Sharing Innovative Approaches to Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes

Blackpool Sixth Form College
“We have used the Study Programme framework to make English and, particularly, maths far more relevant to students’ needs”

Gail Yeadon, Deputy Principal

About the college

Blackpool Sixth Form College serves all the communities within a 20 mile radius of the college across the Fylde coast of Lancashire. The local population of some 330,000 live mainly in the heavily populated towns of Blackpool, Lytham St. Annes, Thornton-Cleveleys, Poulton and Fleetwood or in the adjacent small rural towns and villages. Approximately half the students live in Blackpool, with the remainder living in the Wyre and Fylde boroughs of Lancashire.

The college’s core activity is the provision of full-time education for learners aged 16 to 18. There are currently 2,054 full-time students on Level 3 programmes and 88 on Level 2 programmes. Many of the learners attending the college are the first in their families to follow General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-level or Level 3 BTEC provision. Of the current cohort, 990 students (48%) are identified as “closing the gap” students based on their low family incomes. We track this cohort’s attendance, retention, progress and progression throughout the year, ensuring that they make progress equal to or better than their peers. We use a suite of support measures and interventions based upon national research and designed to support all students to make excellent progress. These range from regular, quality feedback with specific next-step advice to 1:1 meetings with our Futures Team to clarify a career path and gain commitment to their studies.

The college is currently completing the fourth phase of a major campus redevelopment programme. Recent additions to the campus include new teaching blocks, an engineering suite including a workshop, a laboratory, IT facilities and teaching spaces for both electronics and engineering, a dining area and a redeveloped sports hall.

The college’s mission statement is ‘Inspiring learning, developing mind and character, building your future’.

Blackpool ranks as the sixth most deprived borough in the country. There has been a significant worsening of its ranking in recent years (12th in 2007 and 24th in 2004). This deprivation is particularly severe in localised pockets across Blackpool, with 58,500 residents (41% of the total population) living in the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas and 38,529 residents in the most deprived 10% (27% of the population). The college is situated in Park Ward, which is one of the most deprived wards.
Employment in the area is heavily dependent on tourism, leisure and related services. There are very high levels of worklessness in Blackpool and Fleetwood. Economic inactivity is at 27% in Blackpool (UK 23%, North West 25%).

In terms of Key Stage 4 attainment, the percentage of Blackpool school students achieving GCSE A*-C grades including English and maths in 2012 was 47.9%, compared to the national average of 59.4%.

High levels of population mobility prevalent in Blackpool impact disproportionately on children and young people. The annual turnover of pupils in some schools can be as high as 30% and “transient” pupils consistently under-perform in comparison to stable pupils.

**Study Programmes**

The college offers a wide variety of Study Programmes, with over 50 courses in almost any combination. They are designed around prior attainment and to meet our learners’ educational and career aspirations. The college has created career pathways which help the students to map their future in specific employment sectors. We offer four main types of programmes: the A Level Programme, the Gifted and Talented Programme, the Advanced Applied Programme (this can be a combination of BTECs and A Levels) and the Level 2 Programme. For students who come to the college without GCSE grade C in Mathematics or in English, these qualifications become a part of their Study Programme. All programmes include Personal Tutor sessions, an additional studies option and an enrichment choice. Annualised hours depend on the Study Programme taken; for example, we have 361 students who have Study Programmes totaling 651 annualised hours and 330 students who have Study Programmes totaling 808 annualised hours.

**Mathematics**

We have an innovative and cohesive approach to raising the level of mathematical attainment for students who have not already achieved a good GCSE pass in maths. Students who come to the college with a grade D study GCSE Mathematics and those with below a grade D study Functional Skills Mathematics, as a springboard to GCSE. The GCSE course is tailored to what was the old intermediate tier. Students are enrolled onto the higher tier course and the content covered is very much that which overlapped both higher and foundation tiers. This means we can introduce new content that those who have studied only foundation tier may not have come across before, keeping the course accessible to the students whilst offering fresh, interesting content and challenge for all.
The Functional Skills course is completely contextual; the focus is on how students use mathematics in the real world. For example, the students use actual timetables (rather than those simply in an exam paper), they mock up booking holidays using financial skills, work to budgets and experiment with various elements of capacity to see how the skills they learn are used beyond the college.

An extremely thorough system of assessment for learning (AfL) is employed to provide highly personalised support to students. Ongoing classroom assessment in the form of mock exams and MyMaths\(^1\) are used to assess summative work, with the integration of various AfL techniques, such as the use of post-it notes to feedback to the tutor and provide feed-forward guidance to the students. No student is allowed to hide from a question and all have to contribute in class discussions. We have recruited expert staff and have built much stronger links between Additional Learning Support and mathematics tutors. We have a fully integrated mentoring programme in place. Students who have a particularly low grade profile (often those on the Level 2 Programme) have a further session of mathematics each week within a much smaller group of 6-8. This means that students have an additional chance to practice the content they have covered that week with a mathematics specialist.

An example of the success of our Level 2 Mathematics programme is a student who successfully gained her GCSE Mathematics with us in 2011/12 and is now not only studying A2 Mathematics but is also studying AS Further Mathematics in Upper Sixth. We strive to change the way students think about Mathematics from “I don’t like it” to “I need to achieve this”, a necessity if students are to be successful in their future education and careers.

**English**

As with numeracy, we attach an extremely high priority to boosting the literacy skills of students who have not previously obtained a GCSE pass in English. Students who come to the college with a grade D or below in GCSE English study GCSE English Language. We collate the GCSE exam result data from their secondary schools and use this along with internal diagnostic testing to ensure the students are in the right groups and that tutors can differentiate effectively. As students who enroll at the college have taken GCSE English with a range of different examination boards, we do not attempt to convert the original, but teach the course holistically over the year with WJEC. The department chooses different texts and an approach that enables the students to feel they are not simply repeating what they have done; it is “sold” as a stepping-stone or a complement to a Level 3 programme. Using more mature topics and linking the course into

\(^1\) http://www.mymaths.co.uk
current affairs ensure that students feel they are learning something new as well as improving their English and literacy skills.

The GCSE English course begins with an enrichment day, which helps the students to feel that we are investing in them and an employability week to highlight the importance of literacy and GCSE English for their future career. The course is continually reviewed using student focus groups.

Comments on the course for 2013/14 have included: “It's better than high school”, “teachers support students; they will always help you if you are struggling” and “lessons are at the right level”.

We have a whole-college approach to literacy; each term is dedicated to developing a specific area of literacy which links to examination success, both interpreting the question correctly and responding in an articulate and cohesive manner, particularly at high grade level, through to interviews and to written applications for higher education and employment with training. The focus on literacy is at all levels and in all courses.

With an eye on the future, we aim to recruit curriculum leaders in the Mathematics and English departments, to commence August 2014, to have a specific focus on Level 2 English and Level 2 Mathematics. This not only provides specialist support for our students studying Level 2 English and Mathematics but also opens the recruitment opportunity to a wider potential cohort of candidates.