

## Richmond upon Thames College Progression routes from special schools to college

### Introduction

Staff from Richmond upon Thames College (RUTC), a tertiary sector college, have collaborated with staff from two local special schools in planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning for learners with special educational needs (SEN) and learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) aged 14-19 (and up to age 25 for those with a Section 139A Learning Disability Assessment), who are working at entry level.

Those involved in the project were relatively new to Foundation Learning, but they recognised that the implementation of Foundation Learning would create important opportunities to develop personalised programmes, which would prepare and support these learners in making a smooth transition across phases and settings. Staff were also keen to ensure that any changes to curricula and accreditation necessitated by the introduction of Foundation Learning were led by the needs and interests of the learners.

This development project took place from January-June 2010.

### Aims

The specific aims of the project were to:

- explore ways in which personalised programmes can be developed for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD) or with special educational needs (SEN), which will enable them to progress from key stage 4 to post-16 provision at school or college and beyond, building on existing resources from other Foundation Learning projects where appropriate
- identify ways of demonstrating learner progress, particularly within Entry 1, thus maintaining opportunities for continuing education
- identify barriers to successful progression within Foundation Learning for learners across phases and between organisations, and to suggest ways in which these could be resolved.

Intended outcomes for the project included:

- production of a range of sample personalised programmes for learners in transition between school and college
- identification of ways in which qualifications can be used to accredit learning across phases
- identification of issues relating to Foundation Learning that special schools and colleges will need to address collaboratively in order to achieve positive outcomes for learners
- production of a critique of the way in which current qualifications support progression, with suggestions for further development.

### Approach

Preliminary discussions took place among the key staff to identify and share current knowledge about Foundation Learning and to begin to collaborate on planning for change. Staff began by researching Foundation Learning developments. Of particular use were the outcomes of other Foundation Learning development projects such as the Surrey schools

project (see <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=251676>), which provided examples of personalised profiles for key stage 4 learners with severe or complex needs. Participants found it difficult, however, to navigate the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ), where the Foundation Learning qualifications are listed.

Links were made between the key staff involved in progression between the various levels of school and college provision. Each organisation began to consider what was distinctive about the context for learning in its own setting. Resource 1 provides a summary of the learning context of each organisation, including information on curriculum activity and details of accreditation used prior to the implementation of Foundation Learning.

Following this, ideas for implementation were clarified and decisions made about the choice of learners as a potential focus for case studies. Permission letters were prepared for the learners and their families so they could give informed consent. Three learners were identified to illustrate the transition between school and college, all of whom were currently attending link courses at RUTC.

**Learner C:** a key stage 5 learner at Strathmore School, aiming to come to RUTC in September 2010

aged 19. C is currently achieving between P scale 6<sup>1</sup> and National Curriculum Level 1, which would 'translate' to the consolidation and application levels of the achievement continuum, or Milestone 6 – Entry 1.

**Learner M:** a key stage 4 learner at Clarendon aiming to come to RUTC in September 2010 aged 16. He is working at the top end of Entry 1, or the application level of the achievement continuum.

**Learner P:** a key stage 4 learner at Clarendon aiming to come to RUTC in September 2010 aged 16. He is working at Entry 2.

The case studies drawn up by schools included brief profiles of each learner and their proposed destination, including goals and targets towards which the learner had been working and examples of their achievements. College staff contributed to the profiles from their knowledge of each learner's progress on the college link courses. The profiles are presented in Resource 2.

Each school produced a summary of the Foundation Learning programmes that the identified learners would be likely to have completed at the point of transition, based on their expectations of how Foundation Learning

<sup>1</sup> P scales are assessment criteria that have been developed to help assess pupils with special educational needs (SEN) who are working below level 1 of the National Curriculum

would work within their organisation. These summaries (see Resource 3) were passed to relevant colleagues at college who took them into consideration when planning the range of Foundation Learning programmes. Investigations were made into course structures and potential accreditation that would be appropriate to achieve the desired learning outcomes for these learners (results are available in Resource 4).

Throughout the project staff recorded the challenges that arose, and identified recommendations for personalised and collaborative practice (see Resource 5). Finally, the team produced a critique of how current qualifications support progression, with suggestions for further development (see Resource 6).

### Successes

All those involved agreed that the process had been very successful in enabling teachers to become familiar with Foundation Learning and the Entry 1 Personal Progress units. This process is now being rolled out with other staff within and across the organisations. The collaboration has strengthened relationships between the college and its feeder schools and has promoted understanding of their shared responsibility for the development of a 14-19 curriculum based upon Foundation Learning.

Staff at Strathmore School reported several additional

benefits for their organisation.

