

ShIPLEY College The Bradford Pathfinder Vocational Centre



Introduction

The Vocational Pathfinder Centre is a new provision for young people over the age of 16. This is a partnership between a special School and two further education colleges. It exists to offer young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities a college style experience, in which students can develop their confidence, make choices, and practice the independent living skills that they will need to get the most from their life after School.

Background

In February 2009, a new partnership in Bradford came together to discuss a shared vision for the future of young people with Learning difficulties and disabilities (SEN). What was originally conceived of as the 'Pathfinder Project' recognised the need to provide a strategic solution to the larger than predicted numbers of post-16 young people with SEN on the campus of one of three secondary mainstream schools co-located with a new secondary special school under the district's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

Vision and Guiding Principles

From the very outset the project's 'vision' was to enable a carefully identified group of young people to develop independence and access a broader range of choices through the provision of progressive learning opportunities with planned progression into further education and employment.

The Pathfinder Project's vision was underpinned by an agreed set of guiding principles: Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities would be enabled to develop towards independence through –

- Access to personalised learning programmes, including vocational and functional skills, designed and delivered in partnership by school and FE college staff.
- The development of progression pathways underpinned by cross-partner school and FE collaboration and augmented by person-centred transition support.
- Impartial, good quality Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).
- Engagement with parents, families and carers.

Together, the Pathfinder Project's vision and guiding principles reflected the collective recognition among partners that:

- The curriculum offer for some young people in special schools did not enable them to reach their full potential – either as independent members of society or as future contributors to that society through the ability to access employment. It was envisaged that a collaborative partnership between a newly co-located special school, its partner mainstream school and two local FE colleges, supported by the

local authority, would provide the means to enable these young people to meet that potential. However, it was also crucially important to correctly identify those young people who would benefit from this approach and to provide the necessary supported transition from the special school environment into further education and the world of work.

- Special school and FE Colleges would need to address the issue that differing funding routes and methodologies raised in collaborative working, and look for new models to support the Vision.
- The re-organisation of the district's special schools offered the opportunity to develop a joint special school/FE vocational centre by utilising what would become vacated special school premises.

The Centre in operation

The vocational centre opened in September 2011 and offers the opportunity for young people with SEN - from both mainstream and special schools - to experience an 'FE setting', to access an accredited vocational curriculum and to build relationships with FE tutors and support staff before progressing into further education or supported employment. Similarly, FE students with LDD who might initially require additional support were able to attend the centre and access the enhanced support and expertise that is provided in a special school environment.

The curriculum offer reflects the joint expertise of all partners. The FE colleges lead on the provision of Environmental and Land Based studies and Hospitality and Catering, while the co-located special and secondary schools delivered in the schools' specialist area of Sport and Active. All provision is accredited within the Foundation Learning framework and mapped to clear progression pathways into further learning or supported employment.

Collaborative working between special school and FE staff enables the sharing of expertise and enhanced opportunities for continuing professional development. From a cross-district strategic perspective, joint working arrangements and shared support services also serve to facilitate the maximisation of resources and reduce duplication.

A management board consisting of school and FE representatives exists to develop the processes and policies that enable the partnership to deliver the proposed curriculum and ensure progression across all transition points. The board also provides the expertise required to publicise the centre's offer and to liaise and consult with parents and carers.