

## Halesowen College

# How our 'Learnfest' has improved pre-enrolment assessment



### Why we needed to improve our pre-enrolment assessment

As a tertiary college, we offer four discrete courses within our Foundation Department:

- A Bridging course to improve independence and social skills of students normally at pre-entry or entry 1 levels.
- Step Up To Life and Work courses to improve independence and introduce skills required for the workplace at entry level 2.
- Step up to Workskills to prepare students for employment (part time, voluntary or sheltered) at entry level 2 or entry level 3.
- A Foundation Studies course to improve literacy, numeracy and study skills for students at Entry 3 level and to provide tasters in various vocational areas, enabling learners to progress to a Level 1 course.

Four years ago we reviewed our approach to interviewing and enrolling students on these discrete programmes. Although we were identifying students correctly for the Bridging course, students for the Step Up and Foundation courses were sometimes being enrolled on the wrong course despite having an interview, taking up references from their schools and conducting initial assessments. As a result, some students were struggling with the work load, while others were not challenged sufficiently.

### What we did

We decided to introduce a week long 'Learnfest' assessment course before the students enrol. We also changed our application form so students apply for an Entry Level course rather than a specific course.

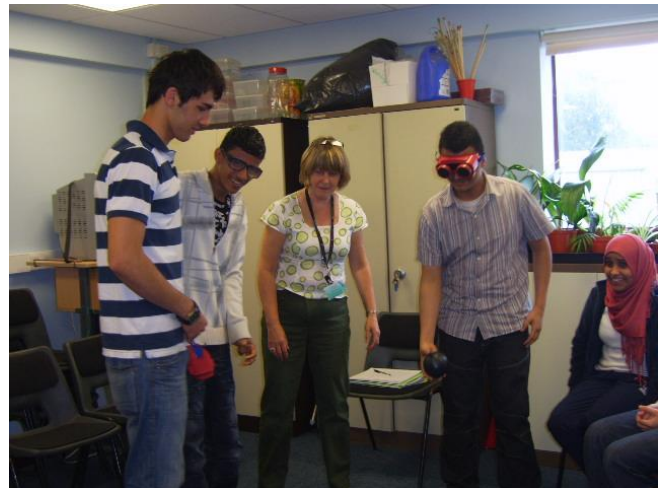
Once the student has accepted a place for September they are invited in for a week long Learnfest course, usually in July. During this week we assess things like whether they are team players, how they interact with other students and how they interact with staff – as well as doing literacy and numeracy assessments.

A visit out of college is arranged for one day during the week - last year to West Midlands Safari Park. This allows the team to see how the students behave out of college and provides additional opportunities to assess social skills and see if they can follow instructions.

Throughout the week staff observe the students and keep a log of the assessments conducted in each lesson. At the end of the week we meet to discuss our assessments and agree which course looks most suitable for each applicant.

## How our students benefit

The Learnfest programme has improved retention levels, with far fewer students transferring to other courses. Retention and achievement have also improved significantly. Previously, transferring students were often having to catch up with work already completed by the rest of their new group and having difficulty in settling into a new group when friendships have already been formed. The Learnfest programme also helps students feel much more confident about their transition from school to college.



Comments by students on the Learnfest course have included the following:

- Enjoyed making new friends.
- Enjoyed getting to know other students who would be starting in September.
- Enjoyed the team building activities.
- More confident about starting in September.

- Liked getting to know the campus better.
- Enjoyed meeting someone they could talk to.
- Enjoyed the variety of activities.
- Enjoyed the visit to the Safari Park!

No external funding is available to run our Learnfest courses. The test of the value of Learnfest is that we fund it ourselves because we believe enabling students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to have the smoothest possible transition from school is a key priority.

*‘Ensuring that learners are assessed thoroughly before starting in September gives greater accuracy with regard to placing them on the correct programmes. This will, in turn, reduce the amount of transfers within the first half term and improve retention.’*

Colleague who visited from a neighbouring college

### What to think about if you plan to do this

- No funding is available and so you need to be creative with the timetable to maximise opportunities e.g. merging groups where appropriate and using LSAs effectively to supervise students.
- Students and parents need to be aware of the importance of the programme to ensure good participation – stress the importance when the students attend for their interview.
- Ensure that if a visit out of college is planned it takes place towards the end of the week when you know more about the students.
- Avoid big busy venues: the first year of running the programme we took students to Drayton Manor Park, trying to supervise all the students in such a large area proved impossible for the staff

### Want to know more?

To find out more about Halesowen College look at our [college website](#). If you'd like to know more about our Learnfest approach, please contact Jane Bridgewater, Curriculum Team Manager, on 0121 602 7738 or at [jbridgewater@halesowen.ac.uk](mailto:jbridgewater@halesowen.ac.uk).