



2015-16 GATEWAY AWARD FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

BARKING AND DAGENHAM COLLEGE

Access to HE Diploma Team

HIGH EXPECTATIONS, NO EXCUSES: HOW THE LEGAL CLINIC IS CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR SECOND CHANCE STUDENTS

The Planning: Purpose and Process

- The college is located in an area with high levels of unemployment and a lack of level 2, 3 and 4 skills. The college therefore required a different approach to inspire adults to engage in learning and, indeed, to pursue a profession such as the law.
- The Access to HE (Law) programme was a L3 full-time course aimed at 19+ adult students who were economically inactive or lacked the confidence to participate in education and training, with the law pathway being introduced in 2013.
- The objectives of the programme were:
 - to ensure the course enabled all students to progress to university
 - to provide students with an insight into the English legal system, exposure to employment routes and the components of criminal and civil law
 - to embed employability skills within the classroom, e.g. IT, research, presentation and debating skills
 - to provide all students with real work opportunities that would benefit their future career ambitions
 - to allow all students to leave the course with added value to their qualifications with confidence, aspiration and commitment to a better future
 - to increase the educational attainment of the local borough and increase the participation of a higher skilled workforce.

Planning into Practice

- The Access to HE (Law) course consisted of a 60 credit diploma, a one year course for adults to get into higher education (HE) or a higher level apprenticeship for the following year. The law pathway consisted of units which were approved by members of the board including the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Gateway Qualifications and higher education institution (HEI) representatives from around the region.
- The college used the high regard that it was held in by the local community to engage, increase awareness and nurture the desire to enter the legal profession and highlight available opportunities. Under-represented groups were targeted, including single parents, those who had been out of education for some time, the unemployed and hard-to-reach adults.
- The college set up a legal clinic to enable students to put their learning into practice and to gain professional experience. Managed by the course tutor and staffed by a team of dedicated law students, the clinic was open to the public to provide advice about employment, benefits, housing and immigration issues. The legal clinic was supported by LawWorks and the Law Society, with the former providing pro-bono barristers and solicitors to provide support on challenging cases.
- The work carried out by the students in the legal clinic was closely mapped against some of the assessment criteria within their diplomas. Furthermore, core skills such as English, maths and IT were integrated into the course and students were given the opportunity to practice their research, presentation and speaking skills through participation in moots and work with the college's enterprise team.
- The college created the timetable so that students with other commitments, such as children or jobs, were able to attend. Units were changed to meet the requirements of the legal clinic and assessment methods were tailored around it. As there was a blended learning approach to support studies, such as the use of a virtual learning environment (Moodle), interactive resources and podcasts, any students needing to go abroad were able to keep up with their work.
- 'Advice Street' (an area within the college where support services were located), provided a range of support for students. Travel allowances were given to those in financial hardship, as well as support for childcare and free breakfasts, where necessary.

- Staff were trained to ensure that students were equipped with the appropriate skills in order to provide legal advice.

Continuing Development

- The college has strong systems of quality assurance with classroom observations of all staff, including those on the access programme. All services are evaluated and continually developed. The course is validated by LawWorks, is supported by local lawyers and has very good reports from the awarding body.
- One of the students was appointed marketing manager of the clinic, following a thorough interview process. She has successfully raised the profile of the legal clinic and law course at the college, as well as working hard to develop new partnerships.
- Going forward, the focus of the course will be to forge closer links with local police and the council and increase promotion to further the legal clinic's reach. For example, the college has been asked by the local police to hold legal advice sessions in the station, affording students the unique opportunity to act as the 'appropriate adult' for detained youths.
- The college is planning to introduce a higher level apprenticeship for legal secretaries and paralegals, as well as looking to register the legal clinic as a charity so that it can become a recognised centre for legal aid in the community.

Outcomes/benefits to date

- The college is highly regarded in the local community.
- The success rate for the project was 91% in 2014/15, with 90% of students progressing to their first choice of university and undergraduate course. In the same year, there was a 13% increase in recruitment to the Access to Law programme.
- In 2014/15, three students received university scholarships and 14 students secured training placements.
- Feedback from students highlighted the many challenges and barriers that they faced, and how the programme opened up real opportunities in a profession that local residents often consider to be beyond their reach.
- The college spent the award money on resources for the legal clinic such as laptops, printers, desk space, marketing materials and a student admin assistant for four hours per week.

Relevance and Replication

- This project is highly effective for individuals who have been out of education for some time, and those who are economically inactive.
- The provision has wider relevance and applicability which makes it of value to other colleges as an exemplar of good practice and innovation in relation to groups who find colleges hard to access.
- Student feedback confirmed that both the project and the college provided a 'dynamic nucleus at the heart of the community', as highlighted in Baroness Sharp's major report in 2012.

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