

LSIS Supported Provider Collaborative Development projects

LSIS funded Getting People into Work project

Case study for Lancaster and Morecambe College: Pathway to Apprenticeships

Project background

LSIS supported a number of provider-led development projects, which were to run from November 2011 through to July 2012, with the aim of building the sector's capacity to design commission and deliver improvement and strategic change.

Our project, involved four providers; Knowsley Community College (KCC) as the lead provider, Lancaster and Morecambe College, Hopwood Hall College (HCC) and Training Tomorrow's Engineers (TTE). Each provider worked on initiatives within their own organisation and we came together to exchange good practice and resources.

This case study focuses specifically on LMC's initiative, which looked at developing a 'Pathway to Apprenticeships' that would be a short bridging course for 16+ learners who were interested in Apprenticeships, but did not yet have the right employability skills to be able to start work.

Introduction

Lancaster and Morecambe College is a small Further Education College serving the communities of North Lancashire, South Cumbria and the western edge of North Yorkshire, with a particular focus on the city of Lancaster and the seaside resort of Morecambe. It is part of an urban area with four wards, in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in England.

The College's mission is, "Providing Lancaster and Morecambe and surrounding communities with an outstanding student experience, fulfilling vocational, personal and employment goals."

The College provides a diverse range of courses from entry level to higher education and delivers Apprenticeships and work place learning with a wide range of employers. Over the past three years the College listened to learners, employers and stakeholders in the local district to develop an innovative and responsive provision for the unemployed. The provision utilizes available funding streams to provide effective training, skills development and support for job seekers into employment.

In 2011-2012, 396 unemployed learners have undertaken thirty eight pre employment pathways resulting in 74 jobs and over one hundred learners progressing to further learning. Many pathways have been employer-led including bespoke training for Travelodge, Sainsbury's, the National Health Service (NHS), local restaurants and a call centre.

The College has taken a whole organisational approach to developing this provision, driven strategically at senior management level, with the College's core values of integrity, inclusively and realising potential at its heart.

The provision was inspected by Ofsted during 2011-2012 who commented:

"The College has built on its previous work to support people on benefits very effectively since August 2011. Innovative curriculum planning and good financial management are key features of the newly developed provision. The College has helped Jobcentre Plus, employers and other providers respond quickly to an identified need for short employability programmes."

The College also provides an 'Aspire to' programme for 16-18 learners who are at risk of not in education, employment or training, delivering a diverse range of activities including personal and social development, Skills for Life, work experience and employability skills.

Project aims

To build on the good work already underway, the aim of this project was to develop a 'Pathway to Apprenticeships' that would be a short bridging course for 16+ learners who were interested in Apprenticeships but did not yet have the right employability skills to be able to start work.

Expected Impact

The short term expectation was to develop a Pathway to Apprenticeships course offer and trial it with a cohort of learners. The long term expectations are to add the Pathway to Apprenticeships course to our pre employment pathway course portfolio, so it runs at regular times of the year and feeds directly into the wider college Apprenticeship provision.

Starting Point

At Lancaster and Morecambe College there has been some excellent pre employment work with adults and young people to support them in gaining and sustaining employment. Alongside this there has been very good work done with employers in the delivery of Apprenticeships. However, the two areas of work had not been fully joined up in the organisation. The result of this was that the two areas of the College would not necessarily look to one another to generate a supply of learners for existing or future vacancies. The Pathway to

Apprenticeships would be a way to help bridge that gap and provide a strong mechanism for the departments to work together.

Activity

A number of fundable qualifications were researched that could be suitable. Due to the wide range of flexible units available, the NCFE Level 1 Award in Employability was chosen. The units chosen within this qualification were problem solving at work, working in a team, presenting yourself for work, job and training search skills.

The course was delivered over two weeks to a small group of six learners. Two core tutors delivered the course and the Business team gave input about Apprenticeships. The following points made this pathway different to the other ones on offer.

It wasn't sector specific.

The course was designed to focus on the generic skills needed for Apprenticeships across a range of sectors. Its primary function was to give the learners focused information on what an Apprenticeship actually entailed. Many learners hadn't realised just how much was required for an Apprenticeship framework. That alongside gaining a qualification in the job they were doing, Maths and English were key components and would be tested by a Functional Skills exam.

It was directed more towards the 16-24 age group than other provision.

Many job seekers attending the sector specific pathways were looking to earn at least the national minimum wage and were less interested in Apprenticeships. The 16-24 age group were more likely to be living with parents or friends and have fewer (if any) dependents, making living on an Apprenticeship wage more realistic.

Pathway was delivered quite intensely in eight days over two weeks.

This was planned to mirror a realistic working pattern and simulate the expectation an employer would have about attendance and punctuality.

Designed to aid decision making by the learner.

To confirm whether or not an Apprenticeship was right for them. Learners would leave the course better informed with some practical employability knowledge to present themselves to a potential employer.

Challenges

There were a number of challenges in delivering the project. Some were logistical such as finding suitable staff who understood the needs of the learners and the practicalities of classroom availability. Two Travel and Tourism lecturers were able to take the course on, who were ideal. They had taught the qualification before as an additional course for their full time learners and had empathy with the learners referred onto the course. In addition and perhaps

most importantly, they came with the enthusiasm needed to engage with what can sometimes be a challenging learner group.

We had a very short window whereby we needed to develop clear messages in a short timeframe to explain why this course would be more beneficial to an individual, than one of our other pre employment pathways.

Once developed, we needed to get our message out to promote the new course to partners in time for the delivery and ensure cross college departments and Student Services knew to refer.

We identified early on that some learners thought that coming on the course would lead to a guaranteed Apprenticeship. Our challenge therefore was to manage expectation and support the learners to progress as best we could through delivering high quality advice and guidance.

Actual Impact

Six learners started and completed the course and all passed the qualification, giving them an increase in confidence, motivation and job hunting techniques. They attended a recruitment event with a local employer and are in the process of applying for Apprenticeships and jobs.

Although direct impact on learners has been limited to date, a wider impact has been that the College identified a gap in provision and has made plans to continue the Pathway to Apprenticeships, particularly for 18-24 year olds who often need an extra employability boost to help them find a job.

The tutors commented on the challenges the learners faced. Some came from very difficult social back grounds and were a long way from the job market at that stage. This will help us to build the course to meet learner needs and ensure our referral information, advice and guidance and initial assessments are all appropriate for the learners.

Top Tips

Put the employer first – your employability provision should be driven by their workforce needs and match job vacancies in your locality.

Ensure you **know your market** and promote pre employment courses on an ongoing basis with Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service and other referral agencies.

Use College's real work environments where possible – unemployed learners need familiarity with these to develop work ready skills and build confidence.

Our next steps

Building suitable pre employment programmes is one of our strengths and we are happy to share our experiences with others. With that in mind we have every intention to continue to work with Knowsley College and Hopwood Hall College following the project.

We will continue to strengthen the internal College systems to ensure that learners recruited to Pathway to Apprenticeships are supported in their progression. We will work to ensure that candidates who have made a firm choice that an Apprenticeship is right for them are put forward to suitable vacancies where they can thrive.

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