“Blended learning within Study Programmes recognises students’ capacity to learn for themselves, with guidance. It can enhance motivation and achievement.”

Debbie Fletcher, Vice Principal

About the college

Leeds City College is one of the UK’s largest FE establishments, offering a diverse curriculum to more than 40,000 students. We provide a vibrant, multicultural learning environment, delivering excellent and innovative education which is supportive, inspiring and life changing.

Our courses cover almost all subject areas and include full and part-time academic and vocational qualifications through from basic skills to apprenticeships and A Levels to foundation and full degrees. There is something to suit the needs of everyone, from pre- and post-16 year olds to adult learners, employers and businesses, with training delivered both on and off site: in partnership, in companies and in local communities.

Work with external partners and businesses is a key area, with the college one of the single largest providers of apprenticeships in the country, with in excess of 12,000 apprentices during the last academic year.

Leeds City College operates out of six main campuses – Horsforth, Joseph Priestley, Keighley, Park Lane, Technology and Printworks – with Leeds College of Music also part of the Leeds City College group. There is provision in dozens of smaller community centres across the region.

In 2012, the college was given an OFSTED rating at Grade 2, Good, with Outstanding features, for the overall effectiveness of its provision.

The college has over 6,500 students on FT Study Programmes. In addition, there are an additional 350 on PT flexible Study Programmes designed specifically for the NEETs cohort.

Study Programmes

In preparation for 2013/14, the curriculum was remodelled to ensure it met the requirements of Study Programmes, namely the substantial qualification (minimum 270 contact hours), tutorial/ entitlement, work experience and/or element of volunteering, English/maths, and an identified progression route through to employment or the next level of programme.
Planned hours

Clear guidance was given to all curriculum teams on annual hours which could be allocated to Study Programmes across the college, according to the type and level of qualification. This also took into account previous efficiencies which had been introduced for main qualification delivery. Generally, a 4 AS programme was to be delivered in 695 hours, 3A2s in 540, Level 3 Extended Diploma 560, Level 3 Diploma 540-560, Level 2 Diploma 550, Entry Level and Level 1 560.

Tutorial/entitlement

In Study Programmes the major change for the college was the removal of the smaller additional qualifications which supported the delivery of the tutorial, as we could now deliver the aspects which best met the needs of the learners, without the need for funding a qualification to support our funding target. Each Study Programme at Level 2 and 3 was allocated two hours tutorial/entitlement – one hour for group activities, to include study skills, development of enterprise skills, preparation for employment/progression etc., and one hour for individual reviews. Three hours per week were allocated to Level 1 and Entry Level students to support their personal development.

English and maths

Prior to the introduction of the Study Programmes, all 16-19 students had been encouraged to further develop their English and maths if they hadn't achieved a grade C or above at GCSE. Prior to September 2013, take-up was variable, and there was a tendency for some curriculum areas to enrol all students onto a FS, as part of their delivery plan – this may not have been at the appropriate level for that learner.

From September 2013, all 16-19 students undertook an initial assessment prior to enrolling at the college, and a diagnostic assessment during induction, to ‘find the level’. In addition, those with a grade D were encouraged to re-sit the GCSE where possible. There are still anomalies, but considerably fewer than in 2012-13, and we are now in a good position to ensure that all learners are on the right programme from 2014. One of the biggest difficulties is finding sufficient staffing to meet the demands of such a large cohort of learners. There are also some issues with students having the maths and English skills to progress onto L3 courses when the starting point at enrolling to college is as low as Entry Level 2 or Entry Level.
Work experience

College guidance for work experience was that it would vary according to the needs of the individual, but that it should support progression into employment or to the next level of programme. Where possible, it should be an assessed part of the vocational programme and was particularly important for students at Level 2 and below. Because of the differing needs of our learners and the huge task being thrust upon our work placement team we identified different forms of work experience which would be acceptable as part of the Study Programme. These included:

