

Realising potential: insights into the design and delivery of pre-vocational programmes

Bedford College



This case study focuses on how Bedford College has been working closely with schools and with the local authority to prepare pupils aged 14-16 for college entry; and how, more recently, it has taken various initiatives to work with young learners to help guide their career choice.¹



NOTE: Bedford College's 14-16 provision is already the subject of an Ofsted Good Practice example published in October 2014. Readers are advised to look at the full Ofsted case study at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424108/Bedford_College_-_good_practice_example.pdf

Brief description

The provision of a discrete Foundation area in the College has resulted in an increase in Traineeships. Since September 2015, and working with the Supported Employment Team at the Borough Council, the College has also seen an increase in supported internships for students with high needs, and has introduced a new programme – Gateway to Progression – designed to help young learners “take responsibility for decision making through understanding where [their] true skills and interest lie”. The College also offers a part-time study programme for 16-18 year-old refugees needing ESOL, and has developed a detailed action plan to alert those involved in home education to the services and facilities that it can offer.

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Effective Practice – the detail

Traineeships

Bedford College was one of 14 providers supported by the Traineeship Staff Support Programme (TSSP) to develop resources for wider sector use. The Traineeship Trainers Tool produced under this programme enables staff involved in traineeships to self-assess against a benchmark model, giving them the ability to develop their own and their organisation’s current practices in traineeships, in particular, their responses to the three elements: a focused period of work preparation, a good level of English and Maths, and a high quality work placement.

The tool is available to download at (reinsert new link). It provides staff with contextualised links to useful resources that include case studies from other providers, employers and learners and is supported by podcasts and video clips. The tool helps staff identify skills and knowledge gaps and access appropriate resources to aid understanding of good practice. Under TSSP the College also designed and produced a set of mobile apps targeting potential trainees to help them ascertain their eligibility for a traineeship. Since this development work reported in late 2014, and the resources became available for sector use in 2015, the College has delegated traineeship delivery to its curriculum teams.

The 2014/15 traineeships cohort at Bedford College achieved an 85% positive destination rate, with students either progressing into further study (including apprenticeships) or, in over 40% of cases, into sustainable employment lasting six weeks or more.



85%



positive destination rate

Example trainee experiences and destinations include:

- A, whose work experience was as a general assistant in the kitchens at a local Academy, clearing and cleaning the dining areas and helping prepare food for lunch; he has now secured a 20-hours per week contract at the same venue;
- B, who was placed with a care home as a catering assistant with duties including food preparation and service, taking deliveries and storing fresh produce; he has now been offered a 10 hours per week job as catering assistant at a different care home;
- C, who had two placements, as a play assistant at a nursery, and as a student support assistant, helping students with difficulties in and out of the classroom; she has since been engaged by the College in this role on a paid basis;
- D, who had work experience as a general care assistant at a care home for elderly people with dementia, helping them with their food preparation and running a variety of activities for residents; she is now employed as a 10-hours per week activities assistant;
- E, who was placed with a retail outlet as a sales assistant, pricing up stock and staffing the tills and serving customers; she went on to secure seasonal work at a local garden centre.

Trainees at Bedford College are able to access an employability unit via the College Moodle, while their work placements draw on well-established college practices and systems to secure the participation of relevant employers. The March 2014 Ofsted inspection (Grade Two) found that “teachers have excellent links with industry and use these effectively to develop high levels of industry-related skills which prepare students skilfully for the world of work”, and this extends to traineeship provision.

The College works with employers through dedicated link officers to ensure they are prepared for the type of candidate they will be receiving. Trainee performance is monitored on a weekly basis (via a folder on the college shared drive) and termly visit; formal workplace assessment of trainees is also undertaken on a termly cycle.

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Gateway to Progression

This scheme is targeted at those with qualifications at Level 1 but who have struggled at Level 2; it offers a programme of study which includes functional skills and tutorials, “the opportunity to experience a range of vocational areas to fully appreciate the demands of each subject before making a choice [about a preferred] progression pathway”, enrichment activities and workshops for portfolio building, and team work exercises to help develop communication skills whilst building up self-confidence. The Gateway to Progression programme leads to a main Certificate in Progression qualification, and learners are entered into appropriate English and maths exams. Although only recently introduced, the Gateway provision is proving both popular and successful, and the College is seeking to develop this type of provision further.

