

Making the most of the QCF

Case Study



Project title: Developing pathways using QCF qualifications and units at Henley College

In 2008/09, Henley College needed to improve retention, achievement and overall success rates for students in the Public Service programme area. This case study describes how they went about using the flexibilities of QCF units and qualifications to develop their curriculum offer which, in 2010/11, resulted in a 30% increase in achievement and success rates, and a 6% increase in retention.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Developing a flexible QCF curriculum
- Career pathways
- Improving learner engagement

Contact information

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Participating organisation:

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What the provider set out to do and why

The provider set out to make the courses on offer in the Public Service programme area more engaging for students, with the aim of improving the success, achievement and retention rates (which in 2008/09 were at 54%, 65% and 84% respectively). The Public Service Programme Manager visited other colleges to share different approaches to implementing a unit-based, Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) curriculum. As part of the College's self-assessment improvement plan, the Head of Department agreed an action plan to create three career pathways within the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Public Services.

What the project has achieved so far

The Programme Manager reviewed the flexibility of the QCF units in the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Public Services, and decided to move away from the traditional

approach of the College selecting what it could deliver and, instead, to ask students what they wanted. Students responded that, although they enjoyed the learning, they wanted a course that they felt was more in touch with their career aspirations and was more engaging.

The Programme Manager used the industry experience of the Public Services staff to help identify those skills that are common across Public Services and the groups of career-specific skills that best support learner progress to further learning and employment. The result is the three career pathways of Law, Forensics, and Outdoor Learning which offer career-specific learning in addition to a core of common units. Students select which career pathway best meets their aspirations and units are offered at different levels to allow staff to pitch the learning across the range of ability from Level 2 to Level 4. This has helped to create a learning experience that is more responsive to learner needs, providing challenge across a range of ability. For example, where students plan to progress to higher levels, units are offered at Level 4 to make the transition smoother.

The department's increased focus on responding to student choice has led to tutors introducing more choice in learning and assessment methods for each unit and has been instrumental in forging a stronger relationship with students. Students have responded positively to these changes, as illustrated by some becoming ambassadors at open evenings and the following comments:

"When compared to how the course was run in Year 1, this has given me more insight into what I will do after college. I am better informed and better prepared."

(Chevonn, student)

"It's better because they've changed the way we learn through visits and activities, and it's more specific to what you want to do."

(Charlotte, student)

"I'm not a fitness freak [reference to Outdoor Education units]. Having pathways means I'm learning what will help me in the future and what I want to learn."

(Keira, student)

"It's the same people teaching you, but the way they teach now is better. You can get more help and you are more interested in what you are learning."

(Claire, student)

The impact of these changes on the Public Services programme area between 2008/09 and 2010/11 has been an increase of 30% in achievement, 6% in retention, and 32% in success rates. Predictions for 2011/12 are that there will be 97% achievement, 93% retention and a 90% success rate.

In addition, the quality of student achievement has increased from 2008/09, when there were no distinction grades, to 2010/11 where the grading profile has improved to include distinctions (32%) and merits (42%).

What still needs to be done

The College continues to explore the development of QCF pathways in other programme areas, with specific interest from the sport department.

Within the Public Service programme area, the Programme Manager is working to make the pathways even more “attractive” to both students and employers. An example of this is the planned introduction of the ‘Diploma in Policing’ qualification, which all future learners wishing to be Police Officers will be required to hold, and this will better support students’ progression to further learning and employment.

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resource is available at the end of the case study:

- Table of common units and grouped units for career pathways in Law, Forensics and Outdoor Education (annex 1).

Key learning points

- Requiring students to choose a pathway has motivated staff and students to become more engaged with delivering / undertaking effective learning, resulting in higher retention, achievement and success rates.
- The flexibility of having common units across the three career pathways has meant groups of students on different career pathways can be combined when learning common units – such as during residential trips.
- Offering students a choice of career pathway requires a systematic approach to Information Advice and Guidance, including setting and reviewing a Career Plan and providing students with access to experienced staff and visitors from their chosen pathways

*“We want to know about things and what it’s like; we want the real deal.”
(Chevonn, student)*

- The Public Service Programme Manager has initiated an on-going review of the curriculum offer to ensure confidence that students are offered a flexible curriculum that best prepares them for further learning and employment.

*“Introducing pathways comprised of QCF units in the Public Service programme area has meant we are moving with the times to meet student and employer needs, both in what we deliver and how we deliver it.”
(Tez Gittens, Programme Manager)*

Annex 1: Table of common units and grouped units for career pathways in Law, Forensic and Outdoor Education

Henley College – Directorate of Sport and Public Services

Mandatory Units

Units	Title	Credits
1	Government, Policies and the Public Services	10
2	Leadership and Teamwork	15
3	Citizenship and Diversity	15
4	Understanding Discipline	10
6	Fitness Testing	10
Total		60

Example Pathway Options (Public Services has 31 option units to create pathways with)

Law			Forensics			Outdoor education		
Unit	Title	Credit	Unit	Title	Credit	Unit	Title	Credit
1	Government, Policies and the Public Service	10	1	Government, Policies and the Public Service	10	1	Government, Policies and the Public Service	10
2	Leadership and Teamwork	15	2	Leadership and Teamwork	15	2	Leadership and Teamwork	15
3	Citizenship and Diversity	15	3	Citizenship and Diversity	15	3	Citizenship and Diversity	15
4	Understanding Discipline	10	4	Understanding Discipline	10	4	Understanding Discipline	10
5	Physical Preparation	10	5	Physical Preparation	10	5	Physical Preparation	10
6	Fitness Testing	10	6	Fitness Testing	10	6	Fitness Testing	10
14	Emergency Service Incidents	10	8	War, Conflict and Terrorism	5	9	Outdoor Expeditions	10
8	War, Conflict and Terrorism	5	10	Land Based	10	10	Land Based	10
10	Land Based	10	11	Water Based	10	11	Water Based	10
11	Water Based	10	12	Crime and Effects	10	13	Command and Control in the Uniformed Services	10
12	Crime and Effects	10	13	Command and Control in the Uniformed Services	10	15	Planning and Management of Major Incidents	10
13	Command and Control in the Uniformed Services	10	14	Emergency Service Incidents	10	16	Career Planning for the Public Service	5
15	Planning and Management of Major Incidents	10	15	Planning and Management of Major Incidents	10	20	Comms and Tech	10
16	Career Planning for the Public Service	5	16	Career Planning for the Public Service	5	30	Team Sports	10
17	Police Powers	5	17	Police Powers	5	31	Health and Lifestyle	10
21	Custodial Care	10	18	Understanding Behaviour	5	32	Instructing Physical Activity	10
22	Legal System	10	22	Legal System	10	33	Volunteering	10
23	Ext Research	10	23	Ext Research	10	34	Environment	10
24	Current Affairs	10	21	Custodial Care	10	35	Land Navigation	10
31	Health and Lifestyle	10						
9	Outdoor Expeditions	10						
Total		180	Total		180	Total		185