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## How culture and curriculum changes can better prepare young people for adulthood.

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## How culture and curriculum changes can better prepare young people for adulthood

### (FE) Peer Reviews

## Introduction

This case study highlights the role of the peer review strand (A4) and the impact the peer review has on learners and their families in Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).

ETF's Centre of Excellence for SEND, NATSPEC, were approached to conduct a peer review of North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC). 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.

With more multisite colleges, an emerging challenge is ensuring consistency across the sites and ensuring all sites offer the same experience in terms of quality and opportunities. This case study illustrates how a peer review focusing on changes to culture and curriculum focusing more on employment can positively impact a young learner's career pathway.

North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC) is a large multi-site further education college with seven campuses based within Leicestershire and Warwickshire. NATSPEC's review covered the foundation learning department, with approximately 140 learners, that operates from the Wigston and Nuneaton campuses. Learners study for 15 hours per week for one or two years. Their ages range from 16 to 25. Learners have a wide range of support needs from moderate to severe learning difficulties with abilities from pre-entry to L1. The provision aims to support young people in developing essential skills to access further education, employment and training. Programmes are flexible and based on individual starting points, personal goals and ambitions.

The department was concerned that learners were not being sufficiently challenged, and the curriculum was too narrow. Procedures for setting, monitoring and measuring progress were too cumbersome and onerous for staff. Links between the department and other areas of the college were not focused on sufficiently. The two college sites delivering foundation learning did not work together closely enough to share best practice and ensure consistency of delivery.

The college wanted an external specialist to visit the college, share/bounce off ideas, re-energise, grow and develop the department. They wanted a review of all aspects of progress reporting, curriculum planning and RARPA processes to ensure a more streamlined and robust method of capturing learner progress. The review aimed to provide support and advice to the department to instigate these changes.

## Implementation (continued)

Online and onsite meetings took place to share information and to review current practice for all foundation learners across the two sites. It was apparent that capturing learner progress was taking up too much time and did not involve learners sufficiently. The planned introduction of a new electronic portfolio took place shortly after the visit. This enables learners to upload examples of their achievements whereas previously staff had been required to record progress, frequently duplicating information. The platform ensures that small steps of achievement can be easily planned, and subsequent progress noted via text or images. The focus on outcomes and subsequent recording of progress and achievement is now much more to the forefront in lessons and work experience. Reviews of learning have become more regular, meaningful and evaluative rather than the previous lengthy descriptions of activities that were written up by staff. A learner noted, *'I like how I have course review every Friday morning.'*

Leaders spent five days post-visit on reviewing the culture of the department and planning for the implementation of changed practice. They considered what was working best at each site to ensure more consistency. The learning and skills manager then provided targeted training for staff to ensure they understood the proposed changes and were supported to implement them successfully. Each Pathway was given a more defined curriculum to provide learners with more choice of learning options.

A key area of focus has been the buy-in of staff and cultural changes, particularly regarding target setting. Previously many targets were not sufficiently linked to a robust baseline assessment process and failed to provide learners with clear achievable and relevant small steps of learning. Learners now have fewer targets that are more meaningful and provide clear measurable steps of achievement. Learners are better able to articulate their targets and can see their relevance to their current and future lives, linked to their preparing for adulthood targets as appropriate. Staff now have a better understanding of the purpose of their sessions, a clear rationale for activities and targets, and the importance of developing transferable skills.

The learning and skills manager and senior leaders have conducted many learning walks and short session visits to check on the implementation of the new pedagogical practices being promoted. Initially staff were uncomfortable with this, however, this has now become more 'normal' and staff and learners value and welcome these visits. Staff are now on board with the changes and can see the value of their involvement in quality improvement. Information from observations of learning feed clearly into appraisals which helps to drive further improvement and targeted support. The department has noted much more structure to sessions with an improved focus on differentiated learning aims and better checking of progress.

## Outcomes

As a result of the refined curriculum offer, learners and their families are now much clearer as to what to expect from each Pathway. Previously all learners took part in some form of cooking regardless of whether they already had these skills. The department now offers a much wider range of experiences, a greater focus on employability and a more clearly defined curriculum offers for each Pathway. For example, learners have been working with a local funeral director on sample memorial displays for their new electric funeral car while others have been working on an allotment. A learner noted, *'My favourite tasks so far are working at Wincanton, working with CEVA Logistics for project management, woodwork, shopping on a budget and working with the level 3 sports coaches.'*



## Outcomes (continued)

The department has increased its focus on sourcing employers to provide supported internship opportunities for learners. In the current academic year 27 learners are taking part in internships at, among other businesses, Tesco, Asda and Wincanton. The aim is to build on this and next year to have 60 learners at an increased range of locations. Productive links with prospective employers have already been forged. Current interns are developing very useful social skills working alongside other employees and taking part in staff development. They have spoken to other learners about the benefits of taking part in an internship to spread the word and to provide useful role models of what can be achieved.

## Impact and Next Steps

The visit reinforced the need for culture change within the department and highlighted suggested good practice and areas of focus. Planned next steps are to continue to develop pedagogy and the shared focus on quality improvement from staff at all levels. More vocational tasters will provide learners and their families with a greater understanding of future opportunities and progression routes. Increased links with more employers will provide greater work experience. The department plans to add significantly to the number of supported internships.

Sustaining the classroom visits and drop-ins will ensure any noted areas for development are swiftly addressed and good practice is celebrated and shared. Involving staff in attending and, in some cases, delivering training will continue to drive improvement. Regular contact between the two campuses will ensure better consistency of the curriculum offer and delivery are maintained.

## Key learning

The visit provided the impetus to implement change, 'take the plunge' and instigate improvements. Although there was some resistance from staff the department now has 'a real buzz.' One of the key learning points has been a change of culture within the department for the benefit of learner progress and achievement.

- More regular staff meetings and training sessions across sites have ensured better consistency across the two sites.
- An increasing number of 'tasters' within the overall college offer has led to learners and their families having a better understanding of opportunities for progression and improved links with other departments.
- Improved links to, and involvement with, the community have led to learners becoming more confident to interact with others.
- Ensuring all learners can take part in work experience has improved the links between classroom theory and practice and a better focus on outcomes.
- The introduction of a practical and accessible e-portfolio system has improved all aspects of setting targets, tracking and reviewing progress.

