

## Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

### Development project

# Setting up a collaborative curriculum among special schools to give learners increased access to accredited learning

## Introduction

The Surrey Collaborative Curriculum Project focused on developing a collaborative curriculum for learners with special educational needs (SEN) across five special schools in Surrey, an approach unique to special schools in this area. The aim of the project, which will be implemented in the academic year 2009/10, was to put in place the mechanisms to allow learners access to a wide curriculum of accredited vocational and personal and social development (PSD) learning.

Partner schools are engaging in the project with a view to increasing options and learning opportunities for their learners through collaborative timetabling and collaborative delivery of units and credits. Although the collaborative provision will initially only be available for half a day a week, it will be possible to expand this provision at a later date.

This case study will be of interest both to local authorities (LAs) and to pilot leads in centres.

## Partnership profile

Name of organisation	The Park School, Woking
Location	Surrey
Contact	Jan Foster Assistant Headteacher enquiries@thepark.surrey.sch.uk
Type of organisation involved in the development project	The Park School caters for secondary-aged learners who have learning difficulties. The school has a language specialism permeating the curriculum.  Philip Southcote School caters for boys and girls with learning and other associated difficulties. The school also makes inclusive provision for deaf learners.

	<p>Wishmore Cross School caters for boys with a range of complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties often linked with medical conditions. This includes boys on the autistic spectrum and those with learning difficulties and communication problems.</p> <p>West Hill School admits learners with moderate learning difficulties, although they have a wide range of other needs including autistic spectrum and specific learning difficulties. Some learners have behavioural, emotional and social needs and some attend part time.</p> <p>Linden Bridge School specialises in the education of learners who are on the autistic spectrum.</p>
Approximate number of staff and learners involved in the development project	The project was led by a member of staff from each of the five schools. Approximately five learners from each of the five schools was involved.
Number of learners involved in Foundation Learning programmes from September 2009	<p>The Park School: 40 at Key Stage 4</p> <p>Phillip Southcote: 40 at Key Stage 4</p> <p>Wishmore Cross: 30 in Years 9,10 and 11</p> <p>West Hill: 15 in Year 10</p> <p>Linden Bridge: 10 in Year 10</p>
Level of experience at the start of the pilot	The schools were not experienced, collectively, in developing collaborative provision in the context of Foundation Learning and Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) units and qualifications

### **Aims and intended outcomes**

All participating schools wanted to increase the opportunities for their Key Stage 4 learners to undertake accredited learning at the same time as broadening their learning activities.

The aim of the development project was to support Foundation Learning pilot centres coming on board in September 2009 as they improved their personalised learning programme offer, by sharing information about progress during the previous academic year. The result of the work was to be a protocol for collaboration to which all schools have signed up.

## Implementation

The project management team included a representative from each of the five schools and focused on operational issues for developing a collaborative curriculum. The team first identified the operational areas of concern and gave responsibility to each of the schools to draft related protocols. The areas for protocol development were initially identified as:

- Risk assessment
- Communications
- Learner placement, selection and induction
- Logistics and travel
- Quality assurance and assessment.

On production of the drafts, the team reconsidered their approach and more clearly defined responsibilities in terms of 'home' and 'host' schools. These responsibilities, which are clearly articulated in the protocol document (see Resource 1), are:

- Identification of participating learners
- Induction and initial engagement
- Quality assurance
  - monitoring
  - assessment
  - reporting
  - recording
- Transport
- Appendices relating to communication with parents, the care file and quality assurance

It was the responsibility of team members to report back to the management and leadership teams of their individual schools and ensure their commitment to the project's proposal and outcomes.

Learners who would benefit from the collaborative provision were identified by each of the schools in July 2009. They will be inducted on the programme and will start on their collaborative learning in Year 10 from September 2009, when they will be working towards National Open College Network Skills Towards Enabling Progression (NOCN Step-UP) qualifications (see Resource 2).

Each learner will have a personalised learning programme and may be working towards Level 1 or Entry Level 3 awards, certificates or diplomas for completion at the end of Year 11.

## Successes

‘This is a really exciting time for us, and it gives us the opportunity to revamp the curriculum and provide a really relevant personalised timetable for each of our learners.’

Headteacher

Participation in the Foundation Learning pilot and use of the QCF have provided opportunities for the recognition of previously unaccredited provision. A unitised, credit-based curriculum framework has given the schools the opportunity to collaborate and ensure that achievements are not only accredited but contribute towards nationally recognised qualifications on the QCF. The collaborative provision will initially only be available for half a day a week, but there is the option to expand this provision at a later date.

Individual schools will also provide for credit accumulation in their ‘home’ provision outside of core delivery. All learners will be working towards the recognition of their achievement in the Key Stage 4 core curriculum.

‘It will be great for our learners to be involved in a nationally recognised accreditation framework where they will feel part of the mainstream and not merely isolated learners.’

