

2015-16 AQA AWARD FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

ABINGDON AND WITNEY COLLEGE

Curriculum Team

THE FUTURES PROGRAMME

The Planning: Purpose and Process

- In 2011, two years before the sector-wide introduction of Study Programmes, the college developed an innovative college-wide curriculum programme model for 16 to 18-year-olds in conjunction with employers. This programme required all 16 to 18-year-old students and their course leaders to radically rethink their approach to full-time study.
- The key objectives of the programme were:
 - to improve the retention of 16 to 18-year-old students by increasing the vocational relevance of their programmes of study
 - to increase the percentage of 16 to 18-year-old students who experience real work situations through work experience placements from 30% to 100%
 - to increase the percentage of 16 to 18-year-old students progressing to a positive destination including employment, apprenticeships or further/higher study
 - to increase the percentage of 16 to 18-year-old students continuing to study GCSE English and maths to A* - C and beyond
 - to enable all 16 to 18-year-old students to develop wider transferable skills as a holistic part of their programme of study which therefore gives them the competitive edge when applying for employment.

Planning into Practice

- The scope and focus of the programme was developed through extensive consultation between the senior management team, curriculum staff, employers and students. This consultation led to the complete redesign of the curriculum to include cross-curricula programme work, an integrated core programme, the recruitment of SPMs and an increased emphasis on the development of English and maths skills.
- The *Futures Programme* was led by the Assistant Principal, Teaching Learning and Assessment, who directed the development and strategic direction of the programme. Key elements of the programme were led by a quality lead for *Futures*, including student performance managers (SPMs), core programme, work experience and programme awards. Heads of Faculties were responsible for the ongoing management of the *Futures Programme* within their areas, while all course leaders had accountability for ensuring that all of their students developed key transferable skills for employment and progression to higher education.
- As part of the implementation of the *Futures Programme*, additional resource was provided to encourage and support industry specialists to make the move into teaching. This ensured that all teaching on the programme was contextualised and relevant to the real world of work.
- The college made the development of English and maths skills an integral part of the project from its inception. Students were able to develop these core skills as part of their vocational studies as well as through bespoke classes.
- Students worked for real clients on employer-led live briefs which meant that they experienced a realistic context which greatly improved the line of sight to work. It was each student's responsibility to liaise with employers and organise these placements, though they were supported by the college, which engendered a sense of accountability for attaining these skills.
- Project based learning skills were integrated into the curriculum at all levels. At level 1, this began in a supportive and 'safe' way, progressing to students working across peer groups with external employers to deliver real work-related projects at level 3.
- All students followed a core programme which developed key transferable skills such as problem solving, using techniques such as Gap Analysis, Constructive Controversy and De Bono's Thinking Hats (2009). As part of the

programme, independent learning skills were taught to students so that they were fully prepared to plan and organise their work successfully.

- Teaching staff spent two days in industry every year in order to maintain their knowledge of current practices.

Continuing Development

- The continuing impact and ongoing effectiveness of the programme were regularly monitored at course, curriculum and college levels. Six weekly KPI meetings, led by a member of the senior management team (SMT), were held with all curriculum management teams to evaluate progress and monitor all elements of the *Futures Programme*.
- Course leaders and curriculum managers evaluated the quality of the programme in termly self-assessment reports in which they analysed the progress made by students in developing key transferable skills. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in relation to the programme was evaluated as part of a lesson observation process managed by the faculty Quality Leads.
- All students on the programme are now working towards gaining a 'passport to your future', developed with and endorsed by local employers. This will provide them with certified evidence of transferable skills and will be achievable at gold, silver and bronze standards, dependent upon the depth and breadth of transferable skills developed.
- Students use ProMonitor to self-assess their initial confidence levels and track their development.
- The college is planning to run sessions for level 3 students on dedicated weeks within the college calendar. The aim of each session is to incorporate the local community and to develop more social action based projects.

Outcomes/benefits to date

- According to 2015 figures, over 1,500 students were studying with the college on a *Futures Programme*.
- The *Futures Programme* was identified by Ofsted and QAA as an example of best practice in 2014, leading to the college being contacted by several providers and disseminating its innovative approach to developing transferable skills.
- As at 2015, the number of students progressing to Higher Education (HE) increased by 23%.
- Retention rates for full-time 16 to 18-year-old students increased to 93%, success rates to 86% and rates of progression to positive destinations to 97% in 2014/15.
- Success rates for GCSE English and maths improved by 12% from 2010/2011 to 2013/14.
- The award money contributed to the cost of bespoke training for Student Performance Managers to develop their knowledge and confidence in delivering the core sessions and to provide them with a qualification in personal tutoring. Furthermore, the award money has been invested in a broader enrichment programme with students, allowing further transferable skills to be developed by external organisations, as well as helping with the recruitment and training of a number of student enrichment activators.

Relevance and Replication

- This programme has many exemplary and innovative features which would be helpful to other colleges addressing the teaching of transferable skills, use of programmes in teaching and learning and mutually productive relations with employers.

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