

Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

Development project

Assessing the personal and social development needs of learners at Key Stage 3

Introduction

Personal and social development (PSD) is a key aspect of the delivery of the Foundation Learning programme which will begin at St Luke's Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) School in Swindon in September 2009.

Learners will be required to achieve appropriate units of PSD at Entry Level or Level 1. In order to personalise the delivery of PSD, each learner will be assessed to establish their learning needs, the support they require and the appropriate achievement for them.

The intention of the development project was to provide a framework of assessment that will inform the personal and social development (PSD) needs of learners about to embark on a personalised learning programme.

Partnership profile

Name of organisation	St Luke's BESD School
Location	Swindon, Wiltshire
Contact	Rachel Smith (leader) Jane Shower (teacher) 01793 705566 admin@stlukes.swindon.sch.uk
Type of organisation involved in the development project	BESD school and a special school for learners with severe learning difficulties
Approximate number of staff involved in the development project	Two, with other staff involved in the programme aware of the project
Approximate number of learners involved in development project	Three
Level of experience at the start of the pilot	Some awareness of Foundation Learning programmes but little appreciation of the purpose or

	importance of PSD as part of the programme
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Aims and intended outcomes

The aim of the development project was to develop a model for initial assessment of PSD using personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) as the framework. PLTS feature as part of the new Diplomas, as well as being a statutory part of the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 curriculums. PLTS are defined by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA) as:

‘A framework for describing the qualities and skills needed for success in learning and life. The PLTS framework has been developed and refined over a number of years in consultation with employers, parents, schools, students and the wider public.’¹

PLTS are important in a personalised Foundation Learning programme because:

- they provide a framework to define and assess PSD as part of the programme; and
- they relate directly to one of the defined progression routes for the programme, namely the Diploma.

The six PLTS are intended to help learners to become:

- independent enquirers
- creative thinkers
- reflective learners
- team workers
- self-managers
- effective participators.

The first focus of the project was on the development of an initial assessment process that is fully accessible to students, so that by the end of Key Stage 3 there will be a full profile of each learner. This enabled the production of individual programmes of PSD to be accessed through qualifications available on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The assessment model was then trialled with a small group of learners from St Luke’s towards the end of Key Stage 3, although it would also be possible at the beginning of Key Stage 4. The intention was to:

- adapt and refine the current PLTS framework to be used in the assessment, ensuring that it is accessible to learners at this level;
- establish learning targets which learners can develop when they move on to a Foundation Learning programme of learning at Key Stage 4; and
- trial the model and report on findings.

¹ Source: <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/skills/plts/index.aspx>





Implementation

Developing an assessment tool

As part of the development project, staff at St Luke's School devised and developed an initial assessment of PSD using the PLTS framework. Their approach to assessment was primarily based on observation and feedback, although some learners also required one-to-one discussions to help diagnose their learning needs in relation to PSD.

The model selected was based on a four-stage model originally designed to support learners on the early stages of Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes.

The process of initial assessment of personal and social skills

Stage 1: Preparing to assess and develop personal and social skills		
Stage 2: Using observation to gain evidence about personal and social skills		
Stage 3: Making objective assessments		
Stage 4: Giving feedback and agreeing key objectives		

This four-stage model identifies suitable opportunities to assess learners against the six PLTS through activities involving skills such as team working or effective participation in learning activities. Once these opportunities have been identified, the assessment criteria are shared with the learners using specially designed worksheets. These sheets simplify the assessment language and enable learners to identify where they might demonstrate that they have achieved the skills.

Following the observations, teachers make objective assessments about the learners' performance and share these observations through feedback sessions.

At the end of the process, learners should have an idea of their strengths and learning needs against each criterion and can, where appropriate, plan future activities where they will be able to provide evidence of their achievements.

It is important to note that PLTS are not formally assessed and verified in Foundation Learning. Instead, formal assessment of PLTS is evidenced through PSD units achieved by learners as part of their programme. The PLTS assessment should, however, help learners to understand what they need to achieve.

It is also useful for learners to have a completed transcript of their achievements in relation to the PLTS at the end of their programme. This is helpful in terms of progression routes, particularly if learners want to progress to the Diploma. This information should be easily accessible from the latest completed observation sheets.

Developing a reporting sheet

Staff involved in the project looked at the assessment model and focused it on teamworking skills (see Resource 1). They designed and used a simplified reporting sheet for the assessment of the appropriate skills (see Resource 2). The key features of the reporting sheet are:

- The development of a broad achievement scale that learners can use to self-assess against criteria (eg, 'Am I a great teamworker?' or 'Am I not yet a teamworker?'). This enables learners to consider the scale of the challenge ahead as well as to offer any previous evidence to show that they are effective teamworkers.
- Simplification of the language of PLTS to relate to the learner. This enables the learner to consider what an effective teamworker can do and ways in which they might want to demonstrate this in the learning activity. Learners should be supported in this and will need to keep records as they prepare for the assessment.
- The 'my feedback' section: the tutor prepares an overall comment for feedback which relates to the broad skills of teamworking. This is followed by observation against the particular criteria within PLTS, based on the session relating to these criteria. For example, in 'manage to reach agreements through discussions' the tutor might observe that 'you were able to overcome the initial disagreements with Fiona and reach an agreement about the choice of colours for painting the room by compromising'.
- The 'my targets' section: this enables the learner to identify targets relevant to areas they have not yet achieved, or things they want to take further. For example, a learner may want to take a leading part in a team activity the next time they are assessed, or they may want to try to listen to the views of other members of the team and record what they have said.
- The final achievement scale enables the learner to make an assessment of the progress they have made since beginning the activity as they go through the process of assessment and feedback.

