

Collaborative working to support transition to college, employment and adulthood

Cedars Academy Cluster



Background

The Cedars Academy cluster included Joseph Swan Academy, Gateshead Collective and its partners (ITEC North east and TDR Training) and SOFA (Supporting Opportunities for All).

Our broad aims were to spread knowledge, improve expertise, build capacity and share delivery arrangements so that, as education and training providers, the Cluster could respond effectively to the needs of learners, local trainers and employers. We wanted to create a shared understanding of how providers in the sector could work together collaboratively and not competitively.

Our focus was to involve learners, support colleagues and challenge low expectations. By supporting learners to prepare for adulthood, the project provided progression pathways through:

- Members working together, through peer to peer learning, prioritising and sharing delivery and resources at a practical level. This co-delivery had a strong emphasis on phased transition, working with partners to develop supported social enterprise models.
- Developing a more rigorous approach to quality control
- Introducing Quality Assurance measures into the 'Step Up' Vocational Programme by specifically piloting review documentation used with Cedars Academy pupils by partners of Gateshead Collective.
- Joseph Swan Academy and Cedars Academy working together in assessing the quality of teaching and learning through paired lesson observations.
- Promoting the student voice and progression by involving learners in reviewing their programme of study with Cedars staff via an active Student Forum
- Learner input and reviews of supported work experience placements and social enterprise programme arranged through SOFA
- A learner forum to support future work experience and training placements

Key lessons learned

Special schools in particular will be interested in how it is possible to both develop and enrich their curriculum and also increase their capacity to provide a wider range of real-life work opportunities, experiences and training. This model, however, could easily be adapted to meet

the needs of mainstream schools, colleges, training providers and their students within a range of settings.

Our model demonstrates how partners can work together, through peer to peer learning, prioritising sharing delivery and resources at a practical level. The project involved co-delivery with a strong emphasis on phased transition, and working with partners to develop employability skills and supported social enterprise models.

Sector coverage: The project involved collaboration between a special school, mainstream school, work-based learning providers and a social enterprise.

Introduction

This collaborative project included:

Cedars Academy

Cedars Academy is an all-age school for children and students aged 5 to 16 years. Cedars has close links with our neighbouring mainstream school Joseph Swan Academy, which allows our pupils to remain in education for a further 1 or 2 years post 16 where this is felt to be appropriate.

Cedars is one of a number of Special Schools in Gateshead, providing education for children and young people with physical and medical needs, speech and language disorders, some types of autism and a wide range of other complex needs often associated with emotional vulnerability.

Cedars normally accommodates between 80 and 90 pupils, the average class size is currently 9 pupils. All of the pupils at the Cedars must have a Statement of Special Educational needs, although it may be possible for this to be drawn up whilst they are in attendance. This Statement protects all of the child's individual needs and is formally reviewed at least annually.

From Key Stages 1-4 (5-16 years) National Curriculum programmes of study are followed, adapted and differentiated to meet individual and group needs.

Students are able to leave at the end of Key Stage 4 to move onto colleges of Further Education locally, or to specialist provision out of Borough. In recent years our close links with Joseph Swan Academy have allowed students to enrol in their sixth form, but to be taught by Cedars staff, either at Cedars or at JSA for part of the week. This depends on pupil ability, and the availability of accommodation.

In the past students have achieved excellent exam results and have gained employment; a few have even graduated from University following their education with us and Cedars enjoys positive links with other local schools, colleges and training providers. The school has an active and supportive Governing body whose members regularly come in to school during the day to fully involve themselves in the life of the school.

Our OfSTED inspection in September 2012, was judged to be "Good" in all areas.

Joseph Swan Academy (JSA)

Joseph Swan School became an Academy in March 2012. Built to accommodate 1300 students aged 11 – 18, the school roll is 1188 with over 200 in the Sixth Form.

