and curriculum innovations that use integrated vocational work-related learning and enterprise educational approaches. A range of evidence supported the increased use of enterprise activities and opportunities, to embed learning through work and within the community or specific projects. We know from where we have had 'live' projects embedded within curriculum delivery that there has been an increase in attendance and punctuality, high grade %'s and learner voice feedback has identified positive impact; improving motivation and behaviour. It has also been shown to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive skills related to innovation, such as thinking creatively, asking relevant questions, employing open ended approaches, problem solving, confidence building and having a positive attitude. These skills have proven themselves to be crucial prerequisite tools required for progression and improving a young person's prospects.

However, even though there has been an increased acknowledgement from the college staff, that project based or enquiry lead learning has benefits for learners, it is not systematically used. The success of our level 1 learner is variable and inconsistent, which results in generally poor progression. The levels of NEET individuals within the City and County are still high. This is particularly true for people aged 17, as the majority have already done a level 1 qualification, either at school or college, post 16.

The learners on our level 1 programme are typically complex with vocational teaching groups that span levels of English and Maths assessed from entry 1 to level 3. As such, teachers, tutors, support staff and managers, all agree that a different delivery approach may prove beneficial.

The introduction of Programmes of Study 2013 and Raising the Participation Age, are two external imperatives that facilitates this initiative to be implemented across the college. However, the project's aim was to enact the vision from within, by using staff and students currently on programme, to rehearse and define an effective model.

Through the project we hope to:

- provide a coherent, different and meaningful provision for young learners at foundation level and level 1, and
- enable them to progress onto level 2 and level 3 learning and work-based and employment opportunities.

The continued development of this curriculum will combine the core skills of creative enterprise and innovative entrepreneurship, with embedded Maths and English skills development supporting the pedagogic process. This will be delivered using project based learning.

PROJECT INTERVENTIONS

Over the course of this project, there has been a range of activities and data analysis to support and prepare for the roll-out of the cross curricular learning experiences to support the implementation of the plan, which was a live event, involving a student cohort and members of staff.

An enterprise project was developed and carried out by the level 1 Motor Vehicle and Business students and staff. It was a test case to support and identify methods and strategies for learning, ready for implementation 2013/14. The rationale for this approach was to have the evidence to support change, derived from internal sources, by using our own resources and infrastructure to develop and deliver and to use external methods to help review the process.

If the implementation of a cross college approach to the level 1 provision is to be successful, it is crucial that all parties are confident that it will be achievable, beneficial, clear, robust and effective enough to not to have to revert to the default model. One of the outcomes for the project was to have some filmed material to use in staff development and initial Teacher Training for project based learning, including the reflections of both the staff and students involved.

The diversity and range of previous experience in the students that made up the cohort within the Motor Vehicle and Business group, is prodigious. However, what is phenomenal is their united vision of why they entered college, what makes a good teacher and their experiences in school. This is interesting because out of the group of 30 learners, 5 of the students were new to the country, with their school experiences coming from both EU and non EU countries.

The enterprise project was filmed by a company called Green Shoots, who are an experienced educational, media and production company, who have been involved with many projects, both as lead practitioners and sub-contractors and have expertise at enabling young people to be engaged and have their say.

ENGAGING STUDENT'S IN BUSINESS AND CAR MAINTENANCE: AN ILLUSTRATIVE PROJECT



The college runs a Garage as a commercial enterprise and the students were set a challenge of generating more business alongside raising awareness of a wider issue. They chose sustainability and the links with tyre pressure and fuel consumption. They wanted to raise awareness of the environmental effect of having the wrong pressure in your tyres; the resulting higher levels of fuel consumption and therefore increased emissions and effect on the environment.

The students tested cars in the college car parks and leaving a red, amber or green card on the windscreen of the car with technical information and additional information about the services the garage covers. The idea was to be run in partnership with the business area, to generate the promotional materials for the event, using their marketing and design skills. The general intention was to encourage different curriculum areas to work together on one short enterprise project with level 1 learners, which they could plan, evaluate and capture on film.

