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Introduction of non-accredited learning for pre-entry and entry one learners (RARPA)

(FE) Peer Reviews

This case study highlights the role of the peer review and the impact the peer review has on learners in Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).

ETF's Centre of Excellence for SEND, NATSPEC, were approached to conduct a peer review of Kirklees College. The peer review is a fully subsidised, confidential and non-judgemental review for colleges. The review is a supportive tool to determine areas of strength in supporting young learners with SEND and suggested areas for improvement, with a summary, recommendations and support in the follow-up provided after the peer review. This case study highlights the importance of supporting learners to develop independence, social and personal skills through non-accredited learning and providing opportunities to practice them in a safe, encouraging environment. The outcomes of this learning enable them as they move into adulthood and live fulfilled lives in their local communities.

Introduction

Kirklees College is a medium sized further education college in West Yorkshire. The college supports 500 high needs learners based across seven sites. Primary needs are diverse and include autism, moderate to severe learning difficulties, hearing and visual impairment. High needs learners are embedded across a wide range of vocational programmes (44%) and the remaining 280 learners are in foundation learning at either Huddersfield or Dewsbury (56%) Levels of learners in foundation learning range from pre-entry to level one with approximately 50 to 60 learners spread equally across each level. Learners are attributed to eight local authorities and attend college for three days a week. Programmes focus on the development of independence, social development and employability skills and include opportunities to progress onto successful supported internship programmes. Achievement rates for high needs learners for accredited outcomes are consistently high and overall learners attend well. The college employs a head of faculty for foundation learning and special education needs and learners now benefit from two curriculum area managers. The college had an Ofsted full inspection in March 2023 and were graded good for high needs provision.

College leaders reviewed their strategy for high needs learners and recognised the value of introducing pre-entry and entry level one learners to non-accredited learning to improve positive destination outcomes. Whilst the college received a positive Ofsted outcome in 2023 the College requested a peer review to provide the support of an experienced associate to support them in how to measure progress against education, health and care plan (EHCP) outcomes and how to establish clear and robust starting points from which to set meaningful targets for their learners. The provider review focused on 280 foundation learners split equally between Huddersfield and Dewsbury.



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting



Increased attendance of learners with SEND



Better outcomes for learners with SEND



Improved transitions for learners with SEND

Implementation

Since the peer review leaders have worked hard to ensure non-accredited learning processes are robust and all staff now fully appreciate the benefits to their learners. The decision was taken that non-accredited learning (RARPA) would focus on pre-entry and entry learners only. From September 2024, managers at both sites introduced a pilot, implementing a new range of documentation capturing learners' starting points. This included a range of baseline assessments for individuals at the start of their programme to establish learning gaps, from which appropriate targets could be derived. Rather than baselining all activities, leaders agreed to pilot only two practical assessments in the first instance with a view to developing these in the future. Training took place with all tutors on how to complete the assessment tools accurately and were quality assured by the curriculum managers and their programme leaders. A policy was created setting out good practice and teams agreed the number of targets appropriate for each course, how frequently they should be reviewed, and which baseline assessments should be carried out.

The new format and scoring method helped in establishing skills gaps in practical subjects and complemented EHCP outcomes. The baseline assessment process was completed at the end of November. Tutors are in the process of setting bespoke targets for their learners using both EHCP outcomes (core targets) and learning gaps evidenced in baseline assessment reports (subject targets). All learners will have visual aids to help them in remembering their targets and the college intends to use the back of learners' lanyards to support this. As learners start to achieve their targets a clear process is in place at the Dewsbury site to capture evidence on whether a learner has achieved a target or not. This includes assessment written comments alongside photographs and video evidence. Leaders and the quality team intend to carry out regular quality assurance activities on target setting including whether evidence against judgements on target achievement is sufficient.

Challenges faced

Leaders recognised a significant curriculum gap for high needs learners was the lack of a domestic environment at each site to enable learners to develop skills in household tasks such as preparing and cooking food or in how to keep a home clean and tidy. Whilst a suitable flat is in the progress of being developed at each site, this will take several months before it is completed. As a result, managers had to delay completion of baseline assessments for the domestic features of independent living, instead focusing on food hygiene and making hot drinks only. All acknowledge the two sites are at different developmental stages of introducing non-accredited learning. It was crucial that leaders were mindful of this when implementing staff training, recognising the varying levels of knowledge and understanding between sites. When implementing baseline assessments to capture levels and learning gaps for English and mathematics, tutors quickly recognised that using the college wide Century system is not always appropriate for high needs learners and, next year, will carry out initial assessment activities during transition in days using a different method. This will save time once learners commence their programme of study at the start of the year and will mean that tutors can focus on diagnostic assessments with their learners and establish more precise learning gaps much earlier in the year.

Outcomes

Approximately 100 learners and their families now benefit from a non-accredited programme of learning. Learners now make progress by achieving meaningful targets related to their communication or personal and social development skills. This will support them as they prepare for adulthood and learn to live fulfilled lives in their local communities.



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Outcomes (continued)

Pre-entry and entry one learners participate in a thorough baseline assessment process. Tutors are now able to set meaningful and challenging targets that are derived from learning gaps established at the start of their programme. As a result, progress against targets set will be clear to see.

Impact

Whilst it is too early to see the full benefits to learners, data indicates that attendance and retention is improving. For example, at the end of the last academic year the self-assessment report for the Dewsbury site evidences retention improved significantly, from 86.8% to 94.5%. Similarly, attendance improved by 1.5%. These improvements are attributed to learners becoming more motivated and they enjoy achieving in small manageable steps through achievement of targets rather than having to endure the challenges of achieving a qualification or end test at the end of the year.

More leavers move into positive destinations compared to the previous year. For example, overall, 92% gain paid or voluntary employment, move onto the next level of programme or access supported living. This contrasts with 84% the previous year when more learners moved into adult social care provision.

Key Learning And Next Steps

- Introduce simplified visual target reminders to support learners' ownership of targets and ensure targets set are based on precise learning gaps derived from baseline assessments and linked to EHCP outcomes. Leaders to consider introducing individual termly tutorials.
- Now that learning gaps are clear for each learner, introduce a baseline summary document for each learner to evaluate assessment outcomes and bring together termly priorities.
- Leaders to start and capture termly data relating to progress against non-accredited learning i.e. number of targets achieved against those set to provide percentage achievement for individual learners, pathways and eventually against protected characteristics. The intention is for this information to be captured using the college management information system 'markbook' and then included in the college self-assessment report.
- Transition teams to implement a process for new learners on transition-in days to participate in initial assessments, particularly for English and mathematics, to save time when learners begin their programme meaning initial assessments will be completed prior to learners starting their programme of study.
- The Huddersfield site to replicate the process at the Dewsbury site, to capture evidence of progress when learners achieve their targets.
- Leaders to consider introducing a standardised slide format for all sessions with high needs learners. This to include initial slides that relate to subject name, subject intent and targets set and then include plenary slides such as targets achieved, recapulation and next steps. As a result, tutors will always include a discussion around targets with learners in every session and this will become normal practice.
- The wider college quality team to introduce quality assurance documentation to quality assure non-accredited learning where learners are participating in this aspect of study.
- Leaders and the quality team to include precise details for each course on the policy document e.g. agreed frequency and number of targets, type of target (core/subject) and appropriate baseline assessments to carry out for each programme.



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