

CASE STUDY

KIRKLEES

COLLEGE

Kirklees College Guide to delivering Employability and Personal Development qualifications

Kirklees College in the heart of Yorkshire is one of the top twenty largest FE colleges in the UK. Its 20,000 full- and part-time learners undertake a wide range of courses for both work and leisure, Apprenticeship schemes and vocational qualifications covering everything from animal care and business administration to sport science and travel and tourism.

FAST FACTS

CENTRE:

Kirklees College, Yorkshire

NUMBER OF LEARNERS:

20,000 full and part-time students

INTERVIEWEES:

Jenny Evans, Head of Foundation Learning,
and Lisa Vinters, Work Focus tutor

WHY CITY & GUILDS FOR FUNCTIONAL SKILLS:

'We were particularly impressed by City & Guilds Employability and Personal Development award – the number and scope of the units enable us to tailor learning programmes in order to meet the specific needs of our learners whilst the structure of the qualification keeps them on track and engaged.'

MEETING THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS

'The college serves a large and diverse community in which disadvantage and unemployment levels are relatively high,' says Jenny Evans, Kirklees College's Head of Foundation Learning. 'This is reflected in the number of learners who are coming to us with the distinct aim of developing their employability skills and improving their chances of finding a job in a very competitive market. From young people who have left the education system with no prospect of work, to the long term unemployed to adults with physical disabilities, mental health issues, behavioural problems or learning difficulties – our student population is increasing year on year. In 2011/12, 500 learners were enrolled on our employability skills courses.'

'Our learners come to us from a wide variety of routes and sources,' continues Jenny. 'Many have seen our advertisements or our website. Others have heard about our courses from friends, family, teachers or careers advisers. We are the key progression route for all of the special schools in the local area, whilst we also have good links with local mental health institutions. Increasingly, we are finding that learners are being referred to us on completion of other college courses on which they may have achieved high levels of vocational or Functional Skills and yet still lack many of the basic attributes and abilities that employers are looking for. And that's exactly what we can deliver!'

CHOOSING CITY & GUILDS

Employability skills sit comfortably within the college's Foundation Learning provision, which has the stated aim of improving essential basic skills for work and life. 'We investigated the range of relevant qualifications available to us and how these met our needs and those of our learners. We were particularly impressed by City & Guilds Employability and Personal Development award – the number and scope of the units enable us to tailor learning programmes in order to meet the specific needs of our learners whilst the structure of the qualification keeps them on track and engaged. **City & Guilds' exceptionally high standard of quality control ensures that all learners achieve their best and reach the necessary levels of capability.** This is recognised by employers who acknowledge and respect the fact that our learners have gained a qualification which is highly relevant and rooted in the requirements of every day working practice. Plus the City & Guilds name still has clout with the owners and managers of businesses both large and small!'

GETTING IT RIGHT FROM THE START

Every learner who applies to study for the Employability and Personal Development qualification is interviewed and carefully assessed by college staff to ensure that they are suitable for the course. 'It is important that we know from the outset exactly what each individual learner can do and what skill level they are at, particularly in English and Maths,' explains Jenny. 'Whilst learning programmes can be adapted it is vital that all learners have the qualities and the determination to commit to the qualification and to work hard to succeed. We assess their social skills, their motivation and their ability to work. We also look closely at the specific support that they may need both in the classroom and in the workplace. The Foundation Learning Department, and the college as a whole, is committed to helping our learners to achieve their potential.'

'Learners take a full year to complete the qualification at their selected level, with the required 12 units undertaken on a term by term basis. They are in college pretty much full time, up to four days a week, participating in formal classroom learning as well as hands-on practical activities. We work in small groups of usually no more than 12 learners with a tutor and two to three support staff, although some individual students may have one-to-one support. **We endeavour to make learning both challenging and fun, without ever forgetting that our learners are working to achieve a recognised qualification what will hopefully take them into employment.'**



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF BUSINESS

Lisa Vinters is a Work Focus course tutor at Kirklees College, responsible for delivering qualifications, including the City & Guilds Employability and Personal Development award, which equip learners with practical skills and experience of working life. 'As we have developed our learning programmes over the years our aim has always been to support our learners in their efforts to find employment,' she says. **'We consulted local business leaders and devised a comprehensive list of the qualities they were looking for in job candidates who may not have more traditional qualifications. Now I ensure that those key qualities – such as punctuality, time management, team working and the ability to ask for help and support – are incorporated into all aspects of teaching and learning.'**

'We have put together a range of hands-on work projects which stretch and engage our learners,' Lisa continues. 'Undertaking tasks both in college and in the community they are able to build their skills and their confidence and demonstrate the valuable contribution that they can make to the workplace.'