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Learners are admitted onto the Gateway programme following college assessment, and are referred for additional support if this is recognised as needed in the classroom. The Gateway programme has a dedicated team of tutors, including those offering English and maths at appropriate levels. There is a strong emphasis on personal and social development; and students are helped to progress through, for example, specific assistance with CV writing and applications for apprenticeships or mainstream FE courses. Learners interviewed, though only a few weeks into their programme, were clear about their aspirations, comfortable in talking about the issues which had prevented them progressing to date, and realistic in their planning of next steps; all seemed highly welcoming of the way in which they were being treated at the College, and appreciative of the supportive environment in which they were now working.

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16-18 ESOL

The incidence of young ESOL learners at Bedford College has increased significantly from 35 in 2014/15 to a current cohort of 57; of these, 29 are unaccompanied asylum seekers in the care of Social Services. The College provides a part-time study programme and the ESOL team is currently in the process of developing a full-time programme of study based on the following model, for introduction in the 2016/17 academic year:

- core ESOL, where learners attend with adults to enhance their social and personal development as well as their language skills;
- discrete 16-18 classes to concentrate on developing required language skills;
- blended learning – a combination of tutor-led and independent study – to complete a dedicated on-line English language course appropriate to their level, which also develops their IT skills;
- discrete maths, at an appropriate level, delivered by a maths and ESOL specialist;
- individual tutorials, to monitor and encourage progression in learning;
- an enrichment course in employability, with the possibility of work placements (to be piloted from March 2016).

Under the guidance of the 16-18 ESOL course manager, **the staff team works closely to monitor and support learner wellbeing as well as their academic and social development. Learner focus groups confirm this level of care is welcomed, and that feeling well-supported by teachers had encouraged learners to aim higher, progress into other areas of study, and prepare them for their future plans.**

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Moving on from Elective Home Education (EHE)

Bedford College has identified a growing incidence of the number of local families who electively home educate, and is actively promoting its services while working in a wide partnership to help parents/carers and their children consider options for progression. Its EHE “*Get to Know Us Better: help us to help you*” action plan for 2015/16 includes:

- the use of College space to accommodate regular meetings of EHE parents/carers;
- once a term tours of the College;
- access to the College as an “examination centre” (both academic and practical assessments);
- bookable slots for an impartial careers information, advice and guidance appointment (already taken up by some EHE families);
- setting up a web-accessed area for EHE use, and populating it with relevant information (eg on government educational reforms);
- organisation of transition and progression workshops in advance of the 2016/17 academic year;
- invitations to younger home-educated children to rehearsals of productions by college performing arts students;
- taster visits, including participation in vocational courses;
- child and parent workshops;
- workshops on how to compile a portfolio of achievement and apply for formal study.

Using technology to support learning

Tutors at the Shuttleworth College site, which offers a range of land-based studies, actively promote the use of ‘bring your own’ devices and mobile technology to enable learners to research topics on their curriculum.

Staff conducted a student survey and held focus groups to discuss the use of such technology, which was very much welcomed, especially by those learners needing to develop their English and maths skills. As a result, the College has developed the use of Q-codes to access information; those learners without their own equipment can use a sessional loan arrangement to access a tablet or huddle.

“This has had a real, sharp impact: it keeps learners on their toes, and staff too. This use of technology can turn the traditional classroom on its head. It is especially powerful in maths and English classes, and in courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – they become so engaged. And it’s a really effective way of teaching Health and Safety, for example. We have also now started using Q-code technology with adult learners: they can be nervous at first, but have really enjoyed it, perhaps because it’s different, and they become confident in the use of the technology within three weeks. They really take ownership, develop pride in their learning and a real sense of achievement.”

Carl Groombridge

Lecturer in animal sciences at Shuttleworth who pioneered the use of Q-codes

Tutors found that the use of technology in teaching sessions acts as a motivator and stimulates experimentation. They report increased numbers enrolling, a high level of student attendance and strong success rates. Students' interest in technology has been harnessed and they are keen to engage in project-based learning; regular student voice feedback confirms a positive reaction to the recent innovations, and as a result the College is embedding other technologies – such as the use of night-vision cameras – into their schemes of work. **The staff at Shuttleworth have facilitated in-house “discover and share” session with other staff at Bedford College, and the use of Q-code technology is becoming part of the delivery in other curriculum teams.**

The College makes wide use of its Moodle, with each course having its own page; and technology is also used to generate a “grade tracker” on student progress, which covers personal development as well as recording assessment results, and which generates reports for staff use in tutorial sessions.