- Producing profiles is helping the school develop its teaching model for all learners, not only those aged 14-19.
- The process of identifying next steps has contributed to the school's review of its assessment, recording and reporting process.
- The review of Foundation Learning has also prompted the school to review the curriculum contexts for the 14-19 age group. The head teacher commented: *"A major benefit of the exercise has been working collaboratively with colleagues at college, enabling information about the students to be articulated and for college staff to be more prepared when planning the curriculum for our school leavers."*

At RUTC, the process has focused upon the needs and interests of specific individuals, and staff report it has been valuable to have detailed information about learners to assist with forward planning. It has also been of great benefit to liaise closely with the school and to find out how the school curriculum will be adapted to include Foundation Learning units.

### Challenges and lessons learned

Over the course of this exploratory work, several challenges arose, including some wider issues, which

could have an impact on the successful implementation of Foundation Learning for this group of learners.

- Foundation Learning is a high priority for colleges because it has to be implemented by September 2010, but is likely to be much less so for schools. In the absence of firm plans from schools, college staff may be tempted simply to adapt their current programmes of study to include new accreditation without consulting or collaborating with other providers.
- Learners may have completed a considerable number of Personal Progress units before coming to college, and therefore funding constraints (as they were at the time of the project)<sup>2</sup> may curtail further learning or consolidation within a level. Tracking achievement within the Entry 1 achievement continuum was difficult. In particular, the consolidation stage of the achievement continuum was considered too broad, covering as it does a range of P scales/former Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework milestones. There were concerns that there would not be sufficient standardised and unambiguous information available to support

<sup>2</sup> Since this development project, the YPLA has provided guidance on funding Foundation Learning programmes (<http://www.ypla.gov.uk/aboutus/ourwork/funding/funding-foundation-learning/>)

progression between phases.

- The college anticipated difficulties in delivering personalised programmes within group settings. Teachers will need to plan for differentiation, particularly in the functional skill areas.
- The range of qualifications available at Entry level is still limited and reduces options available to schools and colleges and choices for learners.
- Functional skills qualifications do not allow learners such as M and P, who are unable to achieve in all aspects of a subject, to obtain recognition for what they can do. For example, a learner who can read and write at Entry 1 but uses Makaton to communicate cannot achieve any accreditation.

Comments and recommendations about the future development of Foundation Learning are summarised in Resource 6, a critique of the way in which current qualifications support progression, with suggestions for further development.

### Conclusions and next steps

This project has enabled staff to focus on the needs of learners when planning implementation of Foundation Learning. While this has been hugely successful in terms of collaboration between the phases, staff felt that changes were needed within

the guidelines for funding. Now that the re-use of units with Personal Progress qualifications has been agreed, it will be much easier to plan for personalised progression for individuals.

Each participating organisation has also identified their own action plans to build on the project.

### Richmond upon Thames College

Against a backdrop of a whole college re-organisation, staff will continue to restructure and develop new timetables for autumn 2010 and will interview potential learners carefully to establish their profiles and their desired destinations. Courses will be deliberately fluid at the start of the year to allow for an element of 'mix and match' for learners. Three courses will be merged and decisions about grouping finalised later in autumn 2010 to maximise responsiveness. Link courses and tasters are in full flow during the summer term of 2010. Staff plan to develop progression routes for some learners between courses at college and will also develop their Foundation Learning

programme for part-time adult learners.

### Strathmore School

Staff at the school plan map units against the key stage 4 and post-16 curriculum and to share this with the college in order to identify opportunities for learners to have their learning at college (whilst on a link course) accredited via Personal Progress units. They will also identify opportunities for introducing new contexts that address learners' interests and reflect their previous experiences as well as offering new experiences.

### Clarendon School

Staff at Clarendon plan to introduce Foundation Learning alongside GCSEs, NVQs, BTECs and Diplomas, so that all learners are able to work towards an individual learning programme that reflects their needs, maps their progression and encourages them to reach their aspirations.

### Further information

#### Resources

**Resource 1:** The context of the three organisations: Richmond upon Thames

College, Clarendon School and Strathmore School

**Resource 2:** Profiles of the three school leavers

**Resource 3:** Projected Foundation Learning achievements of the three school leavers

**Resource 4:** The college's response, including plans for the three school leavers and RUTC Foundation Learning programmes at three levels

**Resource 5:** Recommendations for personalised and collaborative practice (for effective transition)

**Resource 6:** A critique of the way in which current qualifications support progression, with suggestions for further developments.

### Contact

**Helen Hayhoe**, Richmond upon Thames College, [helen.hayhoe@rutc.ac.uk](mailto:helen.hayhoe@rutc.ac.uk)

Egerton Road  
Twickenham  
Middlesex TW2 7SJ

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