

Case study

Designing Foundation Learning provision that promotes progression to supported employment

Introduction

Havering College, a large college of further and higher education on the outskirts of Greater London, has well-established provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) and a very successful supported employment programme in the form of the Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment (ROSE) project. However, no formal link existed between the two different sorts of provision. This made transition between them more difficult for learners. Through this Foundation Learning development project staff explored the potential for Foundation Learning to provide a bridge between the LLDD provision and the ROSE project so that learners could make a seamless journey through the college's foundation studies programmes onto the ROSE project and from there into employment.

This development project took place between January-June 2010.

Aims

The project aimed to:

- explore different approaches to 'converting' existing provision within both the foundation studies programmes and the ROSE project in order to be consistent with the principles and requirements of Foundation Learning
- capture any funding issues arising from this 'conversion' and feed these into the Young People's Learning Agency/Department for Children, Schools and Families (YPLA/DCSF) review of Foundation Learning funding for LLDD provision
- design flexible Foundation Learning provision so that each individual learner can make a smooth transition from school onto a college course at an appropriate level and/or work through one or more foundation studies course until (for

those for whom work is a realistic outcome) they are 'ready to learn on-the-job', at which point they can progress onto the ROSE project and into employment.

Approach

College staff worked together to develop a detailed understanding of Foundation Learning policy and in particular the associated funding guidance, to enable them to determine what could be resourced.

Staff then researched the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) offer with a view to finding a match to their current approach and existing curriculum. The qualifications would need to recognise the skill set that staff were working to develop in their learners at each of the different levels covered by the courses they offer (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3 and Level 1). The ROSE project staff were particularly keen to identify qualifications

- or units within them - which lent themselves to on-the-job learning and to delivery by the job coaches supporting learners in employment.

On the basis of this research, staff selected a range of qualifications and structured these into programmes.¹ At Entry 3 and Level 1, the Foundation Skills team and ROSE project staff worked together to divide up the Employability Skills qualification into units that would be delivered in college on a foundation studies course and those that would be better delivered in the work place. This would enable learners who become 'ready to learn on-the-job' mid-course to transfer onto the ROSE project at the right point for them and complete the qualification they had started in the classroom. An example of a learner's journey through this provision is attached (see Resource 2).

Successes

Staff reported several key successes.

- The college has designed a coherent approach to their Foundation Learning provision with clear

¹ Resource 1 – Details of selected qualifications

progression routes through it and on into supported employment provision.

- The model should allow learners to make rapid progress towards supported employment, rather than remaining at one level or falling victim to 'revolving-door' provision.
- A proper bridge has been built between the two different forms of provision (Foundation Skills team and the ROSE project) to enable a seamless journey for learners.
- All learners will now have the chance to gain nationally recognised qualifications.

Challenges and lessons learned

The project team faced a number of challenges over the course of the project.

Funding

When work on the project began in March 2010, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding guidance for Foundation Learning made it impossible for the college to design programmes that both matched their learners' needs and attracted sufficient funding to enable them to run the courses. This issue was quickly picked up by the YPLA who issued a statement in April instructing colleges to plan their LLDD provision based

on their funding allocation rather than on the learner-responsive funding formula, pending resolution of these issues. The project team from Havering College provided models of provision illustrating the difficulties to the YPLA as part of its review, along with suggestions for changes, which appear to have influenced the latest funding guidance published in June.

However, without definitive guidance on what would and would not be permissible, it remained very difficult for the college to make firm plans. As a result of this staff produced a number of different models, making changes in response to announcements. As the project was drawing to a close, the YPLA issued definitive funding guidance for 2010/11 including the 'unlisting'² of functional skills and Entry 1 qualifications using the achievement continuum, flexibilities around job-coaching-led provision and the use of some non-accredited learning. Plans were revised once again to take account of the changes. However, given the college's internal deadlines, the flexibilities may have arrived too late for

² Unlisting is where the provider defines the guided learning hours the qualification will be delivered in.

staff to take full advantage of them.

Selecting qualifications

Choice of qualifications has been limited, especially at Entry 1 and Entry 2 where there are few practically-focused and employment-related qualifications. Staff have found themselves selecting qualifications on the basis of what is available rather than because they fully match learners' needs. In particular, the ROSE project staff have not been able to source a suitable employability skills qualification for learners working at Entry 2. The project team has identified unit titles they would like to see developed (see Resource 3).

Staff also admit that they have been over-influenced in their qualification choices by Guided Learning Hours (GLH) in order to ensure adequate funding levels. They are now going to consider how the inclusion of some non-accredited learning time and the possible 'unlisting' of qualifications at Entry 2 and Entry 3 may help them in future.

At the time of the development project, Foundation Skills team staff were waiting to hear how the issue around the re-use of Personal Progress units

would be resolved as it would have an impact on their ability to work with their feeder special schools to plan progression from school to college, particularly for learners with the most complex needs³.

College compliance systems and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)

Staff found that the integrated approach to Foundation Learning, which they welcome as highly appropriate for learners, was not compatible with mechanisms used to record a learner's programme onto their ILR or with the college's own compliance systems. As their approach to learning is holistic, with personal and social development and functional skills delivered alongside and through work-focused learning, the college has found it problematic to separate learning into individual components.

³ Since this development project, the YPLA has clarified the policy for reusing Personal Progress units, as follows: "[T]he YPLA will 'unlist' all entry level 1 qualifications that use the ten point continuum. This means the qualification will be funded at the number of guided learning hours (glh) providers require and subsequently record on the ILR as 'planned glh'." (A guide to funding Foundation Learning, June 2010 <http://www.ypla.gov.uk/publications/latest/Detail.htm?id=b19e39a4-51dd-459a-b890-bc7428607687>)

Foundation Learning at key stage 4

Originally the college had planned to involve a local special school for learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties in this project. However, the different timescales for the introduction of Foundation Learning pre- and post-16 has meant that the school was not ready to be involved as they have not yet begun to plan their approach. This has prevented the project from exploring progression routes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 14-25 with a Section 139A Learning Disability Assessment, as had been originally intended.

Impact and outcomes

As the college has yet to implement its plans it is difficult to evaluate impact at this stage. However, some positive outcomes have already been achieved.

- Information provided to the YPLA by the project team has clearly had a positive influence on the way in which LLDD provision will be funded next year.
- There is now greater collaboration between staff from the Foundation Skills team and the ROSE Project.
- Staff have a clear understanding of how

Foundation Learning will work for their learners and how it has the potential to promote progression within and beyond college.

Conclusion and next steps

Foundation Learning has provided a structure for designing a progression framework for LLDD provision at the college. Staff are fully supportive of the principles of Foundation Learning and are keen to use nationally recognised qualifications to accredit their learners' achievements. However, they have been hampered in designing programmes that properly match learners' needs and support their progression, by funding issues and the limited range of entry-level qualifications.

In the coming year staff plan to work much more closely with the local authority to develop a collaborative approach across 14-19 year old learners, and up to 25 year old learners for those with a Section 139a Assessment, involving local schools, both special and mainstream, and adult services.

The focus for this project has been on progression to employment but staff are also very conscious that there is a group of learners for whom employment is not a realistic option. They plan

now to turn their attention to working on positive progressions for these learners, working with social services to influence provision for this group so that they are able to leave college to embark on fulfilling adult lives.

Critically, staff will also be monitoring the effectiveness of the Foundation Learning provision as it is rolled out to ensure that they take every opportunity to make further improvements.

Further information

Resources

Resource 1: Programmes and associated QCF accreditation

Resource 2: Sample learner journey

Resource 3: List of Entry 2 units needed to underpin supported employment provision

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