Sharing Innovative Approaches to Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes

Uxbridge College
“Imaginative assignments set by employers to meet the real requirements of the workplace have enriched the experience of students on our Study Programmes.”

Laraine Smith, Principal

About the college

Uxbridge College is a general further education college, situated in Hillingdon in the outer area of West London. The college offers a diverse range of vocational and academic courses for young people, and adults. Vocational provision is focused on work related and education skills with a significant amount of bespoke skills training for employers. Courses at Uxbridge College are offered from Entry Level to Level 4/5 and embrace courses for students with learning difficulties, to ‘foundation’ degree level programmes. Education and training takes place in all but one of the fifteen sector subject areas (SSA). The college also runs courses in collaboration with London Borough of Hillingdon partners for school pupils aged 14-16.

The college has two campuses: one in the heart of Uxbridge and the other in Hayes. There are 3,697 full time 16-18 year olds at Uxbridge College in 2013/14, with 78% of these based at Uxbridge and 22% at Hayes. There are over 2,500 adult learners, of whom nearly 800 are full-time. The college employs more than 550 staff. Uxbridge's work with employers is a significant part of the college's provision; employers and other key strategic partners are engaged to shape, influence and deliver the skills curriculum. Apprenticeship provision is a feature of our offer for both young people and adults, with over 1,000 enrolled at the college in 2013/14.

Study Programmes

In 2013/14, 98% of Uxbridge College's full-time courses for 16-18s include 540 guided learning hours or more. For 2014/15 the average hours across full-time programmes is planned to be 600. Study Programmes are designed to suit the needs of individual students and each School within the college has the flexibility to adjust the model to suit the needs of the different curriculum areas. All full-time students undertake one substantial qualification as the core of their individualised programme.

In 13/14 English and mathematics is included in the Study Programmes for all 16-18s who have not yet achieved at least a GCSE Grade C in these subjects. The provision is differentiated so that some students are targeted to achieve stepping stone qualifications, mainly Functional Skills, while other students who just missed out on a Grade C before joining the college will be placed on a GCSE programme.
External work experience or work placements are in place for 1,600 students in 2013/14. In some cases this time commitment is counted within Study Programme hours and for others these opportunities form part of the extra-curricular dimension of a course. Work experience is recorded in the students` ILPs, which are electronic and monitored regularly as part of review meetings.

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In addition, the focus on employability and employer engagement is strong in other ways on the vast majority of the full-time courses the college offers in 2013/14. This case study sets out the major strands of the college's approach to promoting employability and employer engagement as a key feature of Study Programme design.

**Embedding employability and employer engagement in Study Programmes**

The college has adopted a mixed model approach in developing its enhancement of employability and employer engagement on 16-19 study programmes. In particular, all vocational courses include elements of employer engagement and/or employability skills development.

**Employability skills and work experience**

In all cases this will involve up-skilling in maths and English for learners, where these are not already achieved at Level 2. Maths and English are promoted across the college as key employability skills, highly valued in the workplace and therefore an integral part of the course. There is a mix of discrete and embedded delivery of maths and English. Learners have responded well and there is very good engagement in these essential skills because their value for a career is evident.

Involvement of employers in Study Programmes can range from engagement in the design, delivery and/or assessment of courses and course elements to learners going into the workplace for full work experience or work placements. As an example, Early Years and Health and Social Care is an area where work placements (for Early Years) and work experience is quite extensive and a built-in expectation of the course specifications. Learners attend work placements for significant periods of time within the Care and Child Care sectors. Practical vocational courses such as Hospitality, Hair and Beauty and Motor Vehicle provide their learners with hands-on real working practice experience within industry standard realistic work-environment settings.
Employers are often willing to come in and talk to our learners about the job opportunities that may be available. For example, an Engineering Aerospace company called FSL is coming in to speak to our engineering students about job opportunities in their industry, where there is expected to be a significant skills shortage looking forward.

**Employer branded assignments in Study Programmes**
There are good examples of a range of occupational sectors involved in the design, delivery and assessment of assignments in a variety of ways. All vocational courses are tasked to have at least one employer-branded assignment, where an employer has provided a real example of a work situation which is then contextualized into the competencies required by the assignment. This is often based on a real brief, for example website and graphic design, promotional videos, or planning a public event. One of our Engineering employer champions also provides specialist training in the workplace to enhance understanding of the sector, and gives an award to the most outstanding student. Other employers will deliver a session around a particular aspect of their industry which Embedding employability and employer engagement in Study Programmes will contribute to an assignment, or as another example, our Retail Employer Champion provides regular workshops on visual merchandising.

**Ways in which the college achieves economies of scale regarding employer involvement as part of 16-19 Study Programmes; making best use of employers' limited availability to enrich the learning of a large number of students**

The college arranges a week of activities engaging large numbers of employers and students from all Study Programmes. One of our employer champions attends the week using its staff volunteering scheme, so that several of its staff members deliver employability workshops to Level 3, year 2 students who have chosen not to attend university but go straight into employment. The workshops are designed jointly with the employer to give the students real examples of the skills and attitudes required by employers. The college will also be running a fun, speed interview day where around 40 employers will be on a carousel listening to three minute presentations by students and scoring them on their performance. This event is open to all students.

Employers who have job vacancies also participate in a recruitment session, promoting part-time and seasonal employment and industry-specific specialists are invited to be guest speakers to large curriculum groups. Students are prepared for the week during the preceding period by employability tutorials across all levels and curriculum areas.
Working with employers to develop ‘real world’ assignments/projects/tasks for students to complete as part of their substantial vocational qualifications.

**Example 1**
The Mayor of Hillingdon Borough has commissioned the college to put on a vintage-themed fashion show at the Civic Hall as his major fundraising event. All areas of Creative Studies are involved: Art and Design students designing the invitations, posters and programmes, Media filming a promotional video and the event itself, Technical Theatre students designing the effects, Styling students working with the models, and Fashion students sourcing the clothes from the charity shops supported by the Mayor. Art students are producing art for auction on the night to contribute to the fundraising effort. Sponsorship from Intu, the owner of the local shopping centre, has secured funding for resources and the students will then repeat the event in the shopping centre as part of their “pamper evening”.

**Example 2**
The Old Vinyl Factory in Hayes is hosting the launch party of our Student Enterprise Company, “The Frock and Rollers”, free of charge and using its own creative sector networks to maximize attendance and new business for the students. One of our other Employer Champions, Metrobank, is helping the group set up a bank account and advising them on how to start the company.