Conducting a small-scale trial

The trial was carried out in the spring and early summer of 2009. The framework had been designed so that it could be used with any structured learning activity where the relevant PLTS could be practised. Staff at St Luke's chose to work in partnership with Uplands School for learners with severe learning difficulties.

Initially they identified two learning activities that involved teamworking. The first was a simulation, based at St Luke's School, and the second took place at Uplands School, working with a small group of learners with severe learning difficulties.

The St Luke's learners were engaged in a range of activities over a period of four weeks. This involved the use of story sacks, music therapy and physiotherapy. They learned to plan and prepare activities to be used with the Uplands learners. The St Luke's learners worked with teachers and specialist support assistants to run the activities in each of the classrooms, assisting with getting the equipment ready and moving the children in and out of their chairs using harnesses.

The St Luke's learners were able to practise the following skills:

- Working with others as part of a small team: planning the activities and running activities with others
- Completing tasks in a given time: the project involved tight timelines and learners were able to meet these
- Contributing to group discussions: this took place as part of the planning of the project as well as the review of learning
- Following instructions: much of the equipment was unfamiliar and learners had to understand how to use equipment with the Uplands learners and to be sensitive to their needs
- Gaining confidence to take more responsibility: in some cases this led to learners shouldering more responsibility such as taking part in interviews for learning assistants
- Learning about the health and safety for each activity: this was an important element of the project in relation to the equipment and the care of learners they were working with
- Discussing how to develop teamwork skills for future sessions: the process of gathering evidence has helped learners to further develop their teamwork skills for the future through setting and achieving targets

Successes

- The adapted initial assessment tool worked well in engaging learners with assessment and helping them to understand what they needed to do to further develop their skills as part of the project.
- Learners who participated in the project developed a much greater awareness of what teamworking involves.

- Learners developed their confidence in teamworking activities, and this improved their overall self-confidence. One learner was invited to be a member of an interview panel for student learning support assistants, something which would not have been likely before this session.
- In addition to initial assessment, the project has provided the basis for measuring distance travelled as learners have developed their skills.
- The evidence gathered from the project will count towards the teamworking unit from the National Open College Network Skills Towards Enabling Progression (NOCN Step-UP) award.
- The school now has a much greater understanding of the importance of PSD and how it can help to meet and develop the needs of individual learners. This has led to a much more positive approach to PSD as part of Foundation Learning and PLTS at Key Stage 3.
- The initial assessment approach can be adapted for use with learners at a range of levels of learning and can be extended to cover the range of PLTS skills beyond teamworking.

Challenges

- It has been difficult to take time out to reflect on the progress of the project with other teachers.
- The language of PLTS is really impenetrable for Key Stage 3 learners and learners on Foundation Learning programmes. One of the conclusions and recommendations of this project is that the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA) should develop level descriptors and guidance to ensure that learners at lower levels can access PLTS without the need for extensive mediation by teachers.
- It was difficult to encourage the engagement of St Luke's learners, who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, with learners with severe learning difficulties from Uplands School. This needs more preparation than originally envisaged. It was particularly the case in the physiotherapy element of the project.

Impact and outcomes

- The impact of the trial on the learners has been very positive. All three have benefited in terms of improved self-confidence and their approach to learning.
- The school now has an approach that works and is ready to extend it to developing activities mapped across the PLTS framework.
- They have developed a positive agenda for each learner in terms of PSD access to Foundation Learning. The school will be running units on teamwork early in the programme and using some of the evidence from the project to support the achievement.
- The staff see this assessment and PSD as something that is valuable for learners at all levels and will be offering it across the whole cohort next year.

- Staff can see a clear link between PSD and employability skills and want to make this a key feature of the way in which they present PSD as part of Foundation Learning programmes.
- The activity is mapped to the NOCN unit Introduction to Teamwork Skills at Entry 3. This has helped staff to see how they might design activities with partner organisations to ensure that they are able to meet the learning outcomes of learners through the QCF units.

Lessons learnt

- The school would have liked to devote more staff development time to this activity. It has helped them to see the potential for blocking out time and actively developing new approaches as part of the Foundation Learning programme.
- They have a much better understanding of the purpose and value of PSD as part of Foundation Learning and the way in which it can be integrated and blended into a range of activities being undertaken by learners.
- They also have a much greater understanding of personalisation. This has been illustrated in the different ways in which learners have responded to the activities and in the strengths and development needs they have demonstrated.

Conclusions and next steps

The next step will be to develop a range of assessments mapped to the PLTS framework that will be delivered as part of the thematic approach to Key Stage 3 delivery within the school. These will feed into the preparation for the personalised Foundation Learning programmes at Key Stage 4 for each learner next year.

This will involve auditing learning sessions to establish whether they are suitable to assess skills or whether they need to be adapted. This should help to ensure that the school has a PLTS profile for each learner that can be shared across the team, enabling all those supporting the learner to help them develop these skills.

St Luke's will also ensure that all learners have the opportunity to achieve at least an Award in PSD to meet their needs, regardless of levels of ability.

Resources produced

Resource 1: A completed initial assessment of teamwork skills for learners on Foundation Learning programmes

Resource 2: Achievement scale reporting sheet (a revised version of the original with simplified language and greater use of the achievement scale for each of the criteria assessed)

Resource 3: Teamwork personal assessment sheet

Resource 4: Teamwork peer assessment sheet (with simplified reporting)

Resource 5: Witness observation sheet (teamwork)

Resource 6: Witness summary