JSA serves a very “diverse population” (Ofsted 2010), with over 10% of students coming from ethnic minorities. JSA is highly regarded and proud of its reputation in the local community as an inclusive comprehensive school. JSA is a lead school in the Joseph Swan School Cluster and enjoys very close links with its five main Primary Partner Schools. JSA has an active and expanding community programme which includes Adult Learning, Leisure and Sport, Performing Arts and Extended Schools provision.

Raising achievement is at the heart of everything that is done at Joseph Swan. JSA works from a strong philosophical position that every child can achieve and that belief informs all our work. JSA is in the fortunate position of being a very popular and thriving school community, renowned for its creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning and raising standards across the Key Stages. In September 2010 JSA joined the Inspirational Schools Partnership which focuses on improving the learning experience for all students in all subjects across the school.

The Gateshead Collective

The Gateshead Collective is an exciting collaboration between eight Gateshead based training and education providers working together to develop and deliver high quality and wide ranging skills development solutions to individuals and businesses located in Gateshead. The Collective works in partnership, to provide individuals and employers with the highest quality and widest range of work based learning provision in the North East and through collaboration, it aims to better understand local training needs and provide quality solutions to develop a more talented workforce for Gateshead.

The eight partners in the Gateshead Collective are Access Training, ITEC North East, NEETA Ltd, Rathbone UK, TDR Ltd, Gateshead College, Train Ltd and Gateshead Learning & Skills. Together, these providers work with over 3000 employers in the region.

The Collective offers Apprenticeships, Traineeships, NVQs, bespoke short courses and adult training. Training is to national standards and focuses on the skills that are important in business.

Two members of the Gateshead Collective – ITEC North East and TDR Training were the vocational delivery partners in this cluster work. Both organisations have recently been awarded a ‘Good’ rating by Ofsted inspectors.

SOFA (Supporting Opportunities for All)

SOFA is a Social Enterprise, established in 2009 and based in Gateshead. Our executive comprises representatives from education, training and business. We provide opportunities for learners aged 16+ with learning difficulties or a disability to progress through vocational applications in catering and hospitality, offering valuable work placements, training pathways, advocacy arrangements, support and social networks. SOFA is committed to providing an environment where individual development is nurtured and in which fulfilling training and careers may be pursued.

Through our work in education and training we have been made acutely aware of the need to provide a route for young people who face barriers to traditional employment pathways. These young people reach the end of their further education and are unable to progress onto unsupported programmes of employment or further training and are left with few, if any, options.

SOFA was developed following the key recommendations of the LSC Paper ‘Meeting Need: Raising Aspiration: The North East’s Strategy for LSC-Funded Provision for Learners with

Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD): 2007/08 to 2009/10'. We have become part of the emerging vision and strategy to improve the choice and effectiveness of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the North East.

SOFA's vision is driven by the concept of learning for living and work. Our role is to increase participation and support individuals entering training to achieve their ambition, whether this is to improve their lives, strengthen their career opportunities, or develop their skills; thus enabling economic participation and the development of self confidence to live independently and contribute to local communities.

SOFA provided the learners involved in this cluster work with work experience placements and programmes that developed their work related skills, providing them with routes, support mechanisms and social networks to enable them to progress to supported employment and vocational programmes.

What we wanted to achieve

The key outcomes sought from the project were:

- The development of a curriculum that provided learners with the opportunity to learn within a vocational environment and puts them in a position to benefit from post 16 learning opportunities and ultimately employment.
- To continue to provide learners with the opportunity to experience learning in a different setting/environment which includes a diverse range of other learners and young people
- To ensure that programmes are tailored to suit the specific needs of all learners through joint and on-going development of the offer.
- To continue to recognise the needs of learners at the start of the programme and throughout its duration, and ensure that they are considered within the planning and delivery of all programmes.
- To ensure that the Initial Referral Process continued to highlight relevant information which will help engage and motivate learners and identify their individual needs and strengths, thereby allowing the programme to be tailored to the needs of the learners.
- To ensure that the Review Process continues to secure a supportive environment for the learner, to enable the Learner Voice to be recognised and that the outcomes of review are fed into the design, delivery and evaluation process of programmes.
- To ensure continuous improvement of teaching and learning, with observations that were planned into the current and subsequent programmes.

