

Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

Case study

How Foundation Learning can motivate those at most risk of disengaging from learning

Introduction

The Compass Programme at Barking College offers provision for learners who have been excluded from school or who have dropped off the school roll because their learning has been interrupted by a range of social and behavioural issues. The programme is funded by the local authority.

Provider profile

Name of organisation	Barking College's pupil referral unit
Location	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Contact	Matthew Fennemore
Type of organisation involved in the case study	Pupil referral unit
Approximate number of staff involved in the case study	3
Approximate number of learners involved in the case study	12
Level of experience at the start of the pilot	The college is new to Foundation Learning delivery but experienced in offering vocational qualifications and non-accredited PSD, and in delivering personalised learning programmes.

Aims and intended outcomes

Participation in the pilot phase was viewed as a means to:

- explore the design of more holistic learning programmes that would motivate learners by providing bite-sized units of achievement; and
- select and deliver a Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) approved vocational qualification (Level 1 BTEC Certificate in Business

Administration) through which learners would also be able to develop their personal and social skills.

Implementation

The college currently offers learners a curriculum based on a mixture of GCSEs and vocational qualifications based on staff expertise. The BTEC in Business Administration is a classroom-based course. The college wants to use engagement with Foundation Learning as a basis for developing a more interactive and personalised learning curriculum that will include formal assessment of personal and social development (PSD) and functional skills.

Within the Level 1 BTEC Certificate in Business Administration there is a unit worth four credits named Ideas for Small Businesses ([L/501/7242](#)). The unit provides an opportunity to motivate and engage students in understanding how to set up a small business. In addition, it would also provide a purposeful context through which individuals can develop their problem-solving and team-building skills and increase their self-confidence. This addresses a key element of the PSD skills identified as required by this group of learners during their induction phase.

Functional skills (FS) were planned for and delivered. Resources were used to prepare students for assessment and learners completed practice papers. Learners will be ready to take FS tests from September 2009.

Maverick Minds, a company specialising in using business start-up as a tool to re-engage young people at risk of exclusion, were approached by the local authority to support the delivery of the business administration unit. They worked with the group to explore ideas for setting up a small business and supported the learners in creating a Theatre in Education project. This involved improvising and scripting a short theatre piece on drug and alcohol awareness that would then be presented (for a fee) to Year 6 pupils within local primary schools.

All students engaged in the project but some were driven more by the thought of making money rather than by the process itself. Others such as Tamar found a real outlet to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. When joining Compass, Tamar had expressed an interest in drama but lacked the necessary skills to succeed at an audition. She had a history of poor attendance and a negative attitude towards teachers and learning, often baiting others to gain a response. Tamar was quite a mature student, but she lacked confidence, and had outgrown the school environment. As a result she had stopped attending school and was de-motivated. She had not achieved any GCSEs but wanted to attend a drama course and could not learn from a script. She was not ready for a mainstream situation and had an uneven skills profile that required support to improve.

Through completing this project and achieving evidence for her unit assessment Tamar has experienced success for the first time. Other teachers have commented on her increased confidence and her ability to articulate ideas in discussions and in presentations to the class. She is more focused and has emerged as a team leader and a positive role model within the group. Engagement with the programme has encouraged Tamar to continue learning and to progress on to a Level 2 course in hair and beauty next year.

Successes

Approaching the delivery of the BTEC Certificate in Business Administration in this way involved and engaged all learners who as a result took greater ownership for their own learning by setting targets and goals. Using a vocational qualification to develop PSD skills provided a context that was meaningful and purposeful for the learners. They could see the value of the skills they were developing and their suitability for application in other aspects of their learning and in the wider contexts of their lives.

Challenges

Developing personal and social skills is a priority for supporting these learners. However, any form of teamwork raises issues of compromise and negotiation and requires careful supervision by teaching staff. Short-term goals supported by rewards serve as good motivators to keep learners on track.

The learners are placed in tutorial groups when they join the college, as they seem to do better when they 'gel' as a group. A six-week induction programme to the course has been designed and will need to be incorporated in the future initial assessment for FS and PSD. The college is currently working with the Barking consortium to develop an individual learning plan (ILP) model which can be used across all partners.

Impact and outcomes

Delivery of the unit has highlighted how vocational learning could be used to develop and accredit both FS and PSD. For example, Barking are considering using Level 1 BTEC Certificate in Work Skills to accredit PSD next year.

Conclusions and next steps

The college is hoping to develop the vocational element of the Foundation Learning programme that they will run next year; they will establish a six-week rotation of 'tasters' that will include opportunities in areas such as drama as part of the offer. They are going to use NOCN Step-UP to accredit unit achievement. This and the tasters will also be made available to other schools in the consortium.

The college has noted that units such as solving work-related problems, taking notes at meetings and self-assessment could also be evidenced and accredited via the vocational learning that is delivered.