Sharing Innovative Approaches to Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes

Gateway Sixth Form College
“Study Programmes have provided the opportunity to design the timetable to meet the students’ needs and prepare them for their progression, either on to the next level, university or employment, by giving them the qualifications and skills required in today’s society. Colleges have to be more proactive in working with employers and identifying opportunities to develop their students’ potential.”

Joy Allman, Vice Principal Curriculum

About the college

Gateway College is one of three sixth form colleges in Leicester and is located approximately three miles north-east of the city centre. Two general further education colleges and four schools with sixth forms also provide education and training for people in the city who are over the age of 16.

Leicester is a densely-populated city with a highly diverse population. Levels of deprivation and unemployment rates in the city are above average. Gateway College is not a typical sixth form college as it offers a wide range of provision at foundation and intermediate level, as well as vocational subjects at Level 3, in addition to its GCE advanced-level courses. Attainment on entry to the college is lower than the average for sixth form colleges, as acknowledged by Ofsted in our recently-published inspection report: “A large majority of entrants to the college have low prior attainment”\(^1\).

The college has increased its student intake over the last 3 years by 14%, to 1,500 students.

Study Programmes

When designing our Study Programmes the following were taken in to account:

**Our Level 3 Curriculum** – Students must have 5 GCSEs A*-C including English and some subjects also require maths GCSE A*-C. The provision overall is divided 50-50 between academic (A level provision) and vocational (BTEC and OCR courses ranging from Certificate to Diploma). Only students in Health & Social Care attended work placement.

**Our Level 2 Curriculum** – Students mainly study a vocational programme and retake English and maths as required. Again, not many students attended work placement as part of their course.

---

\(^1\) [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/130755](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/130755)
Our Level 1 and Entry (Foundation Learning) curriculum – Students study a small vocational qualification along with English and maths, with employability skills and personal & social development (PSD). The majority of students also undertake some work experience.

The School curriculum – responding to what qualifications are being delivered and how students’ study skills are developed. Fortunately, in Leicester schools and post-16 providers work well together to ensure the smooth transition of the students and are happy to share information and good practice.

Universities – what qualification and subjects are required for their courses? Do they want a mix of academic and vocational? Do they want good study skills and independent learners?

Employers – what qualifications and skills are required?

The framework for annualised hours to be taught on Study Programmes varied between 540 and 650 hours.

Maths and English

Gateway College already offered English and maths to those students who had not achieved A*-C at GCSE and therefore were able to accommodate this aspect of the Study Programme fairly easily.

Staff looked at what GCSE English awarding organisation/specification was being delivered in the local schools and the majority of schools were using the same one. Gateway College had been offering an English Language/Literature GCSE with a different awarding organisation. Therefore, the college decided to offer the same English GCSE as the majority of schools to the new students in 2013-14, whilst returning GCSE students continued with the awarding body/specification delivered the previous year. The returning students were able to get off to a good start as the staff knew them well and the new students were retaking a qualification they were familiar with.

Maths staff decided to use the Free Standing Maths Qualification Level 1 instead of Functional Skills Level 1 and the Free Standing Maths Qualification Level 2 instead of Use of maths Level 2 Certificate (previously a GCSE).

Additionally, the initial assessment tools/system was reviewed and three different systems were looked at. At the start of 2013-14 the college changed to ForSkills²,

² http://www.forskills.co.uk/
the online Functional Skills provider, which offered more resources and seemed more accessible to students.

GCSE hours were increased from three hours per week to four hours per week for both English and maths from 2013-14 to help raise success rates.

As the funding guidance approved certain qualifications students were enrolled on the following in 2013-14:

- Maths Functional Skills (FS) Entry – 70 students
- Free Standing Maths Qualification Level 1 (instead of FS Level 1) – 75 students
- Free Standing Maths Qualification Level 2 (for E grade students) – 120 students
- Maths GCSE (for D grade students) – 270 students
- English Functional Skills Entry – 45 students
- English Functional Skills Level 1 – 60 students
- English GCSE (for D and E grade students) – 420 students.
- Staff are now considering offering English Functional Skills Level 2, in addition to some smaller English qualifications, in 2014-15, for students who have achieved an E grade.

Staff are now considering offering English Functional Skills Level 2, in addition to some smaller English qualifications, in 2014-15, for students who have achieved an E grade.

**Enrichment**

Gateway College is fortunate to have a good range of facilities for sports provision and many activities are delivered, including the Basketball Academy and activities organised by our College Sport Maker. However, with the introduction of Study Programmes it was recognised that more enrichment activities were required across the college which would help young people to develop and broaden their skills and assist with their progression. New activities were added and a range of non-qualification sessions organised including Bar Mock Trial, Book Club, Chess/Draughts Club, Dragon's Den (in conjunction with Leicester University), a Fashion Show, and Young Enterprise, along with qualifications such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), AS Citizenship, and Employability. These were timetabled and registered so that total hours could be agreed with the student as part of their learning agreement.

With ever-increasing efficiency savings to be made in college more use of virtual learning environments (VLE) is required and this also encourages students to be more independent learners. In 2012-13 students completed the Learning to Learn
qualification (NCFE Levels 1 and 2), which was started at enrolment in order to enable them to become more independent learners. However, at that time it was found that a large number of students were relying on the teacher to help them with the qualification, retaining their dependency.

In 2013-14 students are assisted in becoming more independent learners through the development of personal skills by the use of flipped learning, homework, project-based and team-based work and self-study time. Continuing professional development for staff was tailored to support their students in this innovative approach to learning. They also enhance their skills in use of the college's VLE and become confident in their use of flipped learning.

**Work experience**

The college employs a full-time Employer Engagement Co-ordinator to help curriculum areas organise work placements, events and guest speakers.

Although the Foundation Learning students had carried out work experience as part of their course this was not the case for many Level 2 and 3 students. Therefore, in 2012-13 it was decided that students would study for the Employability Award at Level 2 and 3. Although this was fairly successful, it was felt that students' employability skills would be improved through more contact with employers. For 2013-14, better liaison with employers has led to more external professionals coming in to talk to the students and staff, more visits to employers and more students undertaking work experience, either as part of their course or on an individual basis with employers or through voluntary work. All hours are timetabled for students and staff.

Employer Engagement days are held on different themes and as a “thank you” to the increasing number of employers who support us, an Employers’ Breakfast was held in 2012-13, which will now be an annual thank you event.

For 2014-15 new Programmes of Study are being developed that link with an individual employer or sector, which will then help shape the curriculum offer. Students will spend time during the week both in college and in the work place.

This approach is being developed through the Local Enterprise Partnership, with employers, and is planned to meet the skills shortages identified in the city and county.

The recent college Ofsted report comments that “leaders and managers plan the college's curriculum well, to meet the changing needs of industry and the local community. Their plans are led by local needs, the drive to improve students’ employability and prospects, and the aim of providing a distinctive curriculum
offer for students and include innovative courses in textile design and technology and a partnership with a local financial institution to train students for work in this rapidly growing sector.”

Summary

For Study Programmes to be effective, links must be formed with all key stakeholders, with the student at the centre of the process. The effectiveness of a Study Programme is shown through the progression of the student from education into employment.

The Ofsted report cited comments that “the college has strong and successful partnerships with local schools, colleges and De Montfort University to provide clear progression routes for students. External organisations speak very highly of the way the college works with other organisations to raise attainment and reduce the number of students who are not in education, employment or training in the city.”