# Foundation Learning Support

**LSIS** LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

## Foundation Learning champions' training programme

## Personalised learning
## Personalising the learning experience

### Learning outcomes

This resource should help you to:

- understand what 'personalised learning' means when applied to Foundation Learning programmes
- consider how the content of a learner's Foundation Learning programme can be designed to match an individual's needs, interests and aspirations
- understand how you might provide a personalised learning experience for learners on Foundation Learning programmes;
- encourage learners to play a more active role in their own learning.

### Understanding personalised learning

The personalising of learning is a fundamental principle of Foundation Learning. It is expected that each learner will have a programme that has been specifically tailored to match their individual needs, interests and aspirations. This needs to happen if a learner is to be supported to progress from their own particular starting point to their planned destination.

Personalising a learner's programme involves two different elements:

- **personalised content**, which means choosing qualifications, and units within them, which enable learners to progress according to their abilities and interests;
- **personalised learning experience**, which means ensuring that the way an individual experiences learning matches their preferred learning styles and promotes personal ownership, autonomy and control of their learning. It also means that learning takes place where and when it best suits the learner and that they are offered appropriate support and guidance to enable them to achieve.

### Personalised content

All Foundation Learning programmes are expected to comprise vocational or subject-based learning, functional skills and personal and social development (PSD) skills. However, an individual's programme can be tailored in several ways to ensure that the content matches their needs, interests and aspirations. These are some of the key variables:

- the weighting given to particular curriculum areas (for example, emphasis on PSD or on sector-specific learning);
- which QCF qualifications are chosen from the FL Qualifications Catalogue;
- the size of the qualifications selected (Award, Certificate, Diploma);
- what level(s) of qualifications are chosen (and what level units within them);
- which units are selected from the rules of combination for each qualification;
- the assessments methods adopted
- the overall size of programme (size and number of qualifications and credits).

**Personalised learning experience**

If each learner is to experience learning positively, in a way that promotes progression, providers need to:

- offer learning at times and in places that the learner can readily access;

- have a thorough initial assessment process that results in a detailed understanding of the learner as an individual;

- respond to a learner's preferred learning style(s);

- provide appropriate levels and types of support to enable the learner to achieve;

- ensure that learner opinions are sought on the planning and design of their programme and related organisational issues in a range of ways;

- use on-going reviews to give learners a chance to reflect on their progress and to suggest any changes to their programme;

- offer individualised guidance to help the learner make appropriate choices;

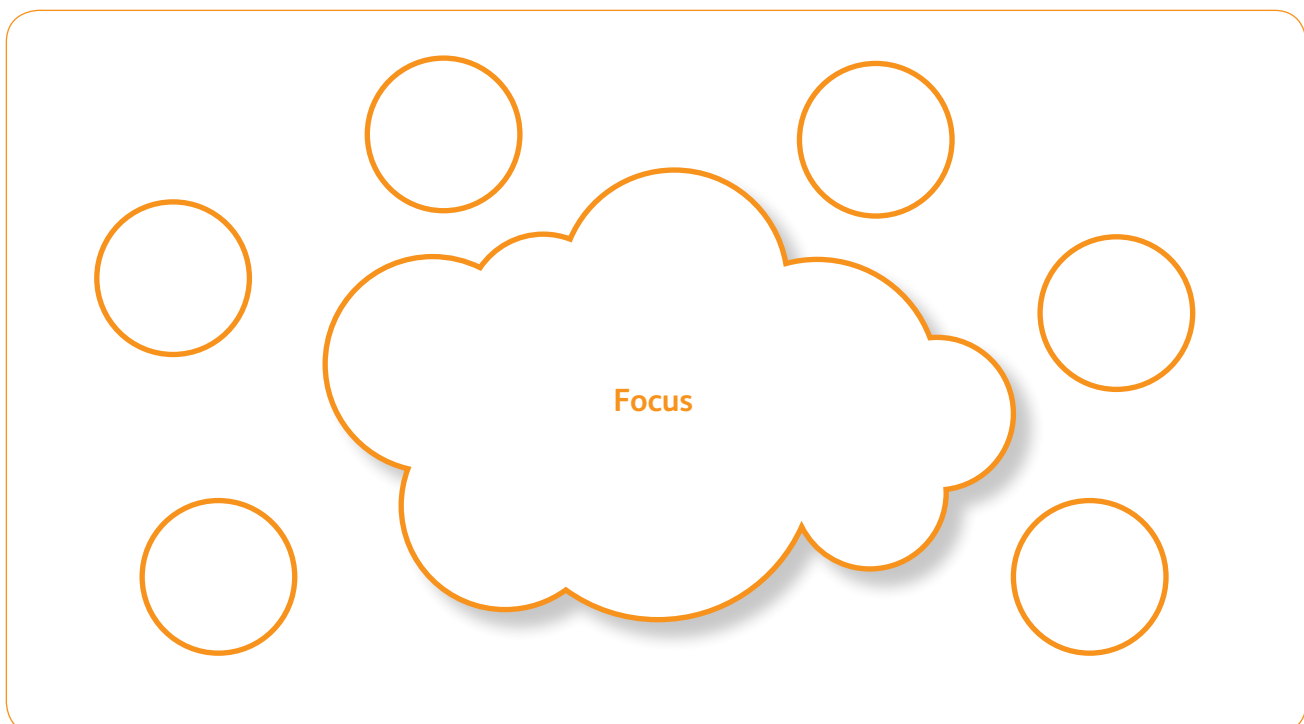- help learners to develop a sense of ownership and autonomy over their own learning.

