Sharing Innovative Approaches to Implementing 16 – 19 Study Programmes

Barking and Dagenham College
“We work closely with employers so that students can experience work placements and real work projects, ensuring they really do understand what the business environment is like and what is expected of them as an employee. Furthermore, we support and encourage students with their own business ideas.”

Cathy Walsh, Principal

About the College

Barking & Dagenham College (BDC) is a large general further education college catering for students of all ages and situated on the eastern boundary of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, approximately 11 miles east of central London. Unemployment in the area is high, with one out of every eight people actively seeking employment or training, making it the fourth highest London Borough.

The college has approximately 3,300 full-time and 7,500 part-time students, with some 550 apprentices from intermediate to higher level. The proportion of students attaining five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics on entry to the college is below the average for similar colleges. Entry to higher education in the area is lower than the national average. About 19% of residents have no formal qualifications and, since the closure of the large manufacturing industries, the majority of firms, at least 82%, are small to medium, employing 10 people or less.

Vocational courses are offered across all sector subject areas and at all levels from Entry to Level 3, with the opportunity to progress to HE at the college available on a growing number of programmes. The offer is distinctively vocational with entrepreneurial skills built-in to many programmes. This is one element of BDC’s role as a “Gazelle” college, one of 20 in the UK. Gazelle Group colleges aim to develop innovative learning models and new partnerships with business to deliver an improved outcome for students, their communities and the economy. This aim is taken forward into BDC’s approach to Study Programmes.

Ofsted noted in the college’s recent inspection report that “...The majority of students develop excellent entrepreneurial and employability skills, such as team-working, communication, resilience, that improve their aspirations and build their self-confidence ...Students acquire sound financial and literacy skills through their everyday studies and through the college’s Entrepreneurs’ Academy,”

1 http://www.gazellecolleges.com
benefiting greatly from the excellent enrichment programme that includes volunteering in the community."

**Study Programmes**

The college recognised early in its curriculum planning that the government’s reforms to 14-19 education would require significant changes for the 2013/14 year. It created a new on-line Individual Learning Plan (e-ILP) in 2012 and has refined this to ensure that students’ own record keeping tracks all their learning and achievements as Study Programmes are initiated.

From September 2013, Study Programmes for 16 – 18 year olds at BDC will comprise of at least 540 hours, with the vocational qualification comprising of at least half of the hours. All students will also work towards a Functional Skill in both English and/or Maths, where relevant. Those without a grade A*-C in these subjects will be offered the opportunity to achieve this. Students will also work towards an employability qualification if this is not covered in the main programme. The programming of Functional Skills is seen as providing both educational and financial challenges - in course costs - and these are being responded to by adapting modes of delivery and recognising where these skills have been achieved through, for example, work experience (see below).

For learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, BDC is utilising Edexcel’s ‘Skilled for life’ units. All students will have an hour a week tutorial where specific learning modules can prepare them for their work experience.

**Work experience and employability**

The fundamental focus of the college on employability and self-employability is carried forward into the planning for Study Programmes. There is a minimum number of hours allocated for work experience (WE) which is recorded by students in a WE Log but it is recognised that not all relevant activities will occur in those sessions. Hours for WE range from 36 to 72 (or higher where there is a requirement for more, such as in some Child Care courses). The college has a Work Experience Coordinator to ensure that employers have a regular and systematic link with vocational areas, supported by a new cross-college employer database.

The college emphasises the importance of capturing all relevant employability experience in a Student Diary. Students were consulted about the format and

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2 http://www.barkingdagenhamcollege.ac.uk/en/about-the-college/college-news.cfm/page/ofsted-praises-entrepreneurial-excellence
style of this diary for the 2013/14 year and with the onset of Study Programmes some changes were made. The diary is used by the student for logging all learning relevant to the Study Programme but with the emphasis on ensuring that any activity that promotes employability is recorded. This should include, but go beyond, formal allocated WE hours. For example, BDC offers its students real, paid work opportunities. Briefs and commissions are taken from external clients and these are matched with the individual student’s skills, to create realistic learning opportunities and to enhance CVs. This activity is recorded in the diary.

The Student Diary is to be developed as an online record during 2013/14. This will require testing in relation to the existing e-ILP to ensure the best elements of both are retained and interact effectively. For the start of the new academic year the college intends that students will record their activity, including work and employability experience, in the hard-copy Diary and transfer information periodically to the e-ILP, with tutor guidance. The e-ILP itself allows all the criteria the college has identified for promoting employability to be highlighted.