The project ran over 3 weeks and involved not only the introduction, practical lessons and the event taking place, but also a range of formal and informal interviews and evaluation sessions, with scope to look at the pathways the learners had followed to be on their chosen course.

As one of the aims of the project was to gather internal evidence to support changes in delivery methods, it was essential to develop the student's confidence in expressing their experiences and opinions. So at the start of the project, we asked both the students and staff together, some general background information to start the discussions. These developed well, as it became evident to the students that they were hearing and sharing the same experiences as teaching and support staff.

Typical questions we asked the learners were:

Who was your favourite teacher in school and why?

What was your favourite lesson in school and why?

What is the best, and worst experiences you had in school?

Why did you come to college?

What is the difference, if any, between going to school and going to college?

What is enterprise? Is it important? Why is it important?

The following quotes form the basis of qualitative data we collected:

We asked about the learners' favourite teacher. The responses were interesting, because none of the 'liking' seemed to be linked to the subject they are currently doing. This even included the business students, even though some had studied business at school. Most responses used the words 'fun' and 'like'. There was the obvious link to practical activity being a better experience for lower level students. Another common theme was that the teacher had put effort into building a relationship; examples given were about helping, letting a student stay in and finish work, helping in explaining something they hadn't understood.

- "Miss Martin was kind and stopped me from getting kicked out of school by sticking up for me"
- "I liked her because she wasn't very 'teachery'. She would talk to you, rather than at you"
- "I liked Miss Taylor because she was funny and friendly "
- "I liked R.E. because it was discussion-based and I liked to talk rather than write "
- "I.T. because I got to play on computer games "
- "Biology was made interesting by doing practical work"
- "I liked sport because they did a lot of practical work. They didn't do a lot of writing "
- " Maths because I like to solve problems "
- " Resistant materials because you get to make stuff "

When we questioned the group about their best and worst experiences in school, it became apparent that there was a high proportion of them that had experienced both short and long term exclusions and there were two learners who had 'managed moves'. 'Leaving' was the most common answer and some learners had nothing good to say about their school life.

- "When I came to college, and when I passed my exams"
- "End of year prom"
- "When I got my grades. I was quite surprised"
- "Worst experience was detentions, which I got for messing about in class. I messed about because the lessons were boring"
- "A good experience was making new friends. The bad experience was getting kicked out of mainstream (school) and losing those friends"

We asked the group why they came to college and we had again a very consistent response. There was a very clear link between coming to college and getting job. However, there was evidence of little through IAG. One Motor vehicle learner wanted to learn English and had no interest in Motor vehicles.

- "I went to college because I wanted a bit more freedom. My parents were really strict, so I went away to catering college for 2 years " (Staff member)
- "I went to college because that's what you do! It was never a choice for me. I did 4 days of Health & Social care, 2 days of A levels, then I worked for a week and I thought I can't do this anymore - I had no advice - so I had to do childcare (BTEC) because it was October and I had to get on a programme"
- "Just thought coming to college was what you do"
- "I came to college to gain experience and get a good job in the future"

- "I came to college because I enjoy cars, and I am fascinated by how they work"
- "I came to college to continue my further education, get to level 2, then even higher, then get successful"
- "For a bright future"
- "To get a better job"
- "To have a good life"

We wanted to explore if the learners could articulate the difference between college and school. The answers were very comprehensive and most identified that they had chosen to be at college, made them positive about the learning experience.

- "(In college) there's more independence, you have to be more responsible for yourself"
- "the teachers and staff are a lot different (at college). They didn't talk AT you, you were expected to talk WITH them"
- "I wasn't confident enough to NOT fit in at school. At college I could be who I wanted to be"
- "The teachers at college talk to you. In lessons they teach you, but they talk to you about other things. They get you ready for the real world. They don't tell you you've GOT to do this. They tell you - you CAN do this or you can go home and you won't get anything out of it"
- "Freedom, you get to make your own choices - no uniform"
- "People (at college) are more grown up. Teachers speak to you like you're an adult"
- "(at college) teachers are more friendly"
- "lessons are more fun"
- "In school the teacher is responsible for the students to learn, in college the student should be responsible for themselves to learn"
- "Better timetable in college. It's much easier, because in school one lesson might be split into 2, having the second part on another day"
- "More relaxed in class (at college) because you don't get forced to do anything"

The Motor vehicle learners were more forthcoming than the Business learners on the question about their understanding of what is enterprise.

