

The Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration

Blackpool and Fylde College- Student forums



This case study outlines the structure supporting promoting and supporting learner voice across the college. The document also outlines the representation that the student forum has, some of the changes they have introduced and the ways in which they shape college provision.

Our organisation

Blackpool & The Fylde College is a general FE college and within that College there is the School of Access & Continuing Education. The School provides a learning environment for students 16-18 years old with additional learning needs. The School also caters for students aged 19+ with additional learning needs and in addition, learners with mental health challenges and learners for who English is a second language (ESOL).

This case study looks at learner voice at Blackpool & The Fylde College and how the college aims to listen to learners ideas, suggestions and comments to improve their experience at the college

Blackpool and The Fylde College have departments known as 'schools' and each school houses a specific vocational or academic course e.g. School of Construction, A-level academy etc . Within each school area are various levels of course and each course aims to have 2 learner representatives – 'student reps'. These form the basic cohort of learner voice and drive the learner voice forward in various strategic ways with other members of the college.

Our approach

The aim has been to further develop the learner voice (especially relevant as Blackpool & the Fylde College commit to "put the learner at the heart of all we do") which provides a platform for learners to bring their concerns, ideas and feedback, which are discussed at termly student forums.

This learner voice initiative is now under the remit of Blackpool & The Fylde College's newly instated FE Director for 14 – 19. Learner voice encompasses student

representation and also the Student Union body that are active in formulating these forums.

At the beginning of term each course nominates 2 representatives, one main rep and a deputy rep. The Student Union also campaign for various role members that attend the student forum meetings. The student forum meetings are held termly over a 2 hour lunchtime period with lunch provided.

Prior to the Student Forum meeting the Student Rep meets with course peers and collates comments and feedback to bring to the Forum meeting.

The Student Forum is chaired by the Vice Principal responsible for curriculum. The first hour is designated for the reps to discuss issues between themselves as a body, to work collaboratively and record any issues to be discussed later. This is overseen (in the background and available to advise if required) by the Student Liaison Officer.

The second hour is chaired with the Vice Principal (VP) and attended by senior managers from corporate and academic areas along with the student reps. The VP feedbacks along with representation from the Student Union in the format of: 'This is what you asked for....this is what we have done...'

The reps then discuss with staff other issues, concerns and feedback of what has worked well etc. Immediate feedback is given if possible from the Academic and Corporate staff however any issues that need consultation feedback is provided at the next meeting.

The initiative works in the same way for both FE and HE learners.

The outcome and impact of the work

In summary: This involves 120 student course reps, Student Union reps including: Presidents for FE and HE, FE Student Governor, FE Vice President, Communications Officer for FE and HE, Events Officer for FE, Equality and Diversity Officer for FE and HE, Lesbian, Gay, Bi – sexual and Trans sexual (LBGT) Officer for FE and Education Officer for HE. It also involves senior management for both academic and corporate areas and appropriate middle managers and tutors. The Principle also attends as she perceives this forum to be crucial to learner autonomy and voice.

Impact:

- The forum provides an opportunity to work collaboratively as a multi sited college and air views and ideas in a positive, respectful manner.
- College is made aware of arising issues that can be acted upon in a timely manner.
- It enables College to know what it is doing well
- Learners know that they have an investment in what is going on, happening in college, be part of it and take a pride in college.

The possibility of becoming a student rep is open to all learners.

Class reps and Student Union reps are chosen by their peers after prior guidance is given by personal tutors as to what makes an efficient rep.

Training is given as to what makes a good rep/what duties are involved.

For student Union rep roles various training has been offered and includes: Safeguarding, NUS training including attending a residential, Equality issues, secretarial skills i.e. minute taking skills, and marketing experience. The aim being to provide opportunities for reps to gain vital skills to enable greater employability opportunities.

As a result of learner voice a series of developments have been undertaken across college, these include;

'Listening posts' being investigated – an initiative led by student representation and works around a designated public area for people that require audible information about locations in college and information from the public information screens.

College now has cashback facilities in canteen areas.

Organic and healthy food options have been integrated.

Music and chat areas along with quiet areas have been organised in the Learning Resource Centres.

Car share scheme is up and running along with the bike scheme as a 'go green' initiative.

Next steps and future plans

Changes that are being discussed for Student Union reps include having a president in place ready for the following academic year. Campaigning will start in March so a handover period can follow including training ready for a September start.

Changes to the student forum meeting have included not having staff involved in the first hour to give greater credence to learner autonomy.

The student forums will continue to evolve as learner voice dictates.