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The Learner Voice

Bedford College considers it crucial to provide students with the opportunity to make their voices heard and participate fully in the life of the College and the wider community. **The College organises and encourages a number of initiatives to ensure that student's views are represented, and a page on its website draws attention to the extent of student involvement in scorecard format:**

- Number of Student Governors: 2
- Number of Student Course Representatives: 233
- Number of Student Champions: 75 - the Schools & Community Liaison service engaged 75 student champions who worked at over 30 events and benefited from increased confidence through team working and meeting strangers
- Number of Student Course Representatives: 274 – the robust structure for cross-college student voice activity is replicated at all campuses, and 274 student reps attended student voice meetings, with actions minuted and progress fed back through a series of 'small change, big difference' posters
- Number of Student Voice meetings: 13
- Student Voice Conference attendees: 60
- Number of Student Wardens (based at Shuttleworth College Halls of Residence): 8
- Student Fresher's Fair attendees: 1,496
- 2,717 students took part in theme week activities on health & wellbeing (up 50%), with 1,663 participating in equality & diversity week.

In addition the College promotes and collects students' views through two annual surveys on their experience; the **"Have Your Say"** initiative enables students to provide comments and feedback through the College's online student learning portal; and six editions of the student-run magazine **"The Edge"**, which provides a platform for student views and opinions, are issued each year.

Will Sparrow

Bedford College Student
Participation Advisor

“Student voice is a core strength here. We listen and respond. There is a cross-college structure that works well, including 14-16 focus groups. We want to make sure all our students feel they have a listened-to voice. We have two students on the Board, hold five student voice events on each campus each year – so 15 such events annually – and have recently introduced a question-time/speed dating event with members of the College executive group, which leads to open dialogue. The annual Student Voice Conference last year was based on a ‘Dragons’ Den’ format. We make wide use of ‘You Said, We Did’ posters, and we’ve found that small changes can make a big difference – for example, the size of tables in the Shuttleworth canteen has been changed at students’ request, and we’ve made changes to the block timetabling of English and maths classes.”

This transparent approach to student involvement in the running of the College is highly evident from a tour of the main campus, and underpins the emphasis on developing learner responsibility which is reflected in curriculum design and classroom activity.

Benefits for the college, staff and students

Learners are actively engaged, and demonstrate strong commitment to their studies. A range of curriculum developments, while supporting College strategic planning, provides a direct response to learner needs.

Learners have a sense of responsibility which contributes to success through the close attention paid to the personal and social development of learners, by skilled and empathetic staff.

Learner commitment is secured through innovative use of technology providing a positive stimulus, especially for learners on lower level courses.

Learners have a sense of security and access to work-standard resources. The learning environment is both well-equipped and comfortable.

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Background to the college

Bedford College, a large multi-dimensional further and higher education provider operating from three main sites and catering for over 13,000 students annually, seeks to serve the employment and community needs of its immediate location. The College Governing Body is currently reviewing its strategic plan for the five-year period beginning September 2016, and is preparing for a formal area review starting this autumn. In that context it has taken a three-year view of its performance against that of neighbouring colleges, and is notably focused on Level 3+ provision: just 2% of its 16-18 classroom learning is at Entry Level, and 10% at Level 1. Bedford College has doubled its apprenticeship numbers in recent years, and has a substantial number of higher education students.

The locality

The most recent population projections for Bedford Borough suggest that the population will increase to approximately 174,700 in 2021, an increase of 7% over 2014. However, the older population is projected to increase at a much higher rate: those aged 65+ to rise by 16%, and 85+ by 32%. Longer term, the population of the Borough is projected to reach 198,700 in 2037, which would represent a 21% increase between 2014 and 2037. Bedford is diverse, with 55 different ethnic communities, many of them well-established. Bedford ranks near the middle of authorities on deprivation rates, with 11% of residents living in wards which are within the 10% most deprived wards in England. Unemployment rates have fallen significantly since a high of 4.3% in February 2013; in January 2016 there were 1,824 people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in the borough, equivalent to 1.8% of the working age population (16-64) compared to 1.5% in England and 1.1% in the East of England. The NEET rate is also falling, down from 6.6% in June 2015 to 4.4% in September; some 80% of the 16-18 cohort are in learning, compared with 74% nationally. The number of pupils in the area attaining five GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, remains below the national average.

Background to the Project

This case study forms part of a suite of six which were developed between January and March 2016. They provide insights and illustrations which will be of benefit to leaders, managers and practitioners when they are:

- Developing and delivering their pre-vocational offer;
- Considering the implications for the professional development support needs of staff involved in prevocational design and delivery.

The Foundation would like to thank all six case study providers; for their time, commitment and help with the development and final production of the case study material.

The project has been commissioned and funded by the Education and Training Foundation, developed in consultation with Ofsted and HOLEX, and with the support and guidance of those listed at Annex 1.

Annex 1

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