- "Putting more money back into the economy by making new ideas"
- "Innovation"
- "creating new jobs, making more money"
- "skills for life, to open your business and what qualities you need"
- "Bringing new ideas to life, to be used to make a profit"

OUTCOMES

The project outcome was reliant on two key components.

Firstly, to embrace the range of evidence which supports the increased use of enterprise activities and opportunities to embed learning through work, the community and/or specific projects, as they have been proven to raise attainment and improve motivation and behaviour in foundation E3 and level 1 learners. This curriculum modelling was achieved by making the content of the project

enterprise based for the learners involved, in an attempt to test this theory with our own students and staff. This was achieved, as informal feedback from the learners involved, has shown that they found the experience very positive.

Secondly, to enact a vision of a different delivery approach, in order to produce more effective results by using staff and students who are currently on programme. An experienced team of staff based the idea for the project on their experiences and understanding of learners from previous foundation E3 and level 1 courses, to produce a curriculum design based on the holistic model of the learner. By using their expertise and professionalism, they were able to design a project which matched the behavioural, academic and social needs of the learners which resulted in the learners improving their skill set.

This was fully achieved, as current staff and learners took part in the project to great success. Staff have commented that they felt that the learners developed their cognitive skills such as innovation, problem solving and confidence building.

The key factor to the success of the programme was the in-depth professional consideration of the typical profile of this level of learner, which was carefully matched to a suitable enterprise activity. The project was designed to engage the learners, inclusive of the spread of levels of English and Maths skills, from Entry 1 to level 3 with over 25% EAL. The activity of collecting and using the data on the cars gave Motor vehicle learners the opportunity to use their prior and sometimes, expert knowledge, in Maths and English learning context. The positive attitudes of the staff helped to encourage the learners to buy into the ideas being proposed and immerse themselves in the task.

The key lessons learned about curriculum development and change, is that the solutions need to be embedded and standardised across the college and linked to strategies for improving English and Maths. More importantly, they must match the profile of the needs of the learner if they are going to improve their chances of progression and success.

The tools needed to further improve the effectiveness of this curriculum redesign project are key to empowering the overall success. The involvement of the Teaching and Learning group is required, in order to develop the pedagogic skills needed by the staff working with these learners. Project teams are also needed to project manage the micro level of the programmes. A peer support and buddy support system within the college will also be key to facilitating sharing good practice.

EVIDENCE

The evidence has been derived from informal qualitative analysis from both staff and learners, who commented on how much they enjoyed taking part in the project. In unstructured interviews with the staff and students, we were able to explore the impact the activity had on them.

In order to encourage learners to become more confident, it was essential that informal discussions took place before the activity, during the planning stage, so that participants could express their experiences and opinions. Therefore, the discussion based approach to data collection, thus far, has resulted in qualitative insights which have validated the success of how this project was designed.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The progress to date is that the project and the introduction of study programmes have encouraged staff to adopt a more analytical approach to an entrenched curriculum design problem. Overall, the project has shown that project based learning is beneficial to these learners. This evidence will be corroborated by the filmed feedback from the learners, which is due to take place shortly.

Therefore, the next steps of the project, is to continue to work with the members of staff and the students involved in foundation, E3 and level 1 courses, to ensure that the crucial redevelopment of these courses takes place. Pertinent to this, will be overcoming the reluctance of some members of staff to embrace the new model in a holistic way, so that it meets the needs of the learners. The success of the curriculum re design, will be further enhanced by the mastering of appropriate teaching strategies, which encourage enterprise skills for these learners. Ultimately, it is hoped that the level 1 programme will provide a solid foundation for the learners, which will enable them to progress on to the next stage of their career.