Implementation

Planning our approach

The project was led by key personnel from each of the partners, including DHT of Cedars Academy, Head of Vth Form JSA, Business Manager of Gateshead Collective, Head of Vth Form Cedars and a Director of SOFA.

Each member of the cluster was supported by a senior manager in their organisation. The cluster nominated a "lead" person. Cluster members met at least once a term. The cluster worked with the specialist adviser we had been allocated to ensure best outcomes.

Outcomes and impacts

- The documentation developed highlighted relevant information to help engage and motivate learners, identifying their individual personal needs and strengths. The programme was then tailored to the needs of the young person.
- Feedback indicates that taking learners out of their normal environment helps to increase their confidence and gives them the opportunity to experience learning within a setting which includes a diverse range of other learners/young people.
- Re-engaging learners in learning within a vocational environment puts them in a position to later benefit from post 16 learning opportunities and employment.
- The quality of teaching and learning being assessed and reported upon should be addressed through future staff training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD).
- Learners' needs should be recognised and considered within planning and delivery
- The Cluster Group have a shared and consistent approach to our assessment of course provision
- The Cluster Group has strengthened communication and developed mutual confidence in the quality of our delivery
- Learners feel more involved/included as part of JSA
- Learners feel that they are listened to and valued as part of our community
- JSA recognises and promotes the learners' achievement and progress
- There is raised esteem amongst learner group
- There is a raised awareness and understanding amongst stakeholders
- Employer and training providers have a raised awareness of learner needs and improved procedures regarding referral, learner profiles, individual pathways, support, adaptations and objectives.
- There is better mapping of learner need to provision.
- There is a mechanism across the cluster to identify areas of strength and areas for development. These will inform future improvement plans.

What we achieved

The Learner Journeys provided as part of this output indicate a high level of satisfaction with the programme from the learners. Learners particularly highlighted the positive impact of learning in different and 'grown up' environments beyond school. All learners reported that they felt the programme helped to prepare them better for future college and training placements and understood the positive impact on their planned transition from school.

What we learned

How will our project lead to better outcomes for learners?

- Learners will be given the opportunity to learn within a vocational environment which will enable them to later benefit from post 16 learning opportunities and ultimately employment.
- This programme's success will ensure that learners will be provided with the opportunity to experience learning in a different setting/environment which includes a diverse range of other learners and young people
- The needs of learners will continue to be recognised at the start of the programme and throughout its duration and be considered in the planning and delivery of the programme.
- The Initial Referral Process will continue to be used to highlight relevant information which will help engage and motivate learners and identify their individual needs and strengths and thereby allowing the programme to be tailored to the needs of learners.
- Observation of teaching and learning will be planned into this and subsequent programmes to ensure continuous improvement of teaching and learning.
- Joint on-going development of the programmes between Cedars Academy, Joseph Swan, ITEC North East, TDR Training and The Collective will ensure that programmes are tailored to suit the specific needs of learners.
- The Review Process will continue to be used to ensure a supportive environment for the learner, to enable the Learner Voice to be recognised and fed into the design, delivery and evaluation process of the programme.
- Whilst the programme is in its infancy we believe that its successes and lessons learned can apply to further programmes.

How will our cluster work continue and develop established and new links with partners?

Already our group has met other cluster partners and built up strong relationships. We propose to maintain such links and continue to network, albeit on an informal basis.

References

As part of the cluster work the group produced a case study what outlined who they implemented and reviewed the following documentation:

- Provider Review Record
- Initial Referral Record
- Learner Journeys

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Provider name(s):

Cedars Academy

Joseph Swan Academy

The Gateshead Collective (ITEC North East and TDR Training)

SOFA (Supporting Opportunities for All)

Contact information

Martin Flowers, Cedars Academy, Ivy Lane, Low Fell, Gateshead. NE9 6QD 191 4874595

M Flowers
Cedars Cluster
DHT Cedars Academy
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