Ideas to work 'SMARTer' in training reps and initiatives to reward them for performing their duties.

Blackpool & The Fylde College is constantly working towards learner involvement and has set the college values to reflect this. The student rep meetings link up the college values that include:

Value 1: Placing the learner at the heart of all we do

Value2: Showing fairness, courtesy and mutual respect

Value3: Teaching and learning as the key to our success

Value4: Aspiring to excellence: quality is everyone's responsibility

Value5: Working together to get the best results

Value6: Empowering others to achieve their full potential

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This case study focuses on the leadership of transition for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into Further Education (FE). The materials outline the historic context of the college, the changes which have been introduced and the ongoing review and evaluation of evolving practices. The case study depicts the

smarter working practices in college and beyond and outline the transition process through flowchart representation.

Our organisation

Blackpool & The Fylde College is a multi sited seaside college and a provider of Further and Higher academic and vocational education that support on average 900 – 1100 FE learners with varying support needs including: Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Dyslexia, those with Mental Health issues, those with physical mobility challenges, Moderate Learning Difficulties, Severe Learning Difficulties, Aspergers, those with emotional and behavioural needs, and Young People Looked After. Learning Support has designated specialists for: Young People Young Looked After (YPLA), Visual and Hearing Impairments, Dyslexia, teams of Communication Support Workers, Educational Support Workers and Learning Support Tutors. Learning Support is currently training an Aspergers specialist. The college is divided into different departments known as 'schools' with each school focusing on teaching a specific vocation e.g. School of Construction, School of Computing. For each school area Learning Support has a designated Support Coordinator that oversees and facilitates the support.

Our approach

This case study focuses on the leadership of transition for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into Further Education (FE). *The accompanying flowchart illustrates the transition process currently used for learners starting September 2012 (attached at 1a).*

Student Support and Guidance Services feature 2 divisions including Student Services and Learning Support. Within the Learning Support division is a Transition Team. There are 2 Transition Coordinators with 0.5 contracts each – equating to a Full time role, with a Curriculum Leader who has responsibility to overseeing and participating. Along with these members are 2 others members that spend approx. 0.2 of their contract attending reviews and supporting transition activities as required.

Previously, the Transition Team spent large amounts of time attending SEN reviews from Year 9 upwards to year 11 (mainstream) or Year 14 (special School) and then collating evidence to put in transition files for learners progressing on to Blackpool & The Fylde College. Transition activity with progressing individuals was therefore limited and was mainly conducted with the 'high support need' cohort and others that made specific enquiry. Evidence gathered was read and specific support strategies were logged onto the Perspective Learners Spreadsheet for the Support Coordinators to facilitate.

The aim has been to develop and continually improve our transition service and processes in order for prospective learners to feel 'college ready' and for Learning Support to have appropriate support measures in place.

In order to achieve this transition policy and processes have been shaped by leaders to secure the following outcomes;

- Attendance at Year 11 or Year 14 reviews only – unless otherwise requested by SENCOs
- More learners to be supported with their specific transition needs in order to feel 'college ready'
- Assessment of a greater number of prospective learners in order to gather accurate support need/package detail.
- Use of Learning Support Specialists – to enable specialist assessments to take place and very specific support package detail to be available and logged
- Learners to meet with appropriate Learning Support Specialists and provide an opportunity to discuss their specific support needs and visit college
- Support packages to be logged electronically with detail and costs attached
- Accurate support package data including costings to be readily available for Managers to inform funding bodies in the time periods specified – to use SpirALS
- Continued logging of support need/package detail in 'school' area for the designated Support Coordinator in spreadsheet format
- Received support evidence to be scanned electronically on to a 'Central Register'
- Continued storage of paper based evidence in the designated Transition area

The changes that have been made have meant a more cost effective and learner focused initiative enabling prospective learners to have more supported individually tailored transition and support package.

(Attached is the flowchart titled '1a Transition Processes used in 11/12' which highlights activities of the Transition Team starting from an enquiry regarding support to compiling a transition plan and predictive support package. This process is used for SEN learners and YPLA learners in order to attain the outcomes listed above.)

