

2015-16 ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AWARD FOR COLLEGE ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Employment Skills and Commercial Directorate

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

The Planning: Purpose and Process

- The college is located in an area with the highest unemployment rate in England, with only 60% of residents being economically active.
- The origins of this project lie in the college's commitment to provide high quality training to local people and local employers. The main aims of the project were:
 - to utilise and optimise government funding such as apprenticeships, workplace learning, European Social Fund (ESF) and classroom based contracts, and commercial fees to deliver training relevant to employers' needs
 - to improve success rates and quality of provision through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including employer feedback
 - to maintain and develop strategic relationships with stakeholders
 - to fulfil the college's mission: "to equip people with the skills to succeed".
- Employer engagement was a critical aspect of the college's core activity. The college had been delivering a range of programmes since 2005/6, including apprenticeships, workplace learning (WPL), employability programmes for the unemployed and a range of commercially-funded projects which employers have paid for. The college mostly worked with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), though it also has links with large employers, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the local council, the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

Planning into Practice

- In 2014/15, all employer facing and employer linked activity was integrated into a single coherent team, the Employment Skills and Commercial Directorate, comprising of 106 staff (17% of the college workforce). Leading the whole-college approach to employer engagement, the remit of the new team included "not in education, employment or training" (NEETs) delivery, pre-recruitment and bespoke employer courses, Prince's Trust, apprenticeships, WPL, commercial activity and coordination of work experience for 16 to 19-year-olds on study programmes. Employers were directly involved in each of these delivery strands.
- The diverse backgrounds of the managers employed in the Directorate meant that they were well-equipped to deal with the variety of employer-related activity carried out by the team.
- As a key part of the college's overall work, activity to support employers and employment opportunities for unemployed people benefitted from strategic and 'hands on' involvement from the college's Executive Management Team and Board of Governors.
- The college invested in state-of-the-art training facilities for construction, engineering and the plastics industry. Investment in training facilities for engineering workshops totalled £1.2m and a purpose-built construction training facility was developed in 2014/15 to house the college's warehousing and logistics provision.
- The college worked closely with employers and other stakeholders to ensure that curriculum content was relevant and up-to-date. All provision for apprentices and WPL was negotiated at an individual student level to ensure that content was directly relevant to the job role and career path. The same applied to employability provision, where content was negotiated with employers and JCP to ensure currency in the local labour market.

Continuing Development

- Employer related provision was embedded in the college quality calendar, including employer and learner surveys, observations of staff and external verification. Delivery teams met every two weeks to assess their progress and bring in 'intensive care' if required.

- Employer provision was regularly monitored by the Employment Skills Board (Quality and Performance), by the executive management team (EMT) and by the Board of Governors as part of the college's key performance indicators. Significant investments were made between 2013 and 2015 to support skills training, including £500,000 in engineering and the same amount in the plastics facility to maintain the college's market share as the leading provider in this sector.
- The Principal and senior managers are on the boards of local statutory and voluntary sector bodies and members of the planning and funding organisations, helping position the college to local employer and economic need.
- Equality and Diversity (E&D) was embedded in learning, for example with a best embedding of E&D award for staff, proactive engagement on the Personal Responsibility Values Education and Training (PREVENT) agenda, highlighting transgender issues and British values and being chosen by Ofsted as a case study for high needs.
- There college has several developments planned, including an increase in the range of apprenticeship frameworks, the announcement of a new ESF programme targeting 4,000 SMEs across the Black Country, additional investment of £300,000 in its Polymer Training and Innovation Centre (PTIC) and phase two of the Mental Health Pilot (part of a £6m England-wide programme involving 54 providers). They are also in negotiations with the council and area LEP to build a new city centre campus.

Outcomes/benefits to date

- The college had the following enrolments, success rates and retention in 2015/16:

Delivery area	No. enrolled and due to complete in 2015/16	Success rate	Retention
Commercial (H&S, BIT)	145	89%	98%
Commercial (automotive)	219	100%	99%
Commercial (PTIC)	580	100%	100%
Prince's Trust	260	89%	95%
H&S care	879	99%	99%
Pre-recruitment	389	97%	97%
Community learning	1132	99%	100%
Apprenticeships	505	80%	80%

- Since 2005/6, 4,900 apprenticeships and over 17,000 WPL qualifications have been delivered.
- Enrolments on classroom-based provision for employability training average at 600-800 per year.
- The conversion rate for progressing unemployed people into jobs is 40% - well above national performance for similar provision delivered by work programme primes and sub-contractors.
- The project's commercial delivery is well-regarded, particularly in the plastics sector, and generates an annual income of £1.09m. The college remained the leading provider for the UK plastics industry-
- In the most recent FE Choices employer survey, the college scored 9 out of 10 for 'offering training and/or assessment in a flexible way to meet employers' needs. The score for professionalism of staff involved in delivery was 9.1 out of 10.
- Collaborative working and support was provided for more than 10 FE colleges through half and full day practice events.
- Staff satisfaction was the highest in the country at 97%, with student satisfaction rarely falling below 92%.
- The award money contributed to costs for various initiatives including developing a Black Country-wide apprenticeships strategy, new software for planning and tracking apprenticeship delivery against profiles and targets, networking and best practise activity including direct support to seven colleges and a scoping exercise for further investment in the college's Polymer Training and Innovation Centre.

Relevance and Replication

- This project demonstrates in an exemplary way the merits and benefits of an FE college working closely in partnership with its city partners and employers for the benefit of its local economy and people.
- The college has worked hard to ensure high quality provision. It has also joined up high levels of deprivation and unemployment while attracting inward investment and recruitment and training for employers.
- This project provides an extremely valuable model of how to work for the benefit of a diverse community through meeting employers' needs.

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