Foundation Learning Support

LSIS LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Case study

Communicating effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) on Foundation Learning

Introduction

Hertfordshire Local Authority is a large and complex authority, with education providers that include mainstream schools, work-based learning providers, FE colleges and a university.

Foundation Learning features as an identified strand in the Strategic Area Partnership Group (SAPG) action plans. Almost 12,000 young people in the county are expected to be identified as suitable for Foundation Learning programmes. It will be important to raise awareness of, interest in and enthusiasm for the provision and management of personalised learning programmes at Entry level and Level 1, which will both demonstrate progression through different pathways and celebrate achievement. Providing information, advice and guidance (IAG) in different formats will be essential to accomplishing this. The LA has identified, communicating IAG as one of

the main priorities in its Foundation Learning implementation plan.

This development project took place from January – June 2010.

Aims

The project set out to raise awareness and knowledge about Foundation Learning and engage the many colleagues who believe that a GSCE pathway is right for all learners.

The initial aim of the project was to investigate the production of Hertfordshire IAG resources, which could be customised for localities as required, to ensure that a clear, consistent and positive message on Foundation Learning is disseminated to all stakeholders. This would give this pathway parity with other learning routes. However, over the course of the project and by involving all relevant stakeholders, it became clear that the project needed instead to focus on a

more strategic approach to the communication and signposting of resources to promote Foundation Learning.

Approach

The starting point for the project was to identify the needs of the professionals in terms of what IAG was needed, when, in what format and who should be responsible for it. A template was produced to capture this information, which will be used to build the programme of training and consultancy (see Resource 1).

One of the strengths of this project was that it was delivered by a team made up of members of the Hertfordshire Foundation Learning Implementation Group, which represents mainstream and special schools, education support centres, work-based learning providers, colleges of further education, alternative providers and Youth

Connexions as well as the 14-19 teams in the local authority. The range of roles among members was important in gaining credibility and engaging the full range of partners who drive curriculum change.

Gathering the views of young people has been a vital part of the project, with an estimated 36 young people involved in focus groups. These brought together learners from different environments including school, college, work-based learning and alternative provision. Each focus group consisted of around six young people sharing their stories of transition. Post-16 learners were also involved in this. The focus group reports and resulting recommendations on creative ways of delivering IAG on Foundation Learning to young people are attached as Resource 2 along with a checklist of the questions that were used as discussion prompts (Resource 3). These focus groups generated ideas that may not have been considered prior to this project.

Young people continue to be involved in the project. Case studies that illustrate the pathways through learning of young people in Hertfordshire are being edited to use as extracts in training.

Challenges and lessons learned

A range of challenges arose over the course of the project. High achieving schools did not always see Foundation Learning as one of the routes they should be offering to their learners. To address this, schools that only offered the GCSE route to learners were identified. A curriculum deputy from a high achieving secondary school has acted as an ambassador to report on the importance of Foundation Learning in his own school; this included communicating the message about the importance of Foundation Learning to the school improvement partners in his school.

The level of collaborative working varies across the county. Where common timetabling is not in place, access to the full range of provision for learners is limited, for example learners wishing to access a further education programme at their local college are missing out on core subjects back in school, which has a detrimental affect on their achievement and motivation and breaks down the relationships between the different learning providers. The project group has provided expertise to design timetables as well as models

of how this can operate in the county that illustrate how to resolve the logistical challenges of delivering effective Foundation Learning provision, as well as the benefits to learners. The principles for Foundation Learning in Hertfordshire are being used as a checklist to encourage and build partnerships.

Understanding personalisation is a key challenge. With the numbers of learners involved, work is needed to support mainstream schools in offering genuinely personalised learning and in making effective use of internal and external resources. There is evidence of this being managed more effectively where learners have the confidence to enter different institutions and enjoy travelling independently. Established and emerging models have been identified, which illustrate the feasibility and benefits of maximising achievement and progression for learners. The group found that although initially time consuming, facilitating groups of providers in working together is highly valuable in providing models and guidance, which can be used by others. One constructive example of this was an initiative that brought colleagues responsible for the

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education of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) together with colleges of further education and alternative providers.

