

## Case study

# Personal and Social Development in Foundation Learning

## Oxford and Cherwell Valley College Multi-programme Foundation Learning Provision

### Introduction

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College (OCVC) is a large, general further education college with sites in Oxford, Banbury and the Blackbird Leys estate in Oxford. The Foundation Studies Department has had responsibility for developing Foundation Learning since they joined the pilot programme in 2007. Altogether there are 350 learners on Foundation Learning programmes across the college on three programmes. In addition there is also an under-16 programme for excluded students, as well as E2E and part-time adult provision (these are excluded from this case study) bringing the total learner numbers to 600.

### Foundation Learning

The Foundation Studies team manages three main programmes catering for a range of learners working from Entry 1 to Level 1. There is a wide spectrum of learners across the three programmes with overlaps between the three levels.

1. The Foundation Learning programme (60–70 learners) is aimed at Entry 1 and Entry 2 (with some Entry 3) and is for learners with moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities who may previously have been in special schools. Most come with statements and have a range of support needs. Progression for this group could be vertical or horizontal, which might be towards entry level programmes, independent living, or supported employment.
2. The New Directions programme (90–100 learners) is for Entry levels 2/3 and is aimed at learners who mostly have attended mainstream school but who achieved mainly GCSE F grades. They may have had additional support through school or have participated in the Key stage 4 engagement programme. New Directions learners may have mild learning difficulties, dyslexia, ADHD, or they might be young mums or young offenders. For this group, the aim is for vertical progression towards Level 1 or 2 learning and/or employment with training.



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3. The Level 1 programme is aimed at learners who have gained GCSEs at grades C–E and who are aiming for Entry 3 or Level 1 in functional skills. Some of these learners may have no additional support needs but simply missed their GCSE targets required for progression. For this group the aim is for vertical progression towards Level 2 learning and/or employment with training.

The Foundation Studies team works closely with Connexions, and schools and special schools. The College has appointed transition coordinators who work with schools and agencies to ensure that students are placed on the right programme. They study 'pick up' statements and liaise with other support workers at an early stage to ensure that learners are placed on to the right programme.

A significant and detailed interview process has evolved in the past two years. The initial assessment includes a thorough interview which includes a discussion of the learners' school history, behaviour, health, family, support history, personality, accommodation and ESOL needs. This might involve gathering information from multiple sources to get a full picture of the learners' needs and aspirations. It leads to full programme agreements which meet the principles of Foundation Learning and ensure that learners understand the appropriateness of the course. The college works with all local support agencies and has a good reputation locally leading to many learner referrals.

*We aim to get to the bottom of their motivation for coming to college. If they have had a bad time at school, then they need to be re-engaged in learning.*

At the interview stage, the learners will also take paper-based, initial assessments in literacy and numeracy to identify their English and Maths starting point. Designed for adult basic skills, these assessments break down skills into specific entry levels and further diagnostic assessment takes place in the first six weeks. They are then given targets linked to their English and Maths

assessments which are reviewed as they progress. All three functional skills are taught at different levels (Entry 1, 2, 3 and Level 1) at the same time to facilitate progression.

The tutorial programme is also effective in supporting learners. Every tutor is skilled at negotiating personal and subject-based targets with learners each term and a key aim is to make sure they hit their progression targets. The pastoral programme also supports personal and social development (PSD), as tutorial activities are linked to the learners' Foundation Learning programme. There are close links with Connexions advisers, who are brought in regularly to meet with the learners, and the role of the personal tutor is to link with those external agencies, e.g. health centre, Connexions, social workers, who are supporting learners.

## Curriculum

The curriculum for learners on the OCVC Foundation Learning programme (programme 1) is integrated and delivered by tutors in the Foundation Studies team. The small number of tutors involved means that it is easier to achieve the integrated approach bringing together functional skills with PSD and vocational learning. Learners do not necessarily identify what they are doing as vocational learning, PSD or functional skills; this overt distinction is not made to allow for a truly holistic approach to learning. Learners work on projects which combine PSD, vocational learning, employability and functional skills, e.g. social enterprise shops on two sites. These projects are skilfully woven together and all three components are taught in an integrated way.

