

## Case study

# Using Foundation Learning as a progression route into an apprenticeship programme

### Introduction

Southend-on-Sea is a small local authority in south east England with a range of education providers, including secondary schools, sixth form and adult community colleges, and work-based learning providers.

Southend offers a wide range of Level 2 and Level 3 progression at post-16. However, there is a need to increase provision at Level 1 and below, particularly for learners at risk of becoming disengaged. These include some of the area's most vulnerable learners such as care leavers, young offenders, teenage parents and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLDD).

Southend LA has tried to support these learners through a range of services and a number of issues have been identified.

- Southend Borough Council's Corporate Parenting 'Care to Work' programme gives priority to employing care leavers on apprenticeships.

However, a number have been unsuccessful in their apprenticeship applications due to poor levels in literacy, numeracy or ICT skills.

- The youth offending team and special educational needs team have cited difficulties in placing some of their young people in post-16 provision and the need for a supported pre-employment and/or engagement programme.
- Through recent applications for apprenticeships in the local authority, Southend Borough Council identified at least 10 young people who were unsuccessful in their application and/or interview and needed additional support.
- In May 2010, Connexions had identified 336 of the NEET cohort who were seeking employment or training.
- Connexions has also requested more options at Entry Level and Level 1 for Year 11 and NEET young people.

This development project took place from January – June 2010.

### Aims

The project's overall objectives were to increase opportunities to accredit learner achievement below Level 2 and to develop Foundation Learning as a progression route to an apprenticeship programme. The project would enable collaborative work between schools and providers to identify clear progression routes at post-16 and to support learners to re-engage in education at pre-16. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- increase the number of learners on apprenticeship programmes in Southend 2010/11
- explore and develop a Foundation Learning programme to enable learners to progress onto appropriate apprenticeships at the correct level
- produce an innovative and accessible curriculum model for delivery and rollout from 2011/12

- develop resources to support the delivery of Foundation Learning.
- improve collaborative working between schools and providers in the borough and develop a Foundation Learning link into apprenticeship programmes, through the establishment of an Foundation Learning working group
- increase awareness of Foundation Learning by exploring different information, advice and guidance (IAG) media.

### Approach

The project focussed on:

- developing a Foundation Learning programme that focuses on functional skills and employability training
- stimulating demand for, and raising awareness of, Foundation Learning amongst all stakeholders, especially parents, carers and young people in addition to Connexions and schools/further education staff.

### Developing a Foundation Learning programme

The development project partnership intended to develop a Foundation Learning programme that could be adapted to different vocational contexts and levels. To achieve this, it

was decided that the best approach would be to design a broad scheme of work that could be used as a framework from which lesson plans could be formed and adapted by providers.

The target group was those learners who may drop out of learning pre-16 (particularly key stage 4 transition) and become NEET post-16, where current education programmes are not meeting their individual needs. The project identified that the NEET cohort included a number of young people who were interested in further education and/or employment but who did not have sufficient skills, including functional skills and PSD, to access apprenticeships. It was agreed that identifying ways of meeting the needs of these learners should be a key focus of this project. To support this, a Foundation Learning Routes Into Apprenticeships sub-group (formed out of the NEET Prevention and Reduction Group) was established to take this forward.

The sub-group identified gaps in provision and also identified a range of barriers that might prevent learners from accessing apprenticeships.

These include:

- low levels of functional skills
- uncertainty about career choice and appropriate learning programme
- emotional and/or behavioural difficulties eg some learners may need a pre-employment programme to support them in working with others
- needing support with job applications or interviews.

The group sought to address the identified gaps in provision and the various barriers to accessing employment and training by designing an engagement programme as a route into apprenticeships. This programme focused on functional skills and personal and social development (PSD), including key employability skills required by employers. The sub-group met several times to explore the design of personalised programmes that would best engage and reward learning while providing a stepping stone towards further progression. A range of issues were taken into consideration.

- A more flexible engagement programme was needed where hours could be built up over time as some learners require a longer progression period.

- Providers need to take into account the impact of the duration of the programme on financial support: more than 12 hours per week enables vulnerable young people to access and maintain Education Maintenance Allowance, but programmes must remain under 16 hours per week to permit some young people to access income support benefits.
- Broader programmes are needed to prepare learners to enter a workplace, rather than pursuing a specific apprenticeship from the outset, as some may not be clear about the career they want to pursue. Vocational tasters were considered valuable in helping young people make an informed choice.
- The third sector plays an important role in enabling access to voluntary and community organisations, which may offer a bridge to full-time employment in apprenticeships.

