Sharing Innovative Approaches to Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes
Cambridge Regional College
“We describe our Study Programmes as ‘Passports to Success’, as the skills our learners develop directly promote their employability.”

Alan Jones, Deputy Principal, Teaching and Learning

About the college

Cambridge Regional College (CRC) is a large, further education college situated in the northern part of Cambridge City, primarily serving the communities of Cambridgeshire, North Essex, West Suffolk, East Bedfordshire and North East Hertfordshire. We have strong links with local schools, other colleges and universities.

Our last inspection report from Ofsted described CRC as a “good college” with “outstanding provision”, “strong and highly effective leadership” where “achievement and standards are good”.

There are approximately 3,200 full time and 3,000 part time students, with over 4,000 apprentices. Most full-time learners are 16-18 although there is an increasing number of adults. 94% of our students successfully progress to employment or further/higher education each year.

A significant number of learners are in employment studying through evening classes, apprenticeships or workplace learning. The college works with more than 2,200 employers. A more recent focus for the college has been our work with the unemployed to support them back into employment.

Our specialism is courses up to and including Level 3 although we offer a small range of prescribed higher education programmes at Level 4 and Level 5 which is planned to expand, and non-prescribed higher education up to Level 7.

We are one of the largest FE providers of programmes for overseas students, with c1000 students from countries spanning Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East.

Our campus, next to the Science Park in Cambridge, is exemplary with excellent, dedicated accommodation for the wide range of vocational programmes on offer.

Study Programme structure

Our Study Programmes are structured around the following key components: a substantial vocational qualification; additional specialist skills (not covered by the
qualification); English and maths; professional skills; and personal skills. We have “branded” this framework as the CRC “Passport to Success” (further details below).

The allocation of programme hours for each component varies between programmes, levels and individual learners, within certain parameters, depending on needs and progression aims. All programmes have at least 540 hours allocated and the average is around 600. Programmes run over 36 weeks.

A minimum of 300 hours is allocated to the main qualification but we have worked hard to focus our culture and process on the aim of progression and have moved away from the concept of set “guided learning hours” for a qualification. Instead, we ask curriculum teams to focus on the skills that will really enable a learner to progress to higher levels or to employment. In many cases, particularly at lower levels, the answer is English and maths and the wider, professional and personal skills, rather than the qualification alone. Our structure thus has a “pyramid” shape at level 1 with transferrable skills at the base and the qualification at the tip; at level 3 the pyramid is inverted with more time allocated to the qualification and other specialist skills.

From 2014-15, all learners, including those who already have GCSE A*-C, will have at least 54 hours of English and maths within their programmes. For learners with A*-C, this will take the form of “elective, enhancement” modules which are being designed jointly by vocational staff and English and maths specialists. These will embed level 3 English and maths skills in a vocational context. Learners without A*-C will attend Functional Skills or GCSE sessions which will be “stacked” in the timetable to coincide with the electives. From 2014-15 we will increase the Functional Skills sessions from 1 to 1.5 hours per week. GCSE will be delivered through two 1.5 hour sessions (3 hours).

The wider, personal and professional skills make up the rest of the Study Programme and, particularly at level 1 and 2, are the key to enabling learners to progress. These components form substantial and important part of our Passport to Success programmes. The challenge has been to build a meaningful and coherent curriculum to define and develop these skills. Our approach to this is set out below.

**A strategic approach**

In order to put a meaningful framework around the non-qualification, transferrable skills elements of Study Programmes, we have developed a concept of a “Passport for Success” for learners. The Passport is organised into categories of professional and personal skills which, in addition to their main vocational qualification, will enable learners to progress either to employment or higher study.
A further innovation is that, within this framework, we have developed at each level and for every course a set of learner skills and competencies which will provide both a basis of the Passport curriculum and a set of learner outcomes.

**Consulting Learners and Employers**

Our strategic approach includes designing professional and personal skill programmes through direct consultation with employers and with learners. We have conducted research with employers in specific sectors and have built the competencies around their feedback. So, for example, in the Passport for Success for Catering, under the heading “work skills” we have described in detail the skills that employers in the catering sector say they value and we will design our curriculum to develop these. We already have endorsement from some key employers and our aim is to secure this for every programme, so that our learners will achieve a holistic set of outcomes which have been designed and approved by prospective employers.

As well as enabling us to focus on skills that employers most value and producing real, marketable benefits for learners, the process is a valuable way of building strategic relationships with employers. We have found that employers appreciate being consulted on the detail of the skills we should try to develop in our learners and, at the same time, they gain a better understanding of the potential in young learners. The consultation enables an open discussion about the view often reported to be held by employers that “young people don’t have the skills we need”.

The consultation process is on-going and a forthcoming forum for dialogue will be our summer term Learner Conference. The conference will bring together learners and employers to work collaboratively on a series of challenges. Following completion of the challenges, the employer representatives will work with the learners to identify the Passport to Success skills they demonstrated during the task. The learners and employers will provide feedback on the appropriateness of the Passport skills and will suggest additions and/or amendments which will inform further development of the framework.

We have also built the Passport skills into our electronic Individual Learning Plans (eILP) and learner tracking system. This enables targets to be set and progress measured against the holistic development of progression skills. Learners have remote access to the eILP and are beginning to take ownership of their Passport skills targets. The skills are developed in a variety of ways, with work experience and simulated work experience a key vehicle. The Passport skills provide a framework for work experience so that learners, tutors and employers are clear about the objectives for the placement.
The eILP tracking of skill development will feed into a CV that the learners can take to employers or higher education providers. The next step in the project is to develop a process of summative assessment for these skills. We have already put into place an initial course-specific assessment process, using active, team-based tasks to measure learners against the skills profile during induction. Our plan is to introduce a similar but extended activity at the end of the Study Programme to reassess skills and measure distance travelled. We are aiming to involve employers in this process so that Study Programmes can be further enhanced for employability.