

# Landex

Land Based Colleges  
Aspiring To Excellence



An Excellence Gateway case study

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## **Easton College: Developing the personal and transferable skills of learners with additional needs, through social enterprise.**

### **Summary**

Foundation learners at Easton College often lack confidence and need opportunities to help develop personal and transferable skills to help them towards a viable future. The college has established a social enterprise involving the weekly delivery of single flowers to staff offices across the college which engages the students and develops many different skills.

### **About Easton College**

Easton College is a small, specialist land based college serving primarily rural communities and industries in Norfolk and East Anglia. It has approximately 1400 full time learners ranging from foundation level through to higher education, plus extensive part time provision.

### **The challenge**

To create a learning environment to allow students with learning difficulties and social issues to undertake a range of real work experience tasks, to develop personal and transferable skills. They needed to gain experience of dealing with real people, real money, and tackling real problems yet all within a supported environment, to develop skills useful to them in the future.

### **The activity**

'Bloom Tube' was started by the college in 2010-11, as a social enterprise activity for foundation level, mainly adult students working at Entry one to three. A 'bloom tube' is a single flower which is delivered to staff and attached to their computer monitor using Velcro. Staff across the college are encouraged to subscribe to the 'bloom tube' service, the flowers for which are

kept fresh by replacing them weekly, and for which subscribers pay a notional £0.50 per week. Flowers are chosen according to seasonal themes and opportunity is taken to develop equality and diversity understanding of students and staff by linking (for example, flower colour) to specific weeks in the equality and diversity calendar.

'Bloom tube' is targeted towards adult students often aged 45-60 years who have more complex learning and social needs. Social enterprise was previously not accessible to these students who tend to attend college on specific days in the week. Students themselves helped establish the project by speaking to people they did not know (staff across the college, suppliers of materials) making and keeping records (such as a simple list of staff wanting flowers). Any surplus income is given to charity and this motivates students to do their jobs well, and staff to participate.

After a year of students delivering flowers to staff offices, their increased confidence was evident. They had started to collect money and give change, and were interacting with a wide range of staff across the college including support and service area staff and senior managers.

Students develop literacy skills (for example, writing their name) numeracy skills (for example, keeping a tally of flowers delivered and money collected). A student prepares labels for the flowers to be delivered and a student states the themes the flowers represent each week.

Staff and students who would not normally come into contact with each other, do so through this project, and this supports staff appreciation of disability and learning need.

The students know they are helping other people. Any profits made support a charity, for example one developing horticultural crop growing in Malawi. Each year the students choose where the money is to go and then develop their interest through other parts of their course, for example, stimulating conversation from viewing photographs of work being done.

The supported project involves other staff and students, for example by delivering tools and specific equipment to the horticultural project. The project has helped develop links between different groups of students and with staff including staff in support and service areas, and this helps increase mutual understanding of learning need.

This year the 'bloom tube' has become a more regular activity for each student as the college has appreciated their need for regular repetition to build skills and confidence.

Staff in support and service areas are very supportive and the number of staff taking part has increased. There are now few college computer monitors without a bloom tube on them.

## **The outcomes**

The enterprise develops citizenship skills and students and staff alike feel they are giving something back to the wider community and gain a sense of well being.

Students gain increased confidence in a range of tasks including literacy, numeracy, working with people, solving problems. The work has enabled some students to be stretched and learn more because the tasks are realistic and the interactions with staff and students can easily extend as the students confidence grows.

Literacy and numeracy skills are developed in a realistic, contextualised setting, regularly repeated so as to consolidate students learning more effectively.

Staff have found the degree of support students need progressively reduces as they develop their skills and confidence.

The enterprise raises awareness of equality and diversity through the choice of flowers each week according to selected themes. The enterprise has helped a wider range of staff and students understand issues relating to learning need and disability.

## **The impact**

The project has provided valuable experience, understanding and handling money including rectifying mistakes.

It is a real enterprise, with real transactions taking place, and the students appreciate their development of relevant life skills.

Students interact with many different people across the college, both students and staff. Many students have behavioural issues, so having to develop and maintain social skills (such as being polite) is excellent practice!

Of those who completed their course in 2011, about 85% successfully progress to their next appropriate level.

The students really enjoy it!

## **The lessons learned**

Success has depended on the willingness of staff across the college to participate by subscribing. However this has been so successful that the foundation department has had offers of more work experience placements from other college departments for future years.

A substantial part of the benefit comes from transactions and interactions being real. Finding an enterprise which is sufficiently real yet sufficiently straightforward to be practicable with these students, is essential.

Students have to learn to deal with unexpected events (conversations with staff, money handled, etc)

Students learn better in a realistic environment which they can more easily relate to the rest of their lives.