Provision was identified, using qualifications from the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), resulting in a one-year programme with a minimum of 18 units, around 15.5 hours per week. There was a particular focus on ensuring that curriculum planning was destination-led. To do this the group produced schemes of work.

### Developing information, advice and guidance (IAG)

The project also identified a need to raise awareness through IAG to parents, carers and young people, schools, further education providers and other stakeholders such as Connexions. To achieve this, an IAG plan (see Resource 1) was produced, setting out the aims and objectives of the materials to be produced and identifying associated risks and challenges. This led to production of Foundation Learning leaflets and posters, for use primarily with parents, carers and young people but also relevant for schools and providers and 14-19 and Connexions staff.

### Successes

Setting up the Foundation Learning Routes Into Apprenticeships sub-group enabled productive and focussed collaborations among members of the NEET Prevention and Reduction Group and the adult community college, Connexions and the borough's Care Leaving and Youth Offender teams. The production of schemes of work was cited as a very valuable exercise in bringing staff together on a focussed task-and-finish basis and in building capacity and

understanding of Foundation Learning.

The IAG materials produced through the project have been particularly well received. A survey was conducted on a small representative sample to obtain feedback on the leaflet produced (see Resources 2 and 3). The results showed that before reading the leaflet 50% had some knowledge of Foundation Learning, 33% some/a little knowledge and 17% no knowledge. After reading the IAG leaflet, 83% felt Foundation Learning was definitely or maybe relevant to them, their job or their family. After reading the leaflet, 100% of respondents felt they knew where to go for further information, advice or guidance, or to engage with Foundation Learning programmes.

### Challenges and lessons learned

The project had identified a range of challenges or risks associated with raising awareness of Foundation Learning, which the IAG materials leaflet and posters sought to address.

- Parents may be reluctant for a learner to access Foundation Learning if they feel it is not nationally recognised, or if it means somehow that the learner is failing. The materials

recognised this risk in use of language and terminology, and fully explained the benefits of Foundation Learning and the opportunities it offers for progression.

- Foundation Learning may be seen as a route only for learners with special educational needs or learning difficulties and disabilities. Care was given to embedding the term Foundation Learning, under the strap-line of *'Every young person needs a good foundation'*.
- Parents who cannot read or are speakers of other languages would be unable to access the materials. Within the scope of this project it was not considered viable to make the leaflet available in other languages and formats. However, the leaflet will be available in large print on request. This issue will be addressed through schools and Connexions via one-to-one IAG.
- There is potential for inconsistent Foundation Learning messages at local level. The project took a joined-up approach to working with Connexions and schools and consulted on materials via existing NEET and Foundation Learning groups.
- There is potential for confusion over how

Foundation Learning fits into the existing curriculum. The materials gave a clear explanation of what Foundation Learning means to a young person's weekly routine and set out what Foundation Learning may look like to parents, carers, young people, advisers and practitioners. The project identified that it would be useful to provide a quick reference poster including example curriculum block diagrams to act as a visual aid for advisers and practitioners. Materials will be made available to schools, further education providers, Connexions and other relevant staff.

### Conclusions and next steps

Southend Borough Council is committed to giving parents, carers and young people accessible information.

Developing the Foundation Learning curriculum will open opportunities for learners seeking alternative or pre-employment education. It will not only re-engage the learners but will also, through IAG, identify a clear progression route.

Southend Borough Council aim for the number of learners on apprenticeship programmes to be increased through targeted support for

those within the NEET cohort who have indicated an interest through Connexions.

Connexions intended destination data at June 2010 shows that 102 of Southend's Year 11 leavers have indicated an intention to move into training and/or an apprenticeship. Those Year 11 leavers who do not possess a Level 2 qualification, along with other young people at 17 and 18, identified as in scope, will be targeted for a programme of support focused on helping them to progress into apprenticeship programmes. It is planned that the adult community college will run trials in July and September 2010. The programme will also be presented to schools for their pre-16 offer, where it will sit alongside other alternative education.

Southend Borough Council will take forward actions, as identified through this project, via the Foundation Learning Working Group and the NEET Prevention and Reduction Group. As all elements of Foundation Learning are key to securing a young person a route into an apprenticeship at Level 2, this will be built into Southend's 2011/12 commissioning priorities.

## Further information

### Resources

**Resource 1:** IAG plan

**Resource 2:** IAG leaflet  
questionnaire

**Resource 3:** IAG draft  
leaflet

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