

Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

Case study

Foundation Learning: The first term

Introduction

Engage Training & Development is one of the centres taking part in the Doncaster Local Authority Foundation Learning pilot. The aim is to engage and motivate learners aged 14 and over who are working below Level 2 and improve their skills by using high-quality credit-based qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1 from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The pilot builds on an existing successful link programme with Danum School Technology College, a local 11–18 secondary school.

Provider profile

Name of organisation	Engage Training & Development Ltd
Location	Doncaster, South Yorkshire
Contact	Katie Hodby Curriculum Coordinator info@engage-training.co.uk
Type of organisation involved in the case study	Specialist in vocational training programmes for young people
Approximate number of staff involved in the case study	5
Approximate number of learners involved in the case study	14
Level of experience at the start of the pilot	The pilot builds on an existing successful link programme with Danum School Technology College

Aims and intended outcomes

Engage Training & Development has a strong commitment to helping young people maximise their potential within a supportive yet challenging environment. The centre was keen to be involved in the pilot as they could see the opportunities that Foundation Learning presented for recognising achievement and promoting progression.

Implementation

A great deal of preparatory work was done from the beginning of the centre's involvement in the pilot. Staff identified the qualifications that they thought would be most suitable and started to prepare resources and plan delivery. They had excellent support from the Local Authority 14-19 Consultant, who arranged for training from the awarding body and in functional skills (FS).

There was a delay in starting the programme and the learners were only identified by Danum and referred on to the centre to take part in the pilot scheme in March 2009.

14 learners from the school enrolled on the pilot, with pupils attending Engage Training & Development one day a week. In the first term, learners started to work towards the three FS and the ASDAN Entry 3/Level 1 Certificate in personal and social development (PSD). It was planned that they would begin the vocational strand (ASDAN Entry 3/Level 1 Certificate in employability) in September 2009.

They began their programme with five weeks' induction to familiarise them with the learning environment and the programme and pilot they were part of. At induction the learners completed an initial assessment and diagnostic to gauge their levels. They also took part in team-building activities to identify where to split the group in terms of ability and working relationships. Each personalised learning programme is made up of 1.5 hour sessions in mathematics, English, ICT and PSD, and learners go to the centre once a week for the whole day (9.30am to 3.30pm).

Engage Training & Development sends weekly reports to the school on each learner and there is a shared approach to supporting and monitoring personal and study targets.

Successes

- All learners completed one credit in PSD – social relationships – and participated actively in role plays and discussions.

- Spelling was identified as a weakness for all the learners. The centre carried out intensive work on this using a variety of strategies, and learners are successfully meeting individual targets.
- The learners responded well to being in a more adult environment and there has been a positive impact on behaviour. Danum reports that this has been carried back into the school.
- A key success factor has been the close working relationship with the school, particularly with the Re-engagement Learning Coordinator.

Challenges

So far the pilot has been very successful. Attendance is excellent, although a couple of learners have a problem with punctuality.

The main challenge has been the fact that the selection and start date of learners were put back significantly, so the centre has not made as much progress as it would have liked.

The centre anticipated that the 'spiky profile' of learners would be a challenge, so staff used the induction period to carefully select groups based on ability and personal relationships. So far this has worked well.

Impact and outcomes

Staff:

- have been given the opportunity for continuous professional development;
- have had the chance to develop schemes of work and resources for new areas within their teaching from the beginning; and
- have had the opportunity to create a structured learning programme with clear outcomes. This will have an impact on how the centre plans other programmes outside the pilot.

Learners:

- have had the chance to achieve outside of mainstream school;
- have been given the opportunity to learn in a different educational environment;
- can work with qualifications that don't follow the GCSE curriculum but give them FS to use in employment and life: they can see the relevance of what they are doing; and
- can take part in personalised learning programmes that will engage and motivate them.

Staff feedback:

'The pilot has given me the chance to see a more structured learning environment with clear aims and focus for learners to progress further.'

Holly, trainer

'I believe that Foundation Learning is an opportunity to develop current learning programmes with a clear focus given to development and progression'

Hannah, trainer

'I think that the pilot has shown us how using real-world examples in lessons has proved to be very effective and engaging.'

Neil, trainer

'These young people have blossomed.'

Nick, Re-engagement Learning Coordinator

Learner feedback:

'I like the way we're treated like adults – with respect.'

'I like PSD. It gives you skills for when you get a job in the real world.'

'I like meeting my targets.'

Lessons learnt

The importance of:

- good planning and preparation;
- good communication links with the host school;
- preparing resources and approaches that relate to the learners' real-life experience and future aspirations – they have really responded to this practical approach; and
- a committed team of staff.

Conclusions and next steps

Early experiences on the Foundation Learning programme have proved to be extremely positive and have definitely supported learners' motivation, engagement and achievement. Moving forwards, both partners are keen to develop their joint working and add further coherence to the approach. Weekly updates and reports will be enhanced to provide two-way feedback on progress. Early indications from both organisations – and the learners themselves – show how much this is valued and how effective it is. Planning is now under way to include the school's Connexions Personal Adviser in the delivery of the Certificate in Employability with a key aim of supporting progression into post-16 learning opportunities.