Sharing Innovative Approaches to Implementing 16 – 19 Study Programmes

Chesterfield College
“When executed with innovation and flexibility Study Programmes can become a really effective opportunity for personalisation and bespoke provision, which can improve both success rates and learner satisfaction.”

Debra Gray, Assistant Principal - Curriculum Development and Delivery

About the College

Chesterfield College is a General Further Education College (GFE), serving a large catchment area in Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire, South Sheffield and beyond. The economy of North East Derbyshire was traditionally based upon the coal, steel and heavy engineering industries. Although these have declined, manufacturing remains a strength in the local economy. The western areas of the district are rural, with employment in agriculture and tourism.

In 2012/13 the College enrolled 3644 full time learners and 2093 apprentices. Around 86% of full time learners are 16–18. The College offers courses across a variety of levels in 14 of the 15 Sector Subject Areas and some vocational Higher Education. The most significant curriculum areas are Heath, Public Services and Care, Construction and Planning, Retail and Commercial Enterprise and Business Administration and Law.

Study Programmes

Study Programmes have been designed in the context of the College’s new holistic curriculum planning model, developed in response to Professor. Alison Wolf’s review of vocational education for 14-19s, which in itself contributed to the creation of Study Programmes. The Chesterfield model links curriculum and resource planning to promote effectiveness and efficiency in programme delivery. Although this whole-College approach had become established it was enhanced for 2013/14 in the expectation that the Wolf recommendations would require a step-change, from the planning of qualifications to the planning of integrated programmes. The College has developed a model for this systematic approach¹.

A whole college approach

The College audited its existing programmes for 16 to 19s to ensure they were in line with the published requirements for Study Programmes and the accompanying funding guidance. This included ensuring that the requirement for

¹ Ensuring your curriculum is Wolf Compliant: Chesterfield College on the Excellence Gateway. http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26675
a substantive qualification at the heart of the programme was met as it was possible that within the previous curriculum model some programmes might not meet this requirement. It was also found that, as courses had been personalised, there were current students whose programmes fell below the 540 annual hours now required as the minimum for a full-time student and below the 600 hours recommended for Study Programmes.

This audit also indicated that an earlier start was needed to the formal curriculum planning process for 2013/14 than had been the case in previous years. This was to ensure that the teaching and learning plans for Study Programmes were aligned to the resources needed to deliver them well, within available budgets. The revised planning process brought together curriculum, management information and finance staff from the start, enabling the College to move away from a “top-down” to a “feed-up” process.

In planning for Study Programmes in 2013/14, a new proprietary Management Information System (MIS) tool, 4cast®, has been introduced to replace the College’s former spreadsheet-based system. This new system enables staff to identify, cost and relate together each component of learning. One of the benefits identified has been the capacity to plan delivery of the Maths, English and non-qualification elements of the Study Programmes across the College, enabling the educational goals to be supported by efficient timetabling.

The planning process for the 2013/14 academic year was completed earlier than usual in April 2013. This enabled the College to ensure that each individual learner was able to have a “bespoke” Study Programme. Learners in individual cohorts may now be on the same main learning aim, but have fully-individualised additional studies, Maths, English, enrichment and work related activity.

Focused use of management information identifies the commonalities in learners’ programmes to ensure efficiency in timetabling. It then signposts the requirements of each individual student to inform their Individual Learning Plans. This approach to personalising learning resulted in the College winning an AoC Beacon award in 2012 for Innovation in FE and has been developed further in the planning for Study Programmes.

Trevor Burton, Head of Learning – Engineering commented on the “feed-up” approach, which links curriculum staff across the College with finance and MI colleagues:

2 A software package modelling the curriculum with links to the funding available to support it. [http://www.drakelane.co.uk/4cast](http://www.drakelane.co.uk/4cast)
“Not only do we have a better understanding of the big picture, we can analyse everything we want to make sure that our courses meet learner needs and employer needs. We want to make our learners more and more employable”.

Continuing professional development

The holistic system of preparing the curriculum plan for 2013/14 has required a fresh approach to preparing the staff as well. Familiarisation with the new Study Programme requirements took place at the start of the planning cycle, at events where staff from across the College were brought together. The planning requirements for the next academic year were shared and the roles of each team, and team member, were explained and understood. The interactive methods used in programme planning have encouraged staff to deal with any issues as they arise. This has enabled the “feed-up” approach to developing the new Study Programmes to be effective, leading to earlier completion of the Curriculum Plan than in previous years.
particularly with non-qualification activity, as shown below.