Parents have considerable influence on young people and need information in language they understand. Consideration needs to be given to best practice in building constructive personal relationships with parents and to providing sessions and information for parents' evenings from Years 7 and 8 onwards. One school has asked those young people who have been informed about apprenticeships to write letters to parents explaining why this might be the right pathway for them. The Strategic Area Partnership Groups will work on creative ways for young people to share the features and strengths of Foundation Learning with their parents, perhaps by planning activities that showcase the value of this provision, rather than simply providing written promotional material.

Communicating the messages to all staff so that Foundation Learning and other Level 1 qualifications have parity of status with the other courses is another challenge. One group of learners interviewed thought

that "BTECs [were] watered down versions of GCSEs"; they had not been informed about the different ways of learning and assessment. A number of briefing seminars and workshops have been run over the course of the year (see Resource 5 for an example presentation from an introductory session for personal advisers working with E2E and Foundation Learning providers). The programme for next year's In-service Education and Training (INSET) days will include widening participation and delivering Foundation Learning programmes. The LSIS developed Local Authority Foundation Learning Lead Toolkit with complementary materials will be used as part of this training.

Poor comprehension among tutors and teachers of the equal importance of the three components of Foundation Learning has created difficulties for the project team. Most teachers and tutors have experience of just one or two of the elements; despite an introductory session and attendance at Foundation Learning events, there is still a lack of understanding of how to design and implement the programme. Awarding organisations have been engaged to work with

curriculum development advisers to set up joint training on how to build learning programmes, including how to link the use of units on career planning and progression to action planning carried out by personal advisers.

With this particular project, finding time to set up meetings and talk to very busy people has proved to be difficult. To make effective use of people's time, it is intended that the format for gathering the views and case studies will continue beyond the life of the project. All members of the implementation group will be involved in this and a template produced to capture the success stories.

Recommendations

Based on insights gained through the project, the team has identified a series of recommendations.

- The need to co-ordinate a joint continuing professional development (CPD) programme

- Work directly with the learners to gain a clear idea of which methods of communication are most effective. Invite them to communicate the key messages to parents,

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teachers and employers as well as to each other.

- Carry out a needs analysis on what IAG is required.

- Build a bank of training materials and resources, starting with the LSIS Local Authority Toolkit. Evaluate these to identify which resources work best with each of the partners.

- Make effective use of the emerging personal and social development units in the National Database of Accredited Qualifications and in the Qualifications and Credits Framework to accredit careers education and processes of effective IAG for learners and staff. Build in adviser and trainer time to ensure that the whole of the area and all its providers are covered, where possible.

- Signpost the materials on the staff development section of the Youth Connexions website, as well as on any 14-19 or curriculum websites. Signpost to existing sites and resources, which will provide access to more materials that meet different partners' needs than could be gathered in one place. This also allows for customisation and localisation of the IAG messages that need to be disseminated.

- Consider how to facilitate partnership groups to design

destination-led programmes from the outset, placing learners rather than organisations at the centre.

- Consider whether or not a dedicated site needs to be set up for Foundation Learning. In Hertfordshire it has been important to position Foundation Learning firmly within the widening participation agenda and not treat it as a separate pathway for those learners who are failing at GCSE level.

- Gather as many models and examples of best practice as possible before using the originators and developers as champions and ambassadors for Foundation Learning.

Conclusions and next steps

The multi-stakeholder, learner-centred approach that this project has taken should enhance the consistency, accuracy and reach of IAG. In particular, it should help create positive attitudes towards Foundation Learning and help build understanding among professionals of how best to implement programmes.

Having established a county-wide strategic approach to the provision of IAG about Foundation Learning, the long-term plan is to build an evolving bank of materials that can be used with

learners, parents and carers and the full range of providers and stakeholders involved - from teachers and tutors to governors, senior/strategic leaders and employers – to ensure they are fully informed about the benefits of Foundation Learning.

Further information

Resources

Resource 1: Information, advice and guidance (IAG) – meeting the needs of the professionals
Resource 2: Creative ways of delivering information, advice and guidance on Foundation Learning to young people – report from focus groups
Resource 3: Creative ways of delivering information, advice and guidance on Foundation Learning to young people – questions for focus groups
Resource 4: Tec@Tabard (The Training and Education Centre at Tabard Rugby Club) outline of programme content and credits that can be achieved
Resource 5: PowerPoint presentation on 'Transition of E2E into Foundation Learning'

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