Foundation Learning Support

LSIS LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Case study

Foundation Learning as a progression route to apprenticeships

Introduction

Middlesbrough is a small local authority with high levels of social deprivation. Poor levels of attendance and achievement have an impact on the educational outcomes for young people, with a significant number becoming at risk of disengagement, or categorised as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET), within a short time of leaving full-time education at age 16.

A review of the backgrounds of the current 18 year olds who are NEET showed an alarming number of young people who had achieved in line with national expectations at the end of Year 6 but had then:

- struggled at key stage 3 and made no real progress
- fallen further behind in Years 10 and 11, often with issues of poor attendance and exclusion
- left school with a collection of low-level qualifications
- moved to a post-16 destination that reflected their existing skills but not their potential and abilities, became bored and dropped out
- progressed to a course that was appropriate for their

potential and abilities, but for which they did not have the skills, and so became demotivated and dropped out.

This history of low levels of attainment and engagement of learners has made Foundation Learning a very attractive programme for Middlesbrough schools and post-16 providers, who all regard Foundation Learning as an opportunity to increase the likelihood of successful post-16 progression for a number of their young people.

Apprenticeships have traditionally been seen as a desirable choice for many young people and, consequently, many of them start out well on their learning programmes. However, the educational issues outlined above mean that many young people lack the skills to successfully complete their apprenticeship programme, and often may drop out and subsequently become NEET.

This development project took place from January – June 2010.

Aims

This project was designed to facilitate joint work by schools and post 16 Foundation Learning providers to address these issues by:

- ensuring that Foundation Learning is seen as a clear progression route, in this case to an apprenticeship
- providing an appropriate programme for those leaving school with qualifications that do not reflect their true abilities
- ensuring that young people who start on apprenticeships are equipped to successfully complete them.

Approach

The focus of the project was on the start-up requirements for offering Foundation Learning programmes that lead to apprenticeship programmes. The project explored the steps required for partners to design appropriate programmes for learners embarking on this pathway.

Partnership working
The partners in the project were selected for their experience and expertise in delivering similar programmes. They included two post-16 providers who

have delivered both apprenticeship programmes and Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and a mainstream school and a key stage 4 pupil referral unit (PRU).

By working with providers who can offer both the Foundation Learning programme and the subsequent apprenticeship, it has been possible to maintain the clear focus on destination for learner and provider alike.

Identification of learners

Connexions staff were briefed on the project and set up interviews for each learner identified as potentially able to benefit from this programme. Local authority colleagues worked together to explore the information, advice and guidance (IAG) on offer.

Schools were asked to identify suitable learners based on outcomes from individual learning plans and Connexions interviews, with a particular focus on those with one or more of the risk factors associated with becoming NEET, for example:
- poor attendance
- lack of engagement
- low literacy skills
- issues with personal and social development
- Looked After Children (LAC)
- being a young parent/carer.

Developing learning programmes

The providers were supported to develop learning programmes that would enable learners to progress from their current starting point to the start of an apprenticeship programme. The rationale was to develop a range of programmes to meet the needs of learners with different entry points in terms of skills and qualifications but, in all cases, led by the proposed destination.

Initially, the focus was on the design of the vocational element of the Foundation Learning programme. In the next phase of work, however, functional skills and personal and social development (PSD) opportunities will be included in each individual programme as it is often a lack of these skills that leads to negative outcomes.

The starting point for developing a learning programme for the Retail, Business Administration, Customer Service and IT User sectors, which supported progression to an Apprenticeship programme, was to identify the requirements for an apprenticeship in terms of knowledge and skills required. Preparatory Foundation Learning programmes (shown below) were then designed for learners at differing levels for progression to apprenticeships in Retail, Business Administration, Customer Service and IT User.

➢ **Programme 1- combination of Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications:**

Aimed at learners who are close to being able to access the full apprenticeship programme, but who need to develop other skills and competencies. The programme focuses on Level 1 qualifications but contains some units from the Level 2 apprenticeship qualification. The desired outcome of this is that learners embark on the full apprenticeship with some units already completed, giving them a very positive start.

➢ **Programme 2 – delivery of full Level 1 qualification:**

Aimed at learners who have not reached Level 2. Learners will undertake the vocational element at Level 1 as preparation for the Level 2 apprenticeship course. They should then be in a position to embark on a successful apprenticeship, as they will have had the benefit of a related Level 1 programme to build their skills in that area. It will be particularly important for these learners that the functional skills and PSD elements of the programme address any gaps in their basic skills.