In brief:

1. A transition learner can be identified in the following ways:
 - At an SEN/YPLA Review
 - Application form data
 - Other: including phone call enquiry, referral from an external agency including Young Peoples Service (YPS, formerly Connexions), Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), Leaving Care Team etc
2. All information is logged onto the 'Prospective Learners' Spreadsheet which records data such as, name, phone details, course/s applied for, evidence sent, assessments needed or completed e.g. Learning Support assessment,

specialist assessment, Risk assessment, PEEP, Duty of Care for medical reasons & support package

3. Information is then logged and scanned onto the Central Register – a central electronic system allowing evidence to be available for those requiring it e.g. specialists, Access arrangements, Support Coordinators etc.
4. Assessments are carried out as appropriate and evidence and findings are logged as required onto the Central register and Prospective Learners spreadsheets.
5. Using this information a Transition Plan is formulated and a Predictive Support Package agreed and costed. Costings are then put on to SpirALS. Managers then use data, for example, to agree funding with funding bodies, budgeting, allocating of support/contracts etc.

How we implemented it...

Improvements to the transition process are seen by managers and the frontline team as a continual work in progress' as the aim is to strive to develop SMARTer working methods and fall inline with developments in other departments in college e.g. admissions procedures. In order to shape SMARTer approaches and capture the learning the transition team meet weekly to discuss issues relating to transition including processes.

A number of cross college development, training initiatives and partnership practices have been introduced through the learning so far:

- Review attendance: Worked with SENCO's and Leaving Care Team to inform about the change in attendance at reviews. An evidence list was compiled by the Transition Team highlighting documents that are very useful to aid a smooth transition and handed to SENCO's and YPS colleagues in order for support evidence to be identified and more readily available.
- Application form procedure – Supported Admissions and Marketing to implement significant changes to the application and interview procedures.
- Other methods – often enquiries from YPS - discussed Section 139a's to be more timely i.e. throughout the year not just sent as a 'bulk lot' in June.
- SpirALS installation and training for Transition Team members inputting data.
- 3 hours of x1 Learning Support Admin staff to carry out Transition admin tasks.
- Development of the Central Register.
- Continued close working with Learning Support Specialists.

The outcome and impact of the work

Some aspects of the new procedure were carried out last year such as, attending less reviews and allowing more time to assess learners support needs. The outcome was that a significantly higher number of prospective learners were assessed with more detailed assessments such as; involving the specialists earlier in the transition process and other departments for risk assessments, PEEP and Duty of Care documents. Costs, funding allocations and staffing requirements were known earlier and acted upon. The Transition Team are set to secure all 10 outcomes identified above, as this year they will develop and deliver live data which will be readily available, logged on SpirALS and scanned onto the Central Register

Learners have had support needs identified earlier. A number of learners have visited the college as they felt necessary. Support Coordinators and those conducting assessments are currently using the central register and are on target to have information to those requiring it in a timely way. Where learners were supported through some of these new measures last year, they reported back saying that they felt their support needs were addressed and the Transition service offered a friendly informative haven for learners and parents worrying about moving on.

The college also envisage securing the following improvements in the short term future; enrolments for learners with more complicated needs will be smoother i.e. fewer halts at enrolment or enrolment postponements to conduct risk assessments or Duty of Care medical documents. Support Coordinators have said they feel they will receive more accurate information especially those working on other campuses.

Learners are at the very heart of the transition procedures. Where possible learners are involved in the assessments conducted and consulted as to their transition needs, the aim is to involve, with permission, other agencies that the young person is involved with.

Prospective learners that apply via application form are sent a Learning Support Questionnaire to complete and return, this gives the Transition Team an idea as to the support needs and information to act on. Once transitioned and enrolled, learners are sent a Learning Support Transition Questionnaire allowing the learner to have their say about the service received.

An extensive review of the developments will be undertaken at the end of academic year 2012 and the learning will inform future developments in structure, training and processes.

Consideration has already been given to re-establishing Steering Group meetings, last year they were held termly and involved outside agencies and other local colleges and sixth forms. These were very successful and achieved some excellent joint working partnerships to the benefit of the prospective learners. Due the restructure and rebranding of Connexions/Young Peoples Service, the loss of some key members in other agencies worked with etc the Steering Group was disbanded. The Transition Team are looking to reinstate this due to demand from other agencies, YPS now more static and key people identified.

Next steps and future plans

The Transition team are constantly working to improve systems and is sensitive to the developments and changes in other college departments and legislation that can impact on the current transition procedures.

Whilst making these constant adjustments the Transition Team is mindful that many other departments and colleagues are reliant on the data it provides in order to operate a SMART service both to the staff and the prospective learners. It is anticipated that whilst this is the process this academic year as changes to policies and procedures continue the aim is to evolve and develop as these dictate.

The aim will always be to provide appropriate support packages and activities to allow learners to be 'college ready' and put them at the heart of college policy and practice in order to support learners to be the very best that they can be.

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