SKILLS FOR WORK

'We run a café in the college hall which incorporates a drinks service, a tuck shop and stalls selling new and second-hand items. Every learner undertakes a specific job role within the café "business" with varying levels of responsibility – from café manager and waiting staff to cash till operative and drinks maker. The emphasis is on the development of skills and quality control, helping learners to build on their strengths and tackle weaker areas. Job roles are rotated so that everyone can test their abilities and experience the full range of work pressures and expectations. College staff are always on hand to support the learners and observe how well they are meeting the requirements of the qualification.'

ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESS

Every student has an individual learning profile which is held centrally and can be accessed electronically by both the learner and the full range of teaching and support staff. Targets, both social and personal, are recorded as well as tasks, activities, projects, achievements and the results of tests and paper-based exercises. Learners' progress can be tracked on a weekly basis to ensure that progression is maintained and that the qualification is completed to time and to the expected standard.



'WE NEVER LET THE LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES OR DISABILITIES BECOME AN EXCUSE FOR THEM TO NOT FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT.'

WORK EXPERIENCE

'Work experience in the "real" world is vital to learners' development and we have established an excellent project with the staff at Greenhead Park,' continues Lisa. 'Working under the direction and supervision of the Park Ranger our learners have been tasked with clearing and rejuvenating a space which had been taken over by drug users. The Park Ranger and I share a strong work ethic and **we never let the learners' difficulties or disabilities become an excuse for them to not fully participate in the project.** From lopping trees, clearing steps, raking and re-laying grass, everyone has to get stuck in! The results have been impressive, with the park space transformed and even the most reluctant learners inspired and enthused by what they have been able to achieve.'

COMMUNITY ACTION

'The long-term aim of our learners is, through work, to make a valid and valuable contribution to the local community and the local economy. So as part of their study they also undertake a variety of community-based activities, including fundraising for local groups and projects, which raise their awareness of how they may be able to get involved, in either a paid or voluntary capacity, in the future. We have

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Lisa Vinters, Work Focus tutor, Kirklees College

excellent ties with a Friendship Club for the elderly which enables otherwise isolated older people to meet on a weekly basis, chat and share a hot drink. Our learners help to serve the drinks, prepare food, set out tables and chairs, call the number for the regular game of bingo and even take on some of the older gentlemen at very competitive games of dominoes! Through this partnership with the Friendship Club we have seen dramatic improvements in our learners' confidence levels as well as their speaking and listening skills.'

LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Hands-on practical work projects are supplemented by structured lessons in the classroom which Lisa explains are vital for exploring the skills and qualities required for specific jobs. 'We encourage learners to focus on jobs and job roles and to carefully consider all the factors that may be involved. We use role play to tackle what may be difficult issues or situations for some of our learners, and explore how action planning, risk assessment, team work and communication all contribute to success in the workplace.'

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACEMENTS

'Of course, one of the most important elements of the Employability and Personal Development qualification is the learner's work placement. We have a dedicated Work Placement Officer, Sue Gibson, who comes into every class at the start of the year to look at skills matching, learners' job choices and realistic employment opportunities. She then matches learners to the placements available and helps us to decide when they are ready to start work having observed them in action in the café. Learners normally attend their placement for one or two days a week over a minimum six-week period. Sue also visits the learners in placement in order to assess them and identify areas for improvement.'

The work placement is essential in developing learners' maturity and reliability. Some employers keep their work placement learners for the entire year and some offer paid employment.'

MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM LEARNING TO WORKING

'We are fortunate that we have a growing number of local businesses and charitable organisations who are prepared

to work with us and trust us to send learners who are up to the job. Progression is crucial and we do all that we can to help our learners take the next step. We hold a transition fair every May so that learners, their parents and carers can meet local support groups, advisers, recruitment agencies and potential employers such as REAL Employment, Remploy, Connexions, JobCentre Plus, Mencap and other voluntary organisations.'

MAXIMISING LEARNER POTENTIAL AND ACHIEVING SUCCESS

'We recognise that in this challenging economic climate it is difficult to get any learner into paid employment, but we believe that through our courses and through the Employability and Personal Development qualification we are providing our learners with the very best preparation and skill set to find a rewarding job,' concludes Lisa. 'We follow up on our learners and are starting to see some real success stories. We had one young man, who is confined to a wheelchair, who had never been to the shops on his own before he began his course with us. Now he is enrolled on a mainstream land-based studies course and is working for the Park Ranger at Greenhead Park. That's progress.'

'Equipping people young and old with the skills to find employment helps to turn lives around and improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities. At Kirklees College we are committed to helping all our learners to achieve their full potential and in many cases to exceed expectations. The Employability and Personal Development qualification provides a clear and comprehensive structure to enable us to do just that. Our learners are determined and we have an extremely low drop-out rate for those on our employability skills courses. On a daily basis they show us that they are not prepared to give up and it is our responsibility to help them to succeed.'

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