➢ **Programme 3 – combination of Entry level and Level 1 qualification:**

Aimed at learners who are not yet ready to tackle a full Level 1. Their vocational programme will initially be an Entry level qualification with some Level 1 units. At the end of this programme they will be able to progress to one of the other programmes outlined above,

depending on the progress they have made.

The development of these programmes was a key part of the project to ensure that all partners understood clearly the 'destination-led' planning approach and how this could be used with other vocational routes.

Supporting delivery of the programmes

As each stage of the start-up activity was embarked upon, it became evident that providers would benefit from clearly articulated processes to support them in delivering programmes. A comprehensive toolkit was produced to meet this need (see Resource 1). The toolkit includes guidance on providing IAG and selecting learners. It focuses on apprenticeships as the destination, and is intended to offer a guide to those setting up similar programmes for learners who are at risk of not making a successful transition to post-16 education, employment or training.

A number of the providers with current E2E contracts involved in the project have also taken part in a CPD programme to prepare them for Foundation Learning. The programme involved three members of staff from each provider in attending nine two-hour workshop sessions covering all aspects of Foundation Learning. At the end of these sessions those who had participated agreed to form a network group to continue the sharing of

emerging practice. This network group, which is to be extended to include school-based colleagues, will be integral to sustaining and developing the work carried out in this project.

Service level agreements

When learners embark on the programme while still at school, it is necessary to have a clear service level agreement between each school and provider. This sets out, both in general terms and for each individual, how each part of the programme is to be delivered and assessed. The project explored in detail the requirements for the service level agreement and produced a flow chart and checklists, included in Section 1 of the toolkit.

Successes

This project has met a need and, as such, has been very well received by schools and learners alike. It has been particularly warmly welcomed by learners who, at the end of Year 11, have realised that they do not have the skills they need to make the transition into adult life that they would like. A profile of a typical learner who has benefited from this approach is included in Resource 3.

Initial meetings with schools and providers, which provided an opportunity to discuss individual young people and their needs, have resulted in widespread agreement on the value of the project and a shared desire to continue in future

years (within the revised time-table proposed in Resource 2). These meetings also enabled a clear understanding of the requirement for destination-led planning, so that those involved could feel confident that programmes would be relevant to the chosen destination.

Challenges and lessons learned

A range of challenges arose over the course of the project.

Timescales

The development project started in spring 2010. Planning took some time to complete, and learners were not able to actually start on a programme until 1 July. This meant that only learners who met the criteria and who had not arranged alternative programmes by the end of May were able to participate. Although this did not appear to rule out many potential participants, it was clearly far from ideal.

Funding

Earlier identification of suitable learners will result in programmes beginning whilst learners are still at school, which means that schools will have to pay for elements of provision. This was not an issue during the project because of the late start date but needs to be further explored outside of the project.

Destination planning

It was not always possible to select combinations of qualifications to meet the exact requirements of the three programmes of learning. In some sectors, such as retail, it was easy to find a Level 1 qualification with units at Level 2 that also featured in the Level 2 qualification specified in the apprenticeship framework. In other sectors, such as childcare and construction, this exact match was not possible so an alternative approach was adopted. However, the course provider was confident that this was a temporary problem as new qualifications appear almost daily on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

Conclusions and next steps

The new programmes are at an early stage in delivery and outcomes for those learners and organisations involved are not yet clear, although initial signs are positive.

There is considerable opportunity to develop the project further in future years to include more providers. Support will need to be made available to providers to facilitate further partnership working in the future, and to move provider thinking from activity to preparation for destination. The toolkit produced as part of this project should support this.

The school and the pupil referral unit concerned were

chosen because of their open approach to this kind of development work and their clear sense of responsibility for the post-16 destinations of their pupils. As the project is widened in future years, issues may emerge when engaging schools for which the impact of end of Year 11 outcomes and performance points are of greater concern. The range or providers will also be extended both to those who currently offer Foundation Learning programmes only and those who currently offer apprenticeship programmes only. This will add a layer of organisational complexity but will facilitate a much wider range of personalised programmes.

Further information

Resources

Resource 1: Toolkit
Resource 2: Proposal for revised timescale for programmes
Resource 3: Learner profile

Contact

Patricia Miller, Middlesbrough Borough Council
patricia_miller@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Helen Stokes, Middlesbrough Borough Council
helen_stokes@middlesbrough.co.uk

Vancouver House
Gurney Street
Middlesbrough
TS1 1EL

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