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Sharing Innovative Approaches to
Implementing 16 – 19 Study
Programmes

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College

“As a successful Sixth Form College which is also inclusive, it is essential that we ensure that students acquire the study skills needed for achievement of their A levels within their Study Programmes. This can be done through enrichment activities.”

Steve Hunnisett, Vice Principal

About the College

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College (QE) serves a diverse community attracting students from South West Durham, North Yorkshire and Teesside as well as from the Borough of Darlington itself. The college is the major provider of GCE AS and A-level courses for young people in the area, enrolling nearly 2000 full time students. The vast majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and are following advanced-level programmes, although part-time adult provision has increased and Art Foundation courses are also provided successfully.

Partnership work is seen as particularly strong and has contributed significantly to raising aspirations in the area and ensuring students are on the correct courses. The college’s progression to HE is exemplified by its ranking of 15th out of all sixth form colleges nationally in the Sutton Trust’s recent survey of students accepted at university. This is notable given the inclusive nature of the college; the majority of students come from backgrounds without prior experience of HE.

A wide variety of extra-curricular activity is undertaken and volunteering is a strength of the college. Support is provided for disadvantaged people in the local community but volunteers have also travelled to Romania to assist a Roma group there¹. The President of the college’s Student Association came up with the idea of Project 450 to mark QE’s 450th anniversary. Wishing to promote the benefits of voluntary work, a target was set for students to carry out 450 acts of volunteering and to record these on an online portal. The target was very quickly exceeded.

As well as benefiting disadvantaged communities, volunteering is seen as enhancing students’ work related skills and employability.

Study Programmes – building from A Levels

A concern for this college and similar 6th Form colleges with a predominantly AS and A level curriculum is the volume of activity to be provided and funded as Study Programmes become operational. This is exemplified by the AS level cohort of students, the majority of whom take 4 AS courses in their first year at the college. About 10% of first year students, the highest achievers, also take a 5th AS

¹ <http://www.qeliz.ac.uk/latest-news/project-450-volunteering-awards>

level in Critical Thinking as a 'stretch and challenge' option. In addition many students take part in supplementary studies such as a certificate in a modern language, first aid, sport awards such as community sport leader, cabin crew awards and similar activities.

Almost all second year students take 3 A2 levels but about 40% also take an additional enrichment option, including an Extended Project or AS levels in Critical Thinking, Science in Society, Citizenship or World Development. These enrichment options are generally delivered in 2 or 2.5 hours per week (72 – 90 hours per year). Many second year students also take part in Supplementary Programme courses and each year a few second year students take 4 A2 levels, or 3 A2 levels plus an additional AS level. This may be because their career choice has changed and an AS level in a new subject will help their progression. In addition, any student taking a Modern Foreign Language at AS or A2 has an hour per week of conversation classes with a native speaker.

With regard to English and maths GCSE, all students who have not gained a grade C previously are required to enroll on resist GCSE courses, supported by Functional Skills. These re-sit courses have high A*-C success rates - almost no students at QE progress from the college without having achieved a grade C in English and maths.

Enrichment activities are offered to all students within a flexible timetable and are taken up by many. However, within the Study Programme context one issue will be ensuring that the hours necessary to complete the whole programme are made up by each and every student.

In this educational context, matching hours of study for students on personalised timetables with the sustainable resources necessary to monitor and support progression and achievement is a challenge. It is expected that many first year students will have planned hours well in excess of 600 but the college is not at this point intending to put a cap on total student hours. It has a very strong principle which underpins all student guidance: each student's programme of study should be the most appropriate programme for them as an individual, to enable them to achieve their potential and move on to the next stage in their lives. However, over the next two years, as funding protection is removed, the larger programmes will require reconsideration for their affordability.

Scheduling Study Programmes in 2013-14

The college welcomes the flexibility that the introduction of 16-19 study programmes has brought but has significant concerns looking to the future as to the sustainability of the broad range of A level courses offered to students,

alongside the additional enrichment options available to broaden and deepen students' experience and qualifications.

In addressing these issues for 2013/14, the college decided to schedule AS level and A2 courses for approximately 155 hours per year. Tutorial programmes about 36 hours per year, with supplementary courses and sport activities each being from 30-72 hours per year. In year 12, those students taking 4 AS plus tutorials are therefore timetabled for about 650 hours per year.

In year 13, students taking 3 AS levels plus tutorials may need additional hours on their timetables to make sure that they count as full time for a Study Programme, i.e. over 540 hours per year. Some of these students take part in supplementary programme activities but this is seen as not consistent enough to ensure that all are 'full time'. Also, the college recognises that many of these students need help and support in study skills to maximise their Advanced Level achievement.

Consequently, the college plans for these students to be timetabled for two hours per week (72 hours p.a.) of 'Enrichment Studies' through which they will take an additional qualification: Improving Own Learning, Key Skill level 3. This will ensure they are given the additional support and structure needed to help them manage the GCSE – AS level transition, developing good independent study habits to support their retention, their learning and their achievement. Targets and progress will be recorded using the college on line 'progress tracker' system.

Work Experience

For both first year and second year students work experience is offered but, apart from one applied GCE A level, is not directly linked to a student's Study Programme. All students do, however, have the opportunity to get assistance in arranging work experience and for some HE courses such as teaching, medicine, and dentistry it is an expectation. This is arranged individually as career plans and UCAS possibilities develop. Hence, although work experience hours will be recorded once they are confirmed, it will be difficult to include them in the planned hours, at the start of the year, for all students who may ultimately take part.



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2-5 Stedham Place, London WC1A 1HU

T: 020 7034 9900 E: enquiries@aoc.co.uk www.aoc.co.uk

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