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CASE STUDY: ANNIESLAND COLLEGE: EARLY EDUCATION AND
CHILDCARE (INTERMEDIATE 1)

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Rationale

This Course is intended to promote the development of practical and employability skills within Early Education and Childcare and was introduced as part of Anniesland College's commitment to school-college partnerships.

In the first year that we delivered the Course, 12 learners were selected by Glasgow City Council's Pre-Vocational Training Department from S3 classes in four different schools.

Although SQA's Skills for Work Courses are not exclusively designed to support young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), the Scottish Government's More Choices, More Chances strategy believes that Skills for Work Courses, 'will represent additional opportunities to suit pupils' interests and inclinations, and could contribute to improved outcomes for young people post-16 by providing a pathway from school to education, employment or training'.

The programme involved partnerships between:

- Anniesland College
- Glasgow City Council's pre-Vocational Training section
- Ross Hall Academy, Lourdes Secondary, Eastbank Academy, and St Margaret Mary's Secondary

Engagement

We were open-minded about how to deliver the Course and were willing to learn from the learners:

'We found that it was essential to remember that the people we were going to be working with were barely one year older than the upper age range of the subject matter (0-12 years) we are delivering and as such, our expectations of their insight and awareness of concepts, perhaps readily grasped by older cohorts, needed to be adjusted accordingly'. (Lecturer, Anniesland College)

Encouraging and relating case study tasks to learners' own experiences of childhood contributes to a more meaningful learning experience. This was particularly helpful in the first year of delivery when the learners were still adapting to the adult environment they found themselves in – and to the interpersonal challenge of getting to know, and getting along with, new people from different schools.

One of our main challenges was establishing group cohesion. With the group originally from four different schools, the learners initially remained within their own school groups interacting in parallel with the other school groups while engaging in 'on-looker' behaviour.

Our introduction to the Course covered the four Units which make up the Course and aimed to focus learning, to feature various activities designed to emphasise employability and teambuilding skills, and to promote and enhance group cohesion. It took two months to achieve a settled class group and to foster effective interaction and learner engagement.

Our aims included the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, such as promoting the development of responsible citizens. In one activity the learners successfully organised a 'Fancy Dress Halloween Bake Sale' for BBC Children in Need. Together, they co-ordinated a series of activities which included designing posters to advertise the event, making cakes in class to sell to staff, bringing in home-made cakes and sweets, creating a counter using desks, and deciding who would run the stall. The learners then completed a worksheet designed to encourage them to map employability and teambuilding skills to the activities undertaken.

The learners were then rewarded for their efforts with a college-funded teambuilding trip, following which they completed another mapping exercise for employability skills gained from this experience. Learners have said:

'I love coming to college. It really cheers me up in the morning to know that I'm coming here in the afternoon to do something that I like. It's fun. I've made a good friend from a different school in

Glasgow that I would never have met if I hadn't come to college. I've applied to do the Introduction to Early Education and Childcare programme at Anniesland College next year. There are colleges nearer to me but I like it here.'

'I love it. It's great. I just like coming because I want to do this as a career when I leave school. It's good practice for me and I've met a lot of nice people.'

Delivery approaches

We harnessed the popularity of social networking sites amongst the learners to help develop 'soft' skills and promote learner engagement. We had previously found that social networking websites can promote group cohesion amongst older cohorts. So, in collaboration with the Skills for Work students, we developed a secure class-only social network using the 'Ning' social networking site. This site offers similar features and applications to popular social networking sites – including a user-friendly interface. However, there are tighter controls in terms of access to membership and learner profiles.

The learners developed their own profiles, uploaded pictures and began interacting with each other beyond their self-imposed school boundaries by using the instant messaging feature of the site.

Initially it was challenging to maintain the learners' concentration because attending college was considered by some of them as a weekly break from normal education. Focusing their learning in order to achieve the evidence requirements of the Units under study, while trying to reflect the values and benefits of doing so within a different learning context, meant staff had to reflect on their delivery and change and adapt approaches in response to methods which did or did not work. This provided a different experience from what they were used to.

