

## Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

### Case study

# Recognising and building skills in learners' work, predominantly at Level 1

### Introduction

Oak Farm Community School has seized the opportunities offered by Foundation Learning to engage disengaged learners and develop and accredit their skills through the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

### Provider profile

Name of organisation	Oak Farm Community School
Location	Farnborough, Hampshire
Contact	Joy Moore Assistant Headteacher admin.office@oakfarm.hants.sch.uk
Type of organisation involved in the case study	Oak Farm Community School is a mixed 11–16 secondary school. It serves a population with a higher than average level of social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average and increasing.
Approximate number of staff involved in the case study	Three: one senior manager and member of the leadership team, the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and one of the school's learning support assistants.
Approximate number of learners involved in the case study	Thirteen learners participated in the pilot in the academic year 2008/09 and around 30% of Year 10 learners will do so in 2009/10.
Level of experience at the start of the pilot	The school had no experience of developments associated with Foundation Learning until their involvement with the Hampshire pilot in 2008. However, the school has been committed to providing an increasingly personalised curriculum for a

	number of years.
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### **Aims and intended outcomes**

- To enhance the achievement of Key Stage 4 students who are operating predominantly at Level 1 or below.
- To provide increased accreditation opportunities for learners.
- To provide a unitised, credit-based model for accreditation to increase student achievement and engagement.
- To improve staff understanding of accreditation opportunities and reflect both in qualifications and learners' needs.
- To develop future opportunities for personalisation.

### **Implementation**

'This has given us the opportunity to review our current practice for our disengaged students and students working at pre-Level 1.'

Assistant Headteacher

The school's senior management team first considered the potential benefits of Foundation Learning before deciding to support the pilot. Management then appointed the school's SENCO to take the initiative forward in conjunction with a neighbouring special educational needs (SEN) school.

In the early stages of the project the school identified high numbers of potential learners but, due to the limited number of qualifications in the Foundation Learning qualifications catalogue in the autumn term of 2008, these projected numbers were reduced for the first year of the pilot.

The school looked to enhance personalised learning opportunities through the development of individual learning plans (ILPs), building on the benefits afforded by the unitised, credit-based nature of the QCF. Preparatory work for further implementation in September 2009 has also taken place by auditing the opportunities for accrediting learning elsewhere in the traditional GCSE curriculum.

### **Successes**

The development of Foundation Learning has been integrated with the school's preparation for the delivery of 14-19 Diplomas. The school has focused its externally delivered Foundation Learning and Diploma curriculum on one day a week. This leaves four days for the Key Stage 4 Core Curriculum, GCSEs, QCF qualifications and vocationally related qualifications, functional skills (FS) and the recording of personal learning and thinking skills.

The small-school environment has allowed for the creation of personalised learning programmes for small numbers of students. It is progress associated with Foundation Learning that has underpinned these developments, providing the flexibility necessary in the offer made to students.

Crucial to the success of the school's Foundation Learning work has been their Year 9 initial assessment and individual learning planning.

'Through the individual learning plans and interview system we have been able to gain a deeper insight into the individual needs of each student.'

SENCO

## **Challenges**

The early challenges for the project were associated with the limited number of qualifications on the Foundation Learning qualifications catalogue and the limited availability at the time the pilot began of FS at Entry Levels 1 and 2.

Oak Farm is a small school, so all members of staff have found that they need to be up to date on all issues relating to Key Stage 3 and 14-19 reforms. The school has had to spread expertise thinly, and this has had an effect on the productivity of staff.

Maintaining good collaborative relationships for vocational delivery is important for a small school. However, not all vocational work is undertaken in college or through work experience. A significant amount of work is also undertaken at the school, not least in Hospitality and Catering. Equally, however, aspects of the personal and social development (PSD) curriculum are facilitated externally.

## **Impact and outcomes**

The impact of the school's involvement in the pilot is best evidenced by its effect on two of the school's Key Stage 4 students.

Kevin (not his real name), who was in Year 10 in 2008/09, was a learner with the potential to achieve five GCSE grades A\*–C by the end of Year 11. However, Kevin had not found school to be an engaging experience and had articulated a strong desire to leave the school environment and to earn money in full-time work at the earliest possible moment. Poor attendance throughout Year 9 highlighted this disengagement, and by the time he embarked on Year 10 his attendance was negligible.

It was decided to introduce Kevin to the opportunities afforded by a two-day-a-week work placement, provided his attendance at school improved on the other three days. At the same time, he was enrolled as a National Open College Network (NOCN) student working toward the Level 1 Certificate in Skills Towards

Enabling Progression (Step-UP). A work placement was found at a local football club tending the grounds and facilities, and FS were embedded in this experience. Kevin found unit achievement and credit accumulation as engaging as he found his vocational learning at his work placement.

He achieved his first full week of attendance on his return after the Easter break of 2009.

Natasha (not her real name) was a Year 10 student in 2008/09. She spent a day a week at the Farnborough College of Technology working towards an NVQ Level 1 in Hairdressing. Although Natasha had a poor record of attainment in English and mathematics, she did engage with FS embedded in their core curriculum.

'I have just come third in a hairdressing competition at college. I really enjoyed this. My lecturer is really pleased with me and thinks I have a real talent.'

Natasha

As with Kevin, the unitised credit accumulation approach to achievement engaged Natasha in ways that 'large' qualifications delivered over Year 10 and 11 would not have done. It is anticipated that Natasha and Kevin will achieve their FS at Level 1 by the end of Year 11.

'I really enjoy college, it has made me decide that this is the career I want, and I am working at qualifications now that I can continue at college when I leave school.'

Natasha

### **Lessons learnt**

The school should have started engaging with the programme with smaller student numbers. In any personalised programme it is essential to ensure that the learner's programme is bespoke enough to promise not only engagement but also achievement. The time spent with learners in Year 9 is therefore crucial for individual action planning and initial assessment. Personalised Foundation Learning programmes need to engage learners and be relevant to them to support progression to their intended destinations and increase independent learning.

Prior to starting any Foundation Learning programmes, the centre should ensure that staff are fully aware of the initiative and its benefits for learners, as well as ensuring that the systems are in place for recording and reporting achievement.

The external support given to the school has been invaluable, as have the inputs from other local providers, not only for supporting the school's personalisation strategy but also for increasing opportunities for vocational and PSD learning.

### **Conclusions and next steps**

The 2009/10 cohort of learners will have a full briefing on Foundation Learning, how QCF qualifications are structured, and what is required of them for success, spending considerable time identifying post-Key Stage 4 destinations.

The school is keen to continue to work in partnership with other providers, not only for the delivery of Key Stage 4 but also to ensure that their learners have the appropriate accreditation for progression post-16 to work or further learning which builds on Years 10 and 11.