



TAKING A
FRESH LOOK
AT QUALIFICATIONS

MORE | **MORE**
CHOICES | **CHANCES**

CASE STUDY: GALGAEL TRUST'S NAVIGATE LIFE PROGRAMME

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The GalGael Trust has become a well known landmark on Scotland's community regeneration landscape. Based in Govan, Glasgow, near to the River Clyde, GalGael has become best known for building and sailing wooden boats in celebration of Scotland's heritage. These and other ventures provide a focal point for community events.

Rationale

GalGael offers activities that can support young people who may be described as vulnerable and hard to reach – including those who are long-term unemployed, those who are experiencing substance misuse, or those with mental health issues. Many of the activities provide opportunities to learn practical skills in a safe and friendly environment.

Currently, GalGael offers two SQA Units in partnership with Cardonald College:

- Working with Wood: An Introduction
- Working with Wood: Garden Furniture

The Units offer practical skills in woodwork as part of GalGael's wider Navigate Life programme – an established programme which GalGael is currently extending to support 'non-attendees' from local schools.

A number of pilot programmes will be established to enhance the learner's practical experience and develop their 'hands-on' skills. Critical to the success of these pilot programmes are: the delivery process involved, the assessment tools, and methodology adopted – all of which may vary from that experienced by the young person in previous environments.

Engagement

The Navigate Life programme, which incorporates the SQA Units has been successfully marketed to a range of local and national bodies and agencies including: NHSScotland, Job Centre Plus, and Addiction Services.

An important aspect of the approach taken, and one of the reasons for its success, is the fact that learners of all ages undertake the course at the same time. This assists with intergenerational bonding, shared experiences and skills, and mutual respect – benefits which have been observed by tutors delivering the programme.

The SQA qualifications are based around practical woodwork tasks and exercises that involve a level of numeracy and literacy skills to ensure accuracy. Even where literacy and numeracy are embedded in the context of an activity, there has been little evidence to suggest that this poses a barrier to achieving the qualification. The practical aspect of the activity is reinforced with two written papers. However, if a learner has difficulty with written work there are options for taking an oral assessment.

Currently the retention rate for learners is around 80% which, considering the often complex issues that can impact on vulnerable or disengaged learners, represents a high success rate. GalGael feels that the high retention rate is partially due to the workshop-based environment the learner works in and the flexibility around the tutors' engagements with the young people. There is also an awareness of the external influences that may impact on a learner's ability to participate and the need for a level of flexibility regarding timescales for completing the qualifications and the assessment methods adopted.

The course delivery involves working closely with a range of agencies and staff including education, social work, health, and housing.



Delivery approaches

The programme, including the SQA Units and the personal project, is delivered in an informal, relaxed but disciplined workshop environment, recognising that the activity requires an awareness of health and safety.

GalGael's programme is based on a six-week rotation, thereby ensuring that there is always an opportunity for existing learners to support and share experience with the new intake of learners. GalGael has identified that this is very effective at tackling the isolation or apprehension that can sometimes be encountered when entering the workshop environment for the first time. GalGael staff actively encourage the more experienced learners to pass on their skill-set to new participants. This is critical to the success of the programme and staff have observed that this transfer of knowledge is motivating for all learners. The trust placed in the longer-term learners is sometimes their first experience of being trusted with responsibility.

To complement the SQA Units, all participants are given the opportunity to manufacture an article for themselves. Projects include wood carvings, chairs and tables. The completed projects are often given to family members and evidence has suggested that it can support the first steps in re-building relationships, which in turn has a positive impact on self-esteem and confidence. The personal project is a very powerful and emotive tool and can have far-reaching positive impacts within the wider community.

Assessment approaches and flexible assessment

The assessment of the SQA Units requires testing for accuracy in manufacture and measurement. This part of the assessment process provides GalGael with the opportunity to let the learners have practical experiences that require an array of complex, but achievable, numeracy and literacy skills. The programme allows the learner to focus on the manufacture of wood products as part of their personal project, employing numeracy and literacy skills without the trainer explicitly making reference to this. When the assessment of the finished product takes place and the numeracy and literacy skills employed in the manufacturing process are assessed retrospectively, tutors refer to the experience of watching the 'light coming on' when learners realise that they have utilised skills that they would have previously refused to acknowledge.

Learners are assessed not only on their achievement of the practical Units but also regarding their 'softer skills' such as self-esteem, confidence, social interactions, and working with others.



Progression

GalGael seeks to maintain progression through various ways. After they move on from the project, many of the learners return as volunteers. In addition, GalGael has a positive relationship with Sport Scotland which can provide a range of work placements while furthering access to qualifications in health and sailing skills. GalGael endeavours to nurture the ethos of learners giving something back to the project and passing on their experiences to other learners.

Future delivery plans

Research indicates that the use of craft skills provides fundamental building blocks for developing individuals' self-belief, confidence and esteem, which further promotes a positive and healthier attitude to considering and achieving future goals.

GalGael is currently exploring opportunities for extending the range of qualifications offered to include: pottery, weaving, music, metalwork, and sailing. These activities will be directly aimed at supporting vulnerable, disengaged and hard-to-reach learners in the context of More Choices, More Chances. GalGael is also looking at how it can deliver SQA qualifications in Personal Development, Employability, and Core Skills. One of the recognised challenges is assisting the learner to progress into further positive destinations. Currently there is a focus on developing partnerships with further education establishments, employers and local regeneration agencies.

On reflection

The success of the project is based on the fact that it is a 'real' project that recognises external influences on young people such as, low-income backgrounds, low aspirations, and the effects of poverty and deprivation on attainment and achievement. GalGael treats all individuals equally and engages on a personal level, treating people with respect.

The GalGael experience is not only about academic experience, attainment and achievement, it is about giving people the tools to become proud of their achievements and of their environment. One learner said:

'GalGael is a fantastic project and helped me start a new chapter in life. Before I got to GalGael I was lacking in self-confidence and extremely shy. Half way through the programme I was starting to grow and mix with other people. I learned new skills and passed the SQA qualifications.'