## Activity
## Personalising the learner experience

To offer a personalised learning experience, providers need to understand their learners as individuals, listen to them and empower them to speak authoritatively about their own learning.

Focus on one of the following and use the brainstorming framework below to set out what you already do. (For a group activity, pairs or small groups could work on a different focus and later exchange and compare frameworks):

- *Understanding learners as individuals*

- *Listening to learners*

- *Promoting learner autonomy*

**Focus**

Read how some providers are tackling these aspects of understanding learners on their Foundation Learning programmes.

## Understanding learners as individuals

■ We carry out a structured interview with learners as part of the engagement phase. It includes questions like "What helps you keep going when things get tough?", "How do you feel when your work is criticised?", "What has been your most enjoyable experience of learning?"

■ One of the first things we do in our Communications class is ask learners to bring in an object or an image that is significant to them and talk to the group about it. It's a good way to find out about what they value.

■ When we are doing initial assessments, wherever possible we involve parents and carers and other members of the learner's circle of support so that we get a range of perspectives.

■ We help learners to complete learning style questionnaires that identify how they learn best. We check out the findings by talking to the learners about their previous experiences of learning, when and where they made most progress and when and why they felt less comfortable.

■ We use vocational profiling techniques to build up a picture of the learner's experiences, ideas, preconceptions and preferences about work. We've even discovered QCF qualifications that accredit the learner's skills in contributing to the process.

## Listening to learners

■ We have short fortnightly review sessions for each learner to help them reflect on their progress. Our target is that the tutor should be doing less than half the talking!

■ Each of our sessions ends with two questions: what have you learned today? What would you like to re-cap at the beginning of the next session? We keep that on a flipchart or call it up on the interactive whiteboard at the start of the next session.

■ We have a suggestions box for each of our courses. We encourage learners to come up with ideas of how we could improve the programme. They can comment on any aspect of the course (facilities, work placements, timetabling, groupings, anything really). Learners making constructive suggestions are entered into a termly prize draw and can win gift vouchers.

■ We include a self-advocacy element in our Foundation Learning programme. We help all learners on the Independent Living course, even those with complex needs, to express themselves. And there's a unit in the Personal Progress qualifications that you can use to recognise their skills as they develop.

■ We've introduced the concept of learner representatives into our Foundation Learning courses. There's one elected learner per course. We started out by using them to collect and feed back learner views. As they've got more confident they have started to initiate the dialogue and are coming up with all sorts of exciting suggestions for improving our provision.

## Learner autonomy

■ Getting learners to understand that they are in charge of their own learning is one of the primary objectives of our induction activities. Many of them have never really been given the chance to exercise choice in what or how they learn, so it can be quite scary for them at first. We start off with small decisions like the order in which they want to approach a series of tasks or by asking them how long they think they need to complete something.

■ One of the things we are working on is supporting learners to see that asking for help is a positive action. We get them to map out the alternatives (get further behind, copy somebody else's work, pretend you're coping) so that they can see that asking for help when you're struggling is the most sensible option.

■ We realised that there wasn't much point in giving learners choice about what they learned if we didn't also give them the skills and knowledge to make informed choices, so we've introduced a 'learning to learn' element into all our Foundation Learning courses. We've also improved our on-course information, advice and guidance so that learners are better able to understand things like the difference between optional units or the opportunities offered by different sorts of work placement.

■ It's very easy to dismiss the concept of learner autonomy when it comes to learners with learning disability but we see it as a crucial part of what we are aiming to achieve for all our learners. Our course is all about developing personal autonomy; learning is just one context in which they can become more active agents in their own lives. We encourage learners to indicate which activity they want to join in with, when they've had enough of something or need a break, if they need an instruction repeating, whether they are enjoying what they are doing. They do that in different ways but they can all do it.

On your framework, add any new ideas or activities that have been inspired by your reading.

## Reflecting on own provision

■ To what extent do your learners already enjoy a personalised learning experience?

■ What are your key priorities for improvement?

■ Where do you see the challenges lying and how might you address them?

■ Do your own colleagues understand the interplay between personalised content and a personalised learning experience and how you can combine these elements to ensure your Foundation learners are offered properly personalised programmes?

## Final thoughts

■ Is there any value in you facilitating this as a CPD session with practitioner colleagues to initiate an exploration of options for personalising the learner experience?

■ Reflect on any implications for your Foundation Learning implementation plan and record any actions that you need to take in your reflective notebook.