In the New Directions programme, the staff team mainly delivers all three Foundation Learning components but specialist functional skills tutors and specialist vocational skills lecturers are also involved in delivery.

In the Level 1 programme, learners are integrated across the college and are taught by vocational lecturers, making it more difficult to have an integrated approach. Learners will have one day of vocational learning, for example – hairdressing or construction or public services – followed by a day of functional skills and a day of PSD. The advantage of this approach is that the learners have access to the expertise of the vocational tutors and develop relationships that will support progression. Functional skills and PSD for this group are taught by the Foundation Studies team. Every class in Foundation Studies has a learning support assistant working alongside the lecturer.

Personalisation occurs within the three programmes. There are regular functional skills exam 'windows' that cover the full range and levels, e.g. IT at entry 2, entry 3 and level 1 across both sites so that learners have opportunities, if they pass, to move up a level during the next exam window. The mixed student groups ensures that these shared learning experiences occur and this creates integrated PSD through learning with and about other learners.

*If you are a hairdresser you are going to be working with students from other vocational areas, for example, construction or catering for functional skills and PSD. In this way, you are not stuck with one relatively narrow student group and will gain a wider view of the world. I think PSD learning comes through this mix.*

However, at present there is no choice of units in PSD for learners, but programmes have been designed to meet the diverse needs of the three groups of learners.

## PSD programme

The PSD programme aims to develop a combination of employability skills and skills that allow learners to develop as individuals, i.e. self control, reflection, resilience, communication, evaluation, team work. Every Child Matters outcomes are integrated throughout the PSD programme and the wider learning programme also supports these PSD outcomes.

*PSD is so much more than a qualification on the QCF and so much more than a PSD lesson. It is about everything that we do. I think a really good Foundation Learning programme should be about excellent quality PSD first, across the curriculum. Unless they are developing personally and socially they are not going to survive in the wider world.*

The Foundation Learning programme uses the ASCENTIS Certificate in Professional and Personal Development, and the City and Guilds Certificate in Employability and Personal Development. The New Directions and Level 1 learners take the NOCN Certificate in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP).

*For each level of learning we combine relevant units for each group. This is where personalisation comes in. We identify areas of need for each learning group and use relevant units and these are changed each year based on student need. The beauty of the QCF is that it gives us the opportunity to genuinely create programmes*

*for specific learner groups but in essence the qualifications do drive the programme.*

## PSD activities

### Social Enterprise Projects.

Using *Action for Inclusion* and LSC funding, the college has set up two working shops, one in Oxford and one in Banbury, both staffed with project managers. The Banbury shop sells good quality second-hand books, DVDs, good quality clothes, bric-a-brac and handmade wooden garden ornaments, e.g. bird boxes made by students. The Oxford shop sells newspapers, provisions, and some second-hand goods. Learners work in the shops and take part in every aspect of the social enterprise, e.g. ordering and taking stock, serving customers, marketing and advertising. Profits are put back into the shop. One member of staff leads the PSD aspects of the social enterprise activities which are accredited as part of the PSD qualification. Links have also been made with an organic producer to sell organic fruit and vegetables to the local community, especially people with limited mobility from the social enterprise shops.

### Business enterprise.

Level 1 learners participate in a Dragon's Den activity. They spend two terms creating a product or service, followed by developing marketing strategies, costings, product design, and working with local business. Learners, in teams, pitch their business ideas to the 'dragons', who are successful business people - one owns an online sports company, another owns a large marketing company and the third owns an opticians. This activity gives the learners the opportunity to develop real-life business and entrepreneurial skills, as well as presentation and

teamwork skills. This work is accredited through the enterprise unit in the NOCN *Certificate in Skills Towards Enabling Progression ( Step-UP)*.

### Community action

The Foundation Learning group planned a Christmas party for students at a residential college, and then invited them and hosted the event. The name of the activity is 'Making a difference' and the party was planned over a period of a couple of months. The PSD outcomes for learners were communication skills, linking with other communities and teamwork.