Much of the Course involves teaching children about children and, because of this, there may be inconsistencies in the learners' behaviours and

attitudes. The learners themselves can be an excellent resource for informing innovative approaches to curriculum delivery – if listened to. Although the learners were informed that they could wear casual clothes to college in the afternoon, many did not have the opportunity to change into the clothes they had brought with them. As such, some felt instantly recognisable as school pupils, particularly at break times when they would have preferred to merge into the general student population.

The classes took place within a purpose-built and resourced practical training room which enhanced learner engagement by providing the appropriate vocational context. Some of the practical activities were photographed in order to put together a montage of the learners' two-year journey through the Course.

The students were required to complete four Units, three mandatory and one optional, to achieve the Course. We integrated the Units to give the learners a more meaningful and less repetitive learning experience. The Child Development Unit and the optional Unit: Maintenance of a Safe Environment were delivered in the first year before progressing to the Play in Early Education and Childcare and Working in Early Education and Childcare Units in the second year. This approach was chosen so that learners might better understand the range of children's development needs and abilities, and the importance of meeting them in a safe environment, before they began to plan play experiences and investigate the range of childcare provision.

'I learned that the key to the success of initiatives such as the SQA Skills for Work programme is to listen to the learner and work in partnership to develop an exciting and engaging curriculum.' (Lecturer, Anniesland College)

During the first year of delivery, we adopted a team-teaching approach to support the younger learners during their transition to the further education environment. This approach evolved to accommodate split-session delivery where colleagues would change over after one hour,

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delivering different Units to maintain concentration and momentum. In the second year, delivery of the Units has been led by a single lecturer to promote consistency, although delivery in both years has featured periodic input from departmental staff in response to the curriculum.

Assessment approaches and flexible assessment

Access to a video camera meant that individual and group presentations could be filmed, adding to the fun and enjoyment of the assessment experience. This approach to assessment was adopted in the group presentation of a puppet show to the children of the college nursery for the evidence requirements of the Play in Early Education and Childcare Unit. The learners worked together to plan, implement and evaluate the activity, which involved making the puppets and puppet theatre and editing the script to make it suitable for the age-group of the audience.

Incorporating the use of ICT applications within assessment completion, such as using PowerPoint, helped to engage the learners in the assessment process in a positive way while reflecting our commitment to increasing the use of e-technologies to support the delivery of SQA qualifications.

The main challenge to ensuring flexibility in assessment was the time frame. In theory, one afternoon per week over two years should be adequate to ensure completion of the assessment requirements for the four Units that make up the qualification. However, certain factors limited actual class contact time and the quality of the learning experience – such as taxis arriving late for the start of a session. The learners also travelled to college during their lunch-break with limited time to ensure access to an adequate lunch to sustain them through the afternoon.

It was critical to the success of the programme to remember the other learning commitments of those taking part in the Course. The second year of delivery finished in April in line with the learners' Standard Grade exam leave, so it was important to plan the timing of assessments to avoid assessment overload and spoiling the learners' enjoyment and lasting memories of the experience.

Progression

At SCQF level 4, this Course serves as the first step on a clear progression pathway to full-time courses in Early Education and Childcare spanning SCQF levels 5-7.

Future delivery plans

As a community college, curriculum development within Anniesland College is driven not only by national and local initiatives but by the changing needs and aspirations of individuals, the community and business. Experience and feedback has informed the college of the potential development of an Early Education and Childcare taster course at SCQF level 4 aimed at Christmas leavers and delivered between January and June. Making the current Skills for Work Course more contextualised to learners' future career plans and embracing the notion of coherence in learning as emphasised within Curriculum for Excellence, may be further explored by linking the practical elements of SQA Unit delivery with work experience undertaken while the learners are at school.