Assistant headteacher

‘It’s a great time for our learners as they will be able to gain accreditation which will carry on at college and may enable them to return to mainstream education.’

Key Stage 4 teacher

Foundation Learning has helped individual schools to explore ways of providing accreditation from a variety of learning experiences. These experiences will not only be collaborative and school-based but will, in most cases, also draw on other partners to provide work-related activities. These include:

- Surrey further education (FE) colleges
- Surrey Education Business Partnership (EBP)
- Normandy Therapy Gardens

Although the schools had already been involved in link provision and Increased Flexibility work with the colleges, this project helped the schools to focus on the support they could give to each other as well as that gained from external partners.

The impact of the project will be more obvious once the learners have completed a year of study and the results of assessments can be analysed. Planning and reviewing will then take place to continue, extend and improve the programme. The use of functional skills (FS) across the individual schools’ curriculums as well

as the collaborative curriculum will ensure that each learner has increased opportunities to achieve maximum success.

The project has also supported the collaborative delivery of the GCSE in Art, as well as Duke of Edinburgh awards.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The greatest impact of the new collaborative programme will be demonstrated through increased learner motivation and the provision of more personalised curriculums through individual learning plans (ILPs).

It is very important to identify those learners who will benefit carefully, and they need careful preparation and support to ensure that success is achieved. For some learners the opportunity is exciting, while for others it is daunting.

Comments from Year 9 learners at The Park School, made during the development of the project, include:

‘It will be really good to see what happens in other schools.’

‘It will be scary meeting lots of new people.’

‘I am looking forward to trying out different courses at college and those other schools.’

‘Will it be like a proper school?’

‘Will the teachers be nice to me?’

The project has also contributed to staff understanding of the flexibility of the QCF and of the benefits to learners with learning difficulties or disabilities of accumulating credits towards nationally recognised qualifications. The recognition of each learner’s skills, knowledge and understanding has supported staff in personalising the learning programmes of their learners.

The possibility of reflecting the ‘spiky profiles’ of learners through different levels of achievement ‘nested’ in qualifications has further assisted personalisation, as have the possibilities of supporting learners in building achievement towards qualifications differentiated by size or volume.

While some learners will be working towards QCF awards, others may complete QCF diplomas within Key Stage 4. Similarly, whereas some learners are engaged and motivated by the vocational nature of their learning plan, others may need to focus on PSD issues prior to engaging in a more vocational or work-related curriculum. All of these flexibilities have enhanced the personalisation of

the curriculum and helped staff supporting learners in building motivational and engaging learning activities.

‘It will be great to be involved in a new initiative from the start and be able to help with the planning and the implementation. We will all be learning this together, which will help with teamwork in the classroom.’

Teaching assistant

The trust built between schools has been considerable, as has the learning about issues associated with collaboration across special schools. Central to the success of the project is the exchange of information and data between partners, and the role played by the schools’ teaching assistants. The relationship between learners and teaching assistants is crucial, as is the knowledge that they have of the learners in their care.

### *Meeting the aims of Every Child Matters*

Movement between schools can be a significant learning experience in itself for learners with SEN. However, an exchange which focuses on vocational skills, FS and PSD learning can underpin a number of aims from the Every Child Matters agenda. ‘Enjoying and achieving’ is the most pertinent outcome from this project, however ‘staying safe’ is also high on the agenda, with stringent risk assessments put in place prior to movement between schools. The vocational learning aspect of Foundation Learning will also contribute to learners ‘achieving economic well-being’ in later life.

### **Lessons learnt**

Points of learning from the development project include recognition of the importance of:

- providing time to build trust between partners;
- identifying and agreeing protocols which are supportive and facilitative;
- identifying and understanding the benefits of a unitised, credit-based curriculum;
- using the flexibilities of the QCF to support personalisation;
- supporting increased learning and accreditation opportunities through collaboration;
- the importance of communication between all partners;
- the crucial role played by teaching assistants in underpinning collaborative provision;
- the need for flexibility in collaborative timetabling;
- increased awareness of the costs of collaborative provision, in particular costs associated with travel;
- the fact that there are cost-effectiveness issues associated with ensuring viable learner numbers;

- the need to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms across the partnership; and
- the need to strengthen and build links with local FE colleges and other external providers.

### **Conclusions and next steps**

Central to the success of the Surrey Collaborative Curriculum Project is the time taken to build trust between partners and having a willingness to commit fully to the work being undertaken. Without this trust, it is unlikely that schools will take the first steps towards collaborative curriculum delivery.

The initial engagement of the learners in Year 9 underpins success in Years 10 and 11. Learners need to be identified carefully, based not only on their ability to achieve accreditation but also on their personal, social and emotional ability to benefit and participate.

### **Resources provided**

Resource 1: Protocols

Resource 2: Tables of NOCN Step-UP units to be delivered at participating schools