

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Building opportunities; bridging barriers

Peterborough Regional College used data, questionnaires and focus groups to understand the barriers to employment for hard-to-reach groups and identify the most appropriate QCF unitised curriculum.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Identifying needs of hard to reach communities
- Identifying perceived barriers to employment by learners and employers
- Building a responsive QCF curriculum

Contact information

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Participating organisation:

Peterborough Regional College

What the project set out to do and why

The College wished to understand, and meet, the needs of hard-to-reach communities and to support their access to employment. To date, understanding has come from feedback from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and teacher observations.

The project set out to gather appropriate data to identify the extent of the issue; locating and engaging with hard-to-reach communities to develop an understanding of local employer needs and clarify perceived barriers to employment for these communities.

This background research would support the building of a responsive curriculum targeted at the communities and designed to help them to progress to employment.

What the project has achieved so far

The supporting methodology had a four-pronged approach to gathering data and intelligence:

- The project gathered a rich source of data using the most up-to-date Ward data (Jan 2011) and population data (2009) to supplement 2001 census data. This was cross-matched with claimant ethnicity data and local authority data.
- Using local authority and key community contacts, the project identified a number of hard-to-reach community groups. The College developed a questionnaire to use with these groups to explore aspirations and barriers to employment.
- Similarly, the project identified a number of key local employers and a recruitment agency and developed a questionnaire to explore perceived recruitment challenges. The questionnaires were presented to thirteen local employers, of whom nine responded. The questionnaires explored employment needs and issues which may hinder recruitment.
- In addition, the project is utilising JCP forums to analyse their understanding of the unemployed communities and their needs.

The project team have now engaged with identified groups, employers and JCP to build the picture of perceived barriers to employment. Key findings to date are:

Background data

- Peterborough has a lower-than-average level of high-end, professional occupations and average weekly earnings are lower than regional and national averages.
- Although the claimant count is predominantly 'White British', proportionally more of the 'White Other', 'Asian' or 'Asian British-Pakistani', or 'Chinese' or 'Other Ethnic Group' are experiencing significant employment difficulties.
- The 'White Other' group includes many people from Eastern Europe with a high demand for English language support.
- Business sector profiles show that most employment opportunities in the area are in business administration and support services (14.3%); health (11.9%), retail (11.7%) and manufacturing (10%).

Employer Research

- Qualities such as attitude and reliability are identified as more important than skills, including literacy.
- Challenges to recruitment are perceived to be work patterns. and the calibre of candidates as identified by screening processes and the relevance of their experience.

- There is no perception of a problem attracting candidates from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Community Forums

- Ethnic minority groups find that they have great difficulty getting past the application process and obtaining interviews.
- The limited opportunity for job interviews is demotivating.
- Many opportunities appear to be seasonal.

The project experienced difficulties making meaningful contact with Pakistani female groups and this needs to be addressed.

Curriculum development response

The College engaged productively with the local JCP to build on work it was starting on the development of sector-based work academies. Using the feedback from employers and the community forums, the project produced a work-ready programme which operates on a two-week cycle.

Recognising that they needed to identify generic QCF units to support attitudinal and mindset approaches to employment, the project eventually chose to offer a core programme of a 'Level 1 Award in Job Search and Interview Skills'. The units are contextualised to help learners understand employer needs and to overcome perceived barriers to employment. Opportunities to explore and engage with online application processes have been incorporated into the programme.

Development of employability skills through contextualising QCF units is now built into all the work the College is doing with sector-based work academies. For example, they are exploring a new approach to dealing with warehousing vacancies and are proposing that the focus is more on contextualised QCF units dealing with attitudes and approaches to employment rather than specific warehousing skills.

The success of this approach is leading the College to consider the development of a similar approach as an addition to a pre-apprenticeship programme for mainstream students.

What the project still needs to do

The project has recognised that it needs to improve access to Pakistani females and develop a better understanding of their needs. A number of options are being considered.

There may be other, disparate data sources still to be explored, which may yet mean there remains an incomplete picture of the local population. The College will look out for the 2011 census data to check their current assumptions.

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resources are available in Annex 1 at the end of the case study:

- Learner Focus Group Questionnaire
- Employment Questionnaire

Access to the project's data sources can be obtained by contacting the project lead.

Key learning points

- Identifying hard-to-reach communities isn't enough; there needs to be a range of strategies in place to allow meaningful engagement with them all.
- Having appropriate and focused data helps to develop a sense of realistic employment opportunities for the local population.
- Utilising employer perceptions, and those of the local communities, guides curriculum development needs.
- Identifying a coherent approach to supporting employability assists in the development of working relationships with JCP and employers.
- Contextualising QCF units and qualifications enables the development of a responsive and appropriate curriculum for the unemployed.

Annex 1



Learner Focus Group Questionnaire

Have you applied for work in the last 3 months?

What sort of roles were you applying for?

How do you go about searching and applying for work?

Have you attended any interviews for roles lately?

Why do you think your searches have been unsuccessful so far?

What have you found difficult about job searching?

What do you think needs to happen to improve your chances of finding work?

Do you think that further training and opportunities in the following areas would assist you in your job search?

Literacy

ICT

Numeracy

Specific industry training, e.g. Retail

Licences, e.g. CSCS

Work Experience

Employment Questionnaire

Peterborough Regional College are involved in a small research project designed to identify ways we can improve our training offer to better meet the needs of local employers. We would greatly appreciate your input to identify your recruitment needs and your views of the local labour market.

Name of Organisation:

Name:

Role:

Employment needs

1. How many employees does your organisation have (please circle)?

1-10 11-20 21-50 51-100 100+

2. How many vacancies do you recruit for on average in a month?

3. What are the main skills that you require for your employees?

4. What is the main challenge your organisation faces when recruiting (i.e. identifying suitable candidates, large-scale changes in volume of work, reliability of staff etc)

Failing points for applicants

1. Do you find it difficult to recruit from any particular social or ethnic groups from the local community?

If "yes", what are the main barriers that you come across?

2. What is the main reason for rejecting applications (e.g. failing CRB/drug tests, unrealistic applications, not enough experience, concern about periods of unemployment, poor performance at interview)?

3. Do you find it difficult to recruit for particular roles?

If "yes", which roles and why do you find them difficult (e.g. lack of skilled applicants, applicants do not perform well at interview/assessment)?