The New Directions group has been linked with *vinvolved*. They have been building raised flower/vegetable beds and involving members of the local community to create a **community garden** which is located five minutes away from the college grounds. Many of these learners have dyslexia and the project is linked to the development of functional skills and PSD. They have been awarded £350 from *vinvolved* to support growing food and passing it on to the community. They have negotiated with the National Herb Centre to sell herbs to them for 10p each. Some funding has also been received from B&Q and the learners are planning a community voice activity to identify what direction the community garden should take.

As part of another community action activity, the New Directions group organised a '**fun day**' for the college community. The aims were to develop the learners' understanding of diversity and teamwork and communication skills. The activities planned were designed to give learners with learning difficulties and disabilities a chance to participate in fun activities and at the same time to build the college community.

The Blackbird Leys centre is a specialist provision for learners with autism and the Foundation Learning group learners has been helping at an **after-school club** for 5–12 year olds, run by volunteers. They have been helping by weeding, painting and clearing debris to improve the environment for the people that use it. The learners have gained confidence and social awareness which is of particular importance for this group, and they feel that they are putting something back into the community. Their learning is accredited through units in the NOCN *Certificate Skills towards enabling Progression (Step UP)*.

## Citizenship

The Foundation Learning group took part in a **recycling bins project**. The students researched waste and visited recycling plants and landfill sites. After gaining an understanding of the process of waste disposal and recycling, they planned a campaign and lobbied the local council to install recycling bins in the college. Recycling bins have been installed across the departments in the college for students to control thus promoting an environmentally-friendly lifestyle.

The New Directions students researched the historic **Banbury charter**. They explored the relevance of the 400-year-old charter to today's society and wrote their own, based on discussion and debate. The group shared their findings with the local community through local press and events. They have worked closely with local politicians. This is accredited through a NOCN citizenship unit.

This year the Foundation Studies team has written its own **learner involvement strategy** (to supplement that of the college as a whole). Staff jointly planned the learner involvement strategy and they were fortunate to be part of a 'text polling' project with LSIS. The idea was to engage students in learner voice through using their mobile phones. The students' union and reps system was not really helping learners as they turned up to meetings only to feel that they were being ignored and did not go again. To kick start the strategy, the team pulled together small learner forums. They discussed a range of questions based on the Common Inspection Framework. This teased out five key themes for improvements that could be made across the college: tougher discipline; better ICT resources; less bitching and bullying; nicer rooms; and more activities, i.e. active learning, sports, visits. A text poll was then carried out quite cheaply with the entire Foundation Studies cohort over a period of a week. The largest vote by far by was for more activities.

*This gave us a kick start to our learner voice activity and our own learner involvement strategy. Now we are getting forums of learners to develop the idea of more active learning. We are going to share responsibility for implementing this with the learners. They are going to research the issues and use additional text polls to refine these ideas which will instigate learner led change.*

### Other activities

Learners have also participated in **survival activities** with an ex royal marine Commando, where they have the opportunity to gain

communication skills, confidence and self reliance through intense survival training. They have taken part in several team-building exercises, e.g. starting fires with no matches, building shelters, compass reading. This activity is accredited through the NOCN team working unit.

## Summary

The key strengths of the college's approach to PSD have been:

- The development of genuine employability skills across all programmes, including enterprise skills, the skills of customer service, effective communication, teamwork, following instructions, resourcefulness and resilience – all helping young people survive in a difficult job market.
- The diverse range of activities offered enables learners to experience PSD – there is a lot of experiential learning going on.
- There is a reflective and innovative staff team who can manage change, e.g. *'we have completely changed the PSD programme four times in four years so we stay up-to-date and respond to learner needs.'*
- The positive personal development of the learner is often identified by parents and the learners themselves at the end-of-year celebrations.

The areas for improvements and future developments are:

- Learners cannot always see the relevance of PSD programmes and one way to address this will be to offer more choice and greater personalisation, although there are logistical difficulties with this.

- The course leaders want to move away from content-based units such as drugs etc. *'We feel that if we gave them the right set of personal and social skills, as well as improved functional skills, then learners would be able to investigate topics of personal relevance for themselves.'*
- The PSD offered to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities *'We plan a greater focus on specific challenges at lower levels of learning, i.e. for learners with mild to severe learning difficulties. Their lifestyles are changing and what they expect from life and learning is changing. We recognise that organisations and employers need to change the way they think about these learners and see them as an asset.'*

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