- Formal placement (day release or block), which existed already on many of our programmes – e.g. Health and Social Care, Childcare, Sport. This could be in-house (for more vulnerable learners and those at Entry and Level 1), through access to our suppliers we have an on-going capital build which is engaging some of our construction, IT and creative arts students), or external
- Real working environments – e.g. our commercial hair and beauty salons, and training restaurant
- Simulated working environments – e.g. motor vehicle workshops
- Live projects – creative arts engage with many external projects
- Shadowing
- Mentoring from employers
- Work-based assignments
- Tasters (particularly relevant and trialled with our Entry and Level 1 students during the work placement trials in 2012/13)
- External visits/speakers

In 2012/13 the Work Placement Team secured external placements for c1,800 students. There was an expectation that as part of Study Programmes this would double to 3,600. To date, the team have currently co-ordinated 1,740 placements in total, with another 1,560 still to do – a slight drop in the original forecast. However, they have successfully engaged with new curriculum areas – e.g. motor vehicle, business, computing technologies, land based, construction, and electrical. They have also engaged with an external provider to support this service. A new, small, Employability Team is being established to develop a network of employers who will support the development of employability skills for our students, through their involvement in the variety of forms of work experience listed above.

Blended/independent learning
The college is proactively developing a more learner-centred delivery model and has created a number of projects which include, for example, the use of Chrome Books with Motor Vehicle students.

The project was piloted in 2012/13 with a mixed group of ten 16-18 and 19+ Level 3 learners. The project was conceived as a basis for delivering a flexible but cost-effective delivery model, with the advent of affordable tablet computers (TCs). TCs were provided to the group on a permanent loan basis and were introduced to enable learners to access learning materials at a time which was convenient to them. Interactive lesson plans were then produced, enabling learners to access learning materials using cloud-based technology, prior to practical sessions. These learning materials included assessment tasks relating to summative on-line assessments which were an integral component of the learners’ qualifications. Mid-way through the project, tablets were replaced with Chromebook computers, as issues emerged with viewing some of the smaller components on the tablets. All learners successfully completed their qualification, five weeks before the end of the course.

All staff within the Faculty have been trained on the use of cloud-based technology which enables them to write interactive lesson plans. These can be accessed by any other member of staff either to share best practice, cover for absent colleagues or to support learners who may be behind or cannot attend the college for a variety of reasons.

In 2013/14 the programme was rolled out to approximately 140 learners, as the success of the pilot had identified the need to provide, more widely, learning programmes that facilitate learning on demand.

The bulk of the blended learning materials, which have been purchased on licence through LJ Create, have been produced to develop learners’ ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations through both instruction and application, the latter through diagnostic assessment and end testing. Further materials have been produced by staff but mainly in a supporting capacity or as extension tasks. The materials are high quality and their use has enabled teachers to further develop their skills in the use of new technologies. Learners can use the materials for practical simulation exercises, as they are of a high calibre and accurately reflect the workshop environment and the workplace. The materials not only provide relevant information, but give the learners the opportunity to carry out diagnostic tests on vehicles and record their findings through formative assessments. Teaching staff are then able to provide clear instruction to learners within a formal workshop setting with the knowledge of learner capabilities, based on the assessment results. This has been confirmed by teaching staff, who have noticed the speed of application on tasks has increased and there is less likelihood of the need for tasks to be repeated.
This delivery strategy has seen 100 hours of direct teaching time being replaced with approximately 30 hours tutorial support. The reduction in direct contact time has, however, not reduced the learners' capability to achieve but has demonstrated that there is potential for learners to be more appropriately stretched and challenged, particularly those who are self-motivated. The materials enable the tutor to track learner engagement. The evidence presented illustrates that learners will spend significant amounts of time either progressing ahead of schedule, or revisiting existing work to reinforce existing knowledge. This provides clear evidence of learners wishing to deepen skills, which has been borne out of their skills application in workshops situations.