

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Intensive career learning and progression programme

The programme 'Advanced New Start' provides an example of partnership working to develop a personalised curriculum offer based on the specific needs of learners operating at level 3 who are identified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Personalised curriculum and flexible delivery models
- Careers learning and IAG (information advice and guidance)
- Learners who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

Contact information

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Participating organisation(s):

Leicester College, Connexions Leicestershire, VESA 13-19 Support Agency.

What the project set out to do and why

The project was developed in response to local data indicating that around a 1000 young people (aged 18-24) across the county had 'dropped out' of advanced level programmes and were now identified as NEET.

Working closely with partner organisations, the project aimed to:

- develop a clearer understanding of the issues and circumstances surrounding the 'drop out' from programmes (external to the College);
- build a robust profile of learners' strengths, needs and aspirations;
- design a personalised programme that enables active exploration of progression opportunities linked to each learner's personal context;
- explore flexible delivery models that support multiple access points and maximise opportunities for skill acquisition directly linked to progression (including relevant accreditation).

What the project has achieved so far

Targeted recruitment and IAG

College staff and wider partners met with around 15 young people who had expressed an interest in the programme or who were considered 'possible candidates'. From these, a group of 8 learners began the programme. Specific care was taken to ensure that the learners were clear about the aims and approach of the programme and that they felt it was likely to meet their needs.

Programme design

The programme was produced through a partnership between the tutor and the learners which led to a menu of core and additional units based on the outcomes of the recruitment and induction sessions. Learners are clear about how their programme supports their own specific circumstances.

A key driver has been supporting the exploration of progression opportunities and skill enhancement, particularly high-order, and critical, thinking skills.

Accreditation

Accreditation is customised to the learners' personalised programmes, and may include a certificate-sized qualification for the core units (drawn from the Edexcel Workskills suite).

Additional accreditation options are available through the College's 'Matrix' menu'. Most learners have opted to do an 'Award in Environmental Sustainability' reflecting Leicester's second place ranking in the '*Sustainable Cities Index*'

Delivery

For this cohort, the programme is being delivered over 3 days for 20 weeks and has been flexible, both to accommodate the personalised programmes and to facilitate the sense of community.

There is a major emphasis on project-based learning and on engagement with external partners through employer visits, mentoring and access to career learning.

What the project still needs to do

Moving forward, project priorities include:

- refining the delivery model to increase the number of entry points;
- developing a peer buddy system using existing learners from the programme in engagement and recruitment, ongoing programme design and peer-support systems;
- review and adapt assessment and tracking processes to improve flexibility and increase emphasis on destination-led planning and progression;
- ongoing partnership work to further explore and address issues influencing 'drop out'.

Key learning points

- Be clear about who you are targeting; avoid making assumptions about learners who may come under the label of NEET and avoid developing generalised programmes that do not meet the specific needs and profile of each learner.
- Adopt a flexible approach to the development of your new offer; build in plenty of opportunities to evaluate, evolve and change plans. This is particularly important when developing flexible delivery models and moving towards a truly personalised model.
- Think carefully about your teaching, learning and assessment strategies, not just the accreditation aspects of the curriculum. Maximise the opportunities for learners to explore and experience progression opportunities rather than just 'telling'.
- Work closely with the IAG and marketing departments; rethink strategies and approaches to reaching target learners. Be creative about how you can find and engage with them; reach out to where they are rather than hoping for them to come to you.
- Involve delivery staff from the earliest stages; help them to develop an ownership of the challenge and the possible solution, especially when this may require different ways to plan and deliver learning. Curriculum innovation and design needs to be supported by relevant CPD opportunities to help